

## **Ascent**

Palms scrape along rough bark,  
Grasping for holds, a limb or stump,  
As sharp stubs form long scratches, stark  
Against pale skin, speckled with bumps

And green bruises that bloom on wrists  
Hidden by beaded bracelets. As  
Fingers fold around oak, she twists  
To squeeze between and pass

Bent sticks that form faltering footholds  
On the lower trunk, and keeps scrambling  
Up to branches swaying in cold  
Wind that slaps her face as hands bring

Her to perch on the tree's summit.  
Fingernails dig into wood arms,  
But shoulders soften as she sits  
And exhales, shaking, her breath warm

Against brittle air. Shriveled brown  
Leaves shield body and blemished face.  
When rustling is the only sound,  
Her countenance finally relaxes, safe.

## **What Was Lurking**

I used to run through feathered grass.  
Soft strands brushed against short, smooth legs  
as bare feet padded past  
pale petaled flowers with bright bees

Buzzing from honeyed core to land  
on my blooming yellow sundress.  
Corners of rose lips curled up as  
blue eyes twinkled in shining rays.

Over time, my skin grew paler  
as sunlit beams began to burn  
Red patches on cheeks. It was clear,  
then, that rose blossoms were weeds

And bare feet faltered as they trod  
on prickling stems beneath the grass.  
Red bumps rose as I stepped and dodged  
quick bees. They were trying to sting

me after all. And when skin swelled  
I sought cool comfort from the breeze;  
I did not trust myself to see  
what was safe and what was lurking.

## **Ballet**

The water moves slowly,  
soft ripples spreading down muddy  
edge. Bark sways on the stream's  
surface, staining it brown, dancing

with the sunlight shining  
through gaps in oval leaves. Needles  
flutter from clouds of pine  
to lay flat on the surface, caught

by a bent branch reaching  
to touch spiders skimming liquid  
like it is solid stone.

As a stray leaf snags weathered wood,

The needle turns, spinning  
with the current's quiet melody,  
joining clovers and grass  
and dragonflies in hovering harmony.