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RYAN HARRIS

I was born a tree.

*I understand, I say.
This is not at issue.*

But it is. A tree,
long-limbed and twisted,
but a tree, yes.
I remember:
I was ripped from bark to leaf;
I cut off my own roots.
I am not the first to do so.

*There was need of it,
I say. Wasn't there?*

Need, yes, and knowing.
There is knowing that must be had
to shuck off the heartwood,
lay bare the naked back.
The need, then,
was consequence.

*Consequence, of course.
If there is anything at issue,
it is consequence. Sin,
hurt, knowing --*

Love of air and light,
of warmth. I
was a lover. I
skinned myself for love.
There came a time that I,
as all trees do,
left my audience of squirrels
and gave myself up
to wolves.

*It is not trees
that succumb to wolves, I almost say.*

This is what I learned: wolves.
There is nothing evil in wolves,
but there was something hurtful,
black-furred and gripping
that eats away at trees,
at stillness.

*I have known that, I say.
I have known wolves
such as this: wolves with
teeth and fur and warmth.*

Of course.
What's at issue here is not
hurt or treehood or
wolves; it is the heartwood,
that naked self I had forgotten,
the tree in the dead old tree.

And what's at issue is knowing.
There is something I have forgotten,
something here in the skin of my skin.
I fear that all untrees have forgotten it.