

Night Fires

—for Tamara

Brent Pace

Family sentinels, we watch flames grab scrub oak
roughly on the shoulder of our dysphoric mountain,
shiver as three firs' tired arms collapse in slow motion
silence.

You give me Camel Lights, speak with
dry mouth of smoke's poetry, look through half-open
eyes to the grove where Father prays to the Wonderful
Wizard of Oz on cracked wheat mornings.

You spit
anecdotes, stream of consciousness, about your year
in hospitals, how an x-acto knife opened up your
forearms twenty times. The scars shimmer here,
flattened silk worms that giggle in the manic light.

I caress the still scarless skin of my white ankles, lean
against our elm, sure that if I sleep, dawn will find me
once again in that windowless room of yellowed cotton
mattresses. And while you doze on weeping grass, a
malingering moon undresses, escapes its canyon
prison.

When you sit up at last, anxiolytic dreams
leap onto frightened, waking eyes—your yellow face.