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**AUTUMN**

**by Michael Ventura**

The blaze is over. It hurt to be so dazzled  
At the end of your long summer –  
The leaves wouldn't let you alone, even your sleep  
Was a long,  
A tortuous falling.

A child ate his crayons in your dreams  
His laugh was cruel, showing off stained teeth.  
Now you're grateful for barren trees  
Air rubbed clean of life.

Then the Lord made you hear howling  
Dogs  
Running down a deer, each antler's  
A point of panic  
The stag's white breast  
Blinds you – still blinds you.

The farmer saying "That dog hurts a deer  
I'll kill 'im. Once when I's a boy, had a deer in my sights;  
Damn near cried. I'd kill a nigger any day  
But I can't shoot no deer."

*Forgive us, forgive us,  
The disgusting flaws in our tenderness.  
Men have fallen from You  
Like dazzling, blazing leaves.*

*And You, Lord, You are huge  
And twisted in the limbs, like this great-oak.  
And like this birch in winter,  
Lord,  
You are two shadows:  
One bark-white, and rising to the sky  
The other dark, distorted on the snow.*

But the small deaths of the leaves are at your feet.  
Beneath your boots they are soft, sodden.  
And the twisted trunks rise all about you  
Like columns of smoke from a burning city.

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