

1971

# Falling

Denis Johnson

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## F A L L I N G

There is a part  
of this poem where you must  
say it with me, so  
be ready, together we will make  
it truthful, as there is gracefulness  
even in the motioning of those  
leafless trees, even in

such motion as descent. Fired,  
I move downward through it all again  
in an aquarium of debt, submerging  
with the flowering electric  
company, with March the 10th, 1971,  
its darkness, justice and mercy

like clownfish, funnily striped.  
Let them both as a matter of policy  
redevour the light that  
escapes them, Shakespeare  
had just candles, lamps,

Milton had only the  
dark, and what difference? as  
poetry, like failure, is fathered  
in any intensity of light, and light  
in all thicknesses of darkness,

as your voice, you out there,  
wakes now, please, to say  
it with me: There  
are descents more final, less graceful  
than this plummeting  
from employment; it is the middle of a false

thaw, the ice undercoating  
of a bare branch is  
in the midst of falling. Where  
can it all be put except  
in this poem, under us, breaking this fall,  
itself falling  
while breaking it? Look  
at this line, stretching out, breaking even as it  
falls to this next, like a suicide,  
the weather singing  
past his face, and arising to kill him  
this first last line in weeks.