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Rachel Richardson

GIRL FRIEND POEM: NOMI

It's the tree I can't get over—
 salvaged Christmas tree someone hauled in
 in January, still up mid-March, in a cabin
 in Vermont, a demure circle
 of needles shed to the floor. No one
 moved it, all of us swishing past
 with backpacks, pizza boxes, me
 with my mixtapes on the windowsill, a throwback
 even then— and the earth outside
 taking its cues from the crocuses,
 the thaw beginning far below the snow.

Once we saw a bear scuttle up a tree
 in the neighborhood and it took us
 three minutes to turn to each other and say
 that was a bear?

What I loved about the mixtape was how the order
 of its songs became a message, and wherever
 it cut off was where the story had to end—
 instrumental interlude or
 middle of a sentence—

 You were mine among woodsmoke
 and calculus homework (someone else's,
 spilled under the couch like a paper river), among
 cowboy hats, let's have a sleepover,
 symmetry of bodies,
are you going to put this in a poem?

Girl in snow boots, girl in sequins,
my new philosophy is everything goes *in a poem*

and one day our roommates dragged that tree
into the woods and lit it—
 galaxy of sparks in the dark forest, our
breath steaming as we circled the flames

smoke tumbling into messages we couldn't read
 or look away from—