

Simon Perchik

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You wash this floor the way winter
waits for its ice to stir
show more interest in coming closer

and the drowned --what bubbles up
is bottom sand though you drift
and further out more water

unable to dry so far from home
—a single drop by drop
wipes down the world and longing

—it's how you sleep
leaking from your pores
this side then that breaking open

holding on to each other and now
without shape, making it through
as surfaces and nearer.

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Between these graves and every Sunday
you bring the wide, floppy hat
—on each visit, the red scarf

before the light she asks for
cools, hardens into the back and forth
that cradles each small stone

—she's not interested in stone
and tells you so though it's not Sunday
—it's not any day, just winter

stone bars and you wait outside
for the gate to show up
or how long she's been in.

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Row after row
—it's your usual vineyard
overrun the way mourners

will always lean too far
are already in clusters
holding on to a stone

as if a sharper knife
could fall through
and deep inside each vine

leave no one to walk past
though you come for work
with wobbling fingers

that no longer make you sad
—you pluck each pebble
trying not to touch the dead

show up as if they
would never let you leave
with nothing in your mouth

except as some seedling
just planted and on your lips
the dirt is somehow sweeter

growing itself into arms
and legs and kisses, by now
even in winter the stars.

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Mouth to mouth this rock
takes back that light
the sun grew fat on

though birds gag in it
still part their wings
not yet the ashes

that run through you
let their last breath
reach under you, hold on

till nothing's left
except the shadow
the dirt counts on

—you don't dig anymore
afraid more darkness
will escape, unfold

as in midair
the slow wide climbing turn
into mountainside

unaware how long it's been
—you sift, lean over
the way this tiny rock

is pulling you closer
wingtip to wingtip
is swallowing you

as if one by one
its feathers had opened
—in time, in time.

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Its arms still around her, this dirt
clings between what's left behind
and the rain --its stones stare back

can't make out the fingers nearby
easily yours and with each handful
something that is not her forehead

just the over and over nearness
you pull closer and with your mouth
welcomes this dirt, covers it

the way any helpless wound is kept moist
and on her cheeks, something later
no longer remembers, barely dry.