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Aspen

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Jehanne Dubrow

Aspen

This was the first story he told,
that a stand of trees could be joined
by a common system made of roots—

all those gold, separate glimmerings
were a single body linked beneath the earth.
At night, I leaned into his neck

to breathe the trace of forest there,
fog and balsam fir, the musk
of something hunting in the dirt.

The trees could survive, he said,
storms that stripped the hillside
to the bare loneliness of winter.

Could come back, he said, repeat
the old habit of branch on branch.
In the juniper shadow of his scent,

it was easy to fall in love
with facts about the natural world,
the aspen leaf like a gilded arrowhead,

and the trees united, how without argument
they angled toward the day.
So easy in those years to forgive

even his cologne, green promise
that would fade away in hours,
its final note a little breath of burning.