

The Year the Trees Fell

(This is the story of the emerald ash borer. Over years the borer insidiously attacked the ash, sucking away life's sustenance. The devastation went unnoticed, the carcasses of the ash overlooked, overpowered by the prosperity of the mighty oaks that dominated the forest. Until the ash could take no more and began to fall.)

That year the trees imploded,
with deadening thumps they fell,
like soldiers, like Ukraine.

It wasn't just one tree that fell, there were days
when the forest shuddered, as if under attack,
like missile bombardments, like Palestine.

The world reverberated with hard noise,
baritone thuds concaving the ground,
like bodiless heads, like Israel.

It was the ash trees, naked starved skeletons
scrapping for the green lives of the oaks,
like malnourished boys, like Sudan.

The devastation distant from our lives,
as if inoculated, as if immune,
like a vaccine, like the U.S.

But still the trees kept falling,

like innocence.

Diane Melby

Recognized for literary excellence by the Poetry Society of Virginia, 2024