

beating
held at the end the filial stem
disappears into body heads straight
for the heart silent in its dry chamber
hears the still point groan
give up eden brace for the fall
for what is coming the tear of teeth
or knife or anxious hands who knows these days
how it will begin only the earth song
planted in the brain want

n e e d to find ground
hope for distraction a mother to call
say it's time to come inside
hope her arm is strong from wrestling brothers
and weeds, from saturday morning chores
strong, to catapult the core to the edge of the map
there grow the pit verb
pull back soil and root-tap want
summon the courage the sap
to think "apple"

—| **REBECCA HOUWER** | going home

there might be snow,
perhaps the kind with ice for skin.
the trees will be holding in warm breath,
waiting for geese, or me.
whoever arrives first will tickle them to sneeze spring.

i arrive first
(the exception),
but later than expected.

you were pacing, gauging alarm,
where oh where has my little sheep gone?
where oh where could she be?
the longer you waited, the more you wanted,
and the want changed shape, froze, melted on your cheek.

you asked the moon to take a message.
take this message now.
tell her she is hoped for.

the limbs are turning colours counting v` s
waiting for green exhale, for arrival, a warm breath

for anything to start the thaw

—| **REBECCA HOUWER** | the hardest word

i can make no simple assumptions
about this man/my father
who felled trees from the hillside
spiked and stacked them into rooms
for years i dreamt of leaving, and yet . . .
i'm still here, standing inside
scanning the valley for him
my father/the far-off figure
executing routine/reverie
(we seldom speak) and just
when i think i've located him
he changes, hinges in the middle
turns one cheek to the gusting snow
as it/he gathers purpose
the light and temperature/he is falling
forward but not yet
there are two hours left until darkness
and he isn't finished splitting
hasn't begun burning
still wants warm
wants to fend off uncertainty
by clasping the axe and letting go/trusting
it will listen to what he can't hear
the everyday sounds/the faith
that grows fainter

(yesterday i was supposed to catch a bus headed for
new york city where i'd meet shannon and
we'd look at people and see things like what is possible
but because of the storm the bus was cancelled)

so i am getting as close to my father as i ever get
tracing/trying to interpret him through the window

as he criss-crosses the property
rending/assembling timbers
i take notes, study why and how he moves/
is moved/or if the calluses rooting
deeper shape him like they shape his hands
hands that only pause when they are empty
when there is nothing to divide or repair
when there is nothing to fuel
only then is the vocabulary of motion/
of this man exhausted

sometimes i lose him in the flurries
forget he taught me that the most obvious explanation
is often the best but i can't apply that here
i can make no simple assumptions
about this man/my father who gives everything
to tell me

this working is his language
and stillness the hardest word