COLLEEN COYNE

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UNDERSTORY

When the dead speak, we have to listen. They coach this puffed up season, this fertile mantle.

They own our palest reflections, which create their own dangers.

In the house of roots, they pass through small rooms and balk at each threshold.

They perch alone among trees, like cold creatures—curve & hunch, fur & bluster—the over-hanging shadows that fold themselves neatly into our beds.

Past the pane: the sky between the branches.

Blue leaves surprised by red flowers, yellow-budded pinecones split by cicadas, a trunk netted by sliding weeds.

Their skin the winter sky between the branches.

In the cradle of evening, the cool, endless rocking, the dead steal our wings. No time to learn to die. Oh, but then—the moment just before, that last lost calling—the body lets go its gentle grip. Every branch bends and lifts—the great exhale. We press our ears to the canopy.
THE BIRKENHEAD DRILL

An ornament of light decorates real danger, scolds our reckless passage. Stumps float in the mirror moon path, or stack solid from the seabed. Prepare for your grave enlightenment; unravel your ultraviolet hair, which we’ll fling into the foam.

On this under-sunned, tilted starboard, salt sanitizes our armless hands, wind steals cold from clanging buckets, and we barnacle our anchor. If rescue fails, we’ll out-sink the scavengers with stale bait: our ankles wrapped in coral.