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Thomas R. Smith

GRASS GROWING FROM A WHITE PINE STUMP

Clean cut by a chainsaw thinning this white pine grove, the stump has a grayish patina of weather, outer growth rings faint as those rings discovered circling Neptune. The bark fits the wood comfortably, as a well-tailored topcoat. Its texture is ruffed like a barn owl's wingfeathers.

The bark is plying loose from the stump over time. To accomplish this separation, we have to let go of outworn innocence, give up our shock at the dishonesties of clerks or the deceptions of public officials. Anticipating all disasters, we bless our life, admitting that one day we also will feel the cold wind on our uncovered neck.

Still, in life it is possible to button one's coat higher, to walk in the storm toward a reviving warmth. This world is ruled by cross-winds of differing intent; four or five long grass blades reach up through the wintry jacket of bark to stand in full sun. "A child said, What is the grass?" The grass-tips blaze, remind us of a greenness that survives the cicadas' autumn. They are gratuitous, gift, unasked-for, necessary—sentries on an unchallenged fort, boys asleep after defending all afternoon the hill of imagination.