

Teaching Myself How To Burn Last Year's Leaves

by Nancy Simpson

If you live in a forest,
don't burn on a windy day.
Look on the boundary oak
for the surveyor's orange ribbon.
If it's not dancing, if it dangles,
you can hope burning is safe.
Best, burn when rain is predicted.

Rake leaves onto the dirt driveway.
Make small leaf mounds.
Burn one or two leaf piles at a time.
Don't let yourself think of the day
your young sons scorched the mountainside.
Do not look across the drive
where your old home place used to be.

Forget it. The cabin was dismantled,
bulldozed to the ground, buried.
Don't think of the man who found you
burning leaves one spring and said,
"Let me help you." He will not come back.
They're all gone now. Rake and burn
leaf piles 3&4, 5&6.

Let sudden wind frighten. Rake faster
when you hear thunder. Rake hot coals
into the gravel.

Stop only when
rain drives you back to the tool shed.
Tomorrow you will see bright green foliage
of five thousand day lilies lining your drive,
promising to bloom.