

to roll
in the wet ashes of the father,
wet with the death of the father,
and not try
to burn my way upward; the son, rising.

I swear to you now, I will survive,
rise up, and chant my way through these losses;

and you, you, brother, whatever that is,
same blood, you who swim
in the same waters,
you promise me to make *your* music too,
whatever the hurt;

O when we are almost only
mouth, when we are almost only a head
stuck on the pole of the body,
and the man says "Talk to me, baby,"
let's refuse him, brother, both, all of us,
and striking the spine like an instrument, inside,
like birds, with even the body broken,
our feathers fiery—there! there!—among
the leaves and branches, make
no sounds he will know;
like birds, my brother, birds of the new world, *sing*.

S. Eliason 66: Double Portrait of Emily Dickinson and the Rev. Charles Wadsworth / Jane Cooper

She is just leaving the room.
He fades to a china cup.

Velocity fraught with gold,
with *menace of Light*, atomic secrets—
An aroused skin opens over the Great Plains,
October leaves rain down.

Corn in conflagration!
The great retreats of the Civil War!
Marriage in conflagration!

Years—An empty canvas.
She scrawls across radiant space

E . . . I . . . SON! I made this, the date,
name within name.

The Day the Air Was on Fire / Reg Saner

All afternoon neither of us said
“This air’s on fire,” though both felt it
and felt in sunlight like that, death
was impossible, or if possible, overrated,
even trivial. The sky kept showing off
in all colors, each of them blue
and we trekked that enormous plateau
whose tundra darkened or flared in one broad
autumnal crackle of burnt orange, then gold,
drifting under islands of cumulus
as if somebody’d laid out the pelt
from a sunset. Towards the nearest of two
schist cairns studding the highest stretches
we knelt and touched late gentian corollas,
still half bud. “How long till first snow?”
Days, not weeks. But with outcrops insisting
the last word should be stone, then flaking
and falling away from that, we noticed
how each tuft put them to use
improvising soil from palmfuls of grit,
saying “If not this season, the next—
perhaps the one after,” and coming on
very small, coming on uphill,
against everything.