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## Joan Mitchell Pulls Me Up

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*Patricia Clark*

**JOAN MITCHELL PULLS ME UP**

What was in the air was leaf-fall, the rot  
of the year's perennials and annuals, stems

and blossom ends done for, going back to earth.  
I couldn't move for being caught by the suck

of quicksand, a clump of blue feathers smacked  
on a window from a hit. Here I am on a cold Friday

and to my amazement the painter Joan  
Mitchell reaches for me, from her oil

on canvas, a diptych called *Weeds*,  
grabbing a hold of me, saying "Here,

take my hand!" There's something about  
her seeming riot of marks that's giving

a calming and cooling effect. It's cobalt blue,  
orange, tawny, and flecked with white,

even a spot or two of sage, and I see  
the trail-side at Huff Park with tall

teasel, Queen Anne's lace, and a waving  
frond of goldenrod or a flat-topped

white aster. Each year I'm caught watching  
this awakening starting up in early spring,

a mere sprout or two at first, then  
climbing, growing, a stem hoisting itself up

all season till it's five feet high,  
shedding petals, pollen and seeds. Not

a riot at all, a cyclic process of  
great determination, genetics, chance,

weather, sunlight, rain. Right now,  
I'm bowing to the botanical display and to two

canvases of supreme order, remembering  
our visit to the Baltimore Art Museum, August,

standing in front of the actual paintings,  
work as sturdy and wrought

as any palace. Then we went walking off  
in a pack for lunch, having salad and Chesapeake oysters

on the half-shell along with a crisp  
citrus tasting wine. Good friends, fellow

artists, a couple more hands to pull me  
out of quicksand. Where do we turn, lost

on that trail, or sinking? The Baltimore light  
was pure lemon as we strolled through

the galleries pointing, talking, saying  
look at that magenta, violet, sage, her vision,

her ability to make these marks. The gleam of it  
lasting as long as the light, what we call a day.