

To the Bear in a Neighbor's Tree

by Robert Peake

How quickly we become accustomed to the light,
blinking through discomfort, standing upright,
when our claws break, we fashion tools, use
them, and then just as easily put them down.

We discover clumps of hair on the ground,
and see our lack of fur as a great improvement,
stamping and shivering, we like a cold wind!
When our night vision fades, we stumble a dance.

Now, we have lost you too, primeval cousin,
lost the instinct that might have guided us
in shooing you back where you came from.
We can no longer smell what is on the wind.

You sat all day in a tree, learning our gestures.
You waved at the crowds and considered making a speech.
When you became too much like us, we brought you down,
and hauled your massive blackness into the night.

The truth is that we lost you long ago, long before
our friends loaded up their guns. Look how far
we have come! Our fingers fit the triggers.
And still we remember not to look in an animal's eyes.

I looked, and became frozen on my couch.
I blinked into the sunlight, and you were gone.
The black spot in the tree is no longer you.
It is the place that you have burned into my mind.

