

STRIKE

So close, the sky
stopped as the clouds
cleared, as if through a keyhole
in the rock I caught a glimpse
of fire, uninhabitable with nothing to feed it,
or was it sunlight on lake water?
How to surface and know
that the lightning
was not for us, that the strike
was not ours? Still echoing in
our ribs there uttered
what had waited a lifetime to
move through us and be heard. Its storm cell
halved the valley, its violence at
a distance—a towel slipping from your
waist by lamplight—
was gone. Erased then
restored, unblemished in
draws and hoof prints, standing
water eclipsed by
wing beats in scattered
ozone, as if thunder had
cracked the sky's underbelly
of sleeping scavengers, falling birds
turning noonday into milky iridescence
half darkening the desert scrub.
Still bearing leaves, the tree
that took the strike
gave it to the bull now dead

on its side. Your hands
spanned valleys to
reach me, where unflinching
in the animal's eye, the horizon held
neither of us. Which role was ours,
now that to draw closer would
pull us to its center, would break
the circuits of courting birds,
the dampening void of
thermals, then wave after wave
of vultures descending, the pact
between us sinuous, still
warm to first touch, to what
had stopped stirring beneath
the surface, your voice
taut, its twinning
undone only to tangle and
bunch before the mottled flanks
that were swaying at their tugs? Devouring
yet devoured, at what point
did we vanish, where nothing
would be lost, where of two worlds
known to us—one being *danger*,
the other, *domain*—
neither would have us.