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## Eve of St. Valentine

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*Janisse Ray*

## Eve of St. Valentine

Weeks of unusual winds  
in a windless place.  
The pine struck by lightning leaning  
toward the eve of love's day.  
The day my husband cradled sapling longleafs  
in straw in the field beyond.  
While dough rose on the stove.  
The day my father drew a line  
between me and him.  
A line always there.  
Not imaginary.  
I looked straight at him and crossed it.  
Crossed it, crossed it, line of old tree, lightning line.  
What are you going to do now?  
It's down.  
Wind, oh stop your blowing, wind,  
now the tree's down.

All of the old trees are leaning  
one way or another.  
The cardinal a sudden red bloom  
in the dooryard quince.  
Winter sun flaring on its breast.  
My father carrying his wounded heart  
in its cradle of ribs  
out the old door.  
I wish I had a hand so big and strong  
it could straighten damaged things.  
Those blown over. Slanted.  
Compressed to withstand.

*Yalobusha Review*

When the tree began to fall  
none of us heard.  
The voice of wind was steady,  
urging it down.  
Dough rising in the kitchen  
over a pan of fresh-boiled water.  
My father walking out  
leaving his old line, fence-line, heart-line.  
The tree so strange, lying green  
on the ground.

I like to imagine  
that as the tree was finally going down –  
in the wordless space of falling –  
the cardinal in its branches,  
like a winged red heart,  
flew free of the crashing ribs of limbs.