

Autumn in the Heart

All day ashes sift down like dry snow
to settle in fields and coat the creek and pond
and grind into the porous opening of all things.

Even my own blood slows
under this darkened, ash-hammered sky.

In Chinese calligraphy, Autumn in the heart is sorrow,
sun going down,
flowers heavy with seed, cucumbers swollen
and yellow on the vine, trees felled and burned,
the paper company's two thousand acres sold-
a gated community,
half-a-million-dollar house every half-acre, eighteen-hole golf course.
Already the bulldozers crash through the woods
paving out horse trails and nature walks.

The sky eases down and all the particularities
of land vanish in corpse-light. No revelation,
no answer in the spiders spinning in their webbed cages,
no answer in the frog grunting under the bed
or in this birch, lightning struck, shattered,
split root to crown, two years in a row
sending out shoots all along its trunk.

But what can this birch say now in the endless
high revving of chainsaws, what can it say
to these years spent in a greenhouse,
years gone now, tumbled into the star-wheeling sky?

Ashes light on the horses restless in the fields, drift
over the salvia and astilbe, sift across the aster and scabiosa,
and catch on the leaves so that the trees are forced to bear this last
indignity, burnt remnants of felled trees filling the sky,
ashes floating like lost children to their arms.