

Tree Surgeon

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After my father left,
I climbed trees. I do not know
what it means to be safe,
but I learned how it felt to be held—

woven in limbs, brushed in bark dust,
uncoaxed by the prodding of the wind
or the lulling certainty of ground
and it was here, hovering, that I felt closest

to him. He spent hours climbing trees,
maneuvering limbs to cut out damage,
ridding the world of one entrenched
in telephone wire or lingering near a roof.

I ate Handi snacks on branch tops,
pretended the red stick was a saw
and went at it, thinking I could
break tree bones.

I would move two-handed, driving
it until skin had broken, until
something lighter appeared, a dint
the size of my pinky nail.

Then, I would stop, wipe the matted hair
from my forehead, examine what living was left
and trace sounds of clapping leaves with my eyes.
I am left wondering at the ways we sprawl

and curl—how trees don't know what solace is
but sustain it anyway. I will never
hold a contradiction like that.

What I remember most from those days:

hollow never meant empty
and ants can't tell the difference
between skin and bark.

