

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.*