

BENJAMIN VOIGT

Deadfall

My father scavenges deadfall
all year long. Even in winter
he prepares for next winter,
studying the tree line as he drives
home from work. He's got an eye
for crown rot. He keeps a chainsaw
in the trunk of his Mazda. He is
always running out of fuel
to feed the burning furnace
in his mind. His ritual:
breathing bellows at its door.

Ours, when I was young: stacking
what he split. Then I did—

I left him to his acres,
their quiet ache.

No more cords passed
between us. Alone,
he drives his axe down
through the years. The rings ring.

But he starts with days: the paper,
its names and faces twisted,
balled up, to form the base.

Then kindling. Before long,
decades made smoke:
oak, beech, ash. The hardwoods
harder to find as he thins out
the woods. Last season's stock
already gone. How quick they take.
How slow they grow back.

The past used up. The future cut,
but still drying. He folds
back the tarp, starts to count
how long he has left.