

JAMES GRINWIS

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*Xerophytes*

Things of importance:  
without them, none of us  
would be able to live the way we do.  
Neutrinos meanwhile  
keep slicing through us  
like skewers of corn.  
Is a theoretical particle  
invisible, or a bare thing?  
On a night some months ago,  
a man was writing on a napkin  
at some tiny bar, looking out the door  
where a woman was hauling  
a bundle of sticks  
home for the fire. Scenarios  
splay out: a fire for meat  
or an evening tea fire?  
She sets her sticks in the pit  
and rummages about  
for the first chapter of fire,  
part one in the syllabus for  
*Prerequisites of Civ.*  
She pokes her eye on a palm frond  
and everyone feels bad.  
Every finger in town  
seems stained: nicotine, wing sauce,  
snow removal equipment.  
Toes pop off like clothes  
falling from hangers.

The harbinger of the new  
existentialism hurled a stolen  
pomegranate. The porcelain  
hippopotamus lifted both eyelids  
and came into his own  
like a horrendous sparkler.  
A marsh-star curled in storm wind,  
a harpsichord was stripped of hammers,  
and inside the storm, way inside, where  
nobody could see it, stretched warmth  
like a lava-crusted tool.  
If sensation were a fake thing  
would you smash it?  
There's no sensation worth the warmth  
on the edge of her eyelash.  
All the pain the messenger felt  
centered on glass. Pain dislodges  
when focus shifts off of it,  
some people said, and the forest  
stretched an awkward tendril  
a significant inch closer.  
I cup one xerophyte  
in the castle of my palm  
and it shrieks. It shrieks like zero  
shrieks, angry in its cage  
with a frozen crow for a halo  
and a burning shell for dreams.