

KEVIN CLARK

Small Fires

Smoke enlaced in the branches
of the walnut tree. These
burning fields declare
an end to autumn's harvest.
Split tomatoes ferment
in their furrows. The scent
of rice, riding dust
across the valley, intimates
a season of kitchens, of food
cooling in wooden bowls. A year ago
you began your leaving. When
I'd return from class, your notes
reminded me of the change
you needed, Berkeley and Wilbur,
giving nights to all those closest
friends.

Now, if I sit at my desk
to write, I can only stare out
at the swelling walnut tree
and remember your planting
the winter garden last year,
while I wrote about the late death
of Indian Summer.

There was
an angling afternoon sun,
and later, after making love,
our skin radiant in the lemon light,
we quietly stared at the ceiling,
our own private visions crossing the horizon
of our eyes. We rested,
then talked of changing together.
But light illudes,

and when finally
we'd fall off to sleep, your needs
flamed like other lovers
in our dreams.

Again, I try
to write. Small fires advance
across the fields, pulling
pitch to each acre's edge.
*Everywhere in the pale afternoon,
char and ash!*
What we had burns.