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# Alma

Kathryn Stripling

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A disturbed student raged in my office  
about elk roaming some desert for water.  
A swim—I felt my arms harden  
and knew I was building more wind.  
On the way home, night ignited the town  
and I thought of a speech: In conclusion,  
let me say Getty let me say—  
I remembered his eyes and the sky in them,  
his easy prediction coughed out  
like we had plenty in common.

## Alma / Kathryn Stripling

Two dead leaves  
on the table and ice

floats on milk like the ashes  
of leaves. Oak  
twigs kindle  
and fire leaps like a prayer, “Give us

breath.” When I open  
the door and breathe deeply  
the cold air inflames me.  
The fire seizes log after log.

In the garden my husband burns  
dead stalks of squash and potatoes.  
I sweep my dust into the coals  
and our smoke mingles over the orchard.

In winter I sweep the floor gladly.  
I gather the crumbs from the cupboard,  
and the rinds of the apples.  
When the dust bin grows heavy,  
I give what it holds to the fire  
and the fire sings its song:

raise your dead  
from the earth, make a fire  
of their bones,  
set them free

to be sky  
to be nothing at all.

## Day of Rest / Jack Myers

When mother lit the candles on a Friday night  
the bull plunging through the rooms all week lay down.  
Even the gulls settled down like paper on the breakers.  
The Sabbath was the torch she swept her house with.

In those days it was simple: a sip of wine rushed us  
through ourselves and we were blessed. The stars  
came out like little sayings: Be good. Be good.  
It was nothing to touch a God.

But it isn't like that now. The afternoons rise up  
like the cement sides of an empty sea and filling up  
on booze, I become the bull. Knock the daylight down.  
The walls redden with laughter and I wake up with them  
holding down my fists.

Some Friday night, my last, will find me glazed and stiff.  
The light pinched out, last thoughts smoking up  
as if I were a wick. Somewhere a woman will be lighting  
candles and children drinking wine. God bless.  
All night there will be a melting into space,  
a long, slow leap toward God.