

Still trying

For a few years, as a young child,
we lived along a gravel road. On the town
side of the yard: a row of white birches.

Sitting on a small hill beneath them,
watching white bark peel in big, full sheets.
I imagined writing on them.

Fascinated by the way the trees shed their bark
like a snake, how what looks like dying
is a new way of being.

For a few seasons, I watched these trees
grow and shed, different than the oak
in my grandmother's yard with its thick bark.

I used to dig my bare feet into it
using my arms to pull my weight
swinging up onto the lowest branch
climbing as far as I could without fear
to look out over the neighborhood.

As an adult, I have two sycamores
in my backyard. They don't belong
in the middle of the desert.

Once the same was true of me.
Yet, we're both here
while it keeps getting hotter.

It's too warm to write on the patio
and with a gust of wind,
a few more branches drop.

Even though the city tells us
to reduce our water usage, how can I not
give you what I can on the hottest days?

As your bark peels, it falls
on the rose bushes, among the pink rocks,
scattered across the yard, revealing

your chartreuse trunk, still trying.
Wrapping my arms around your trunk,
so smooth, I press my cheek against it.

Hold on, I say, hold on.

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