

Ponderosa

It was out in the middle of the light, no way back for that old giant.

Other trees stood cloaked at a safe distance.

I used to think its
name meant it was thoughtful.

It did look like a green brain on a
stem, alive in wind.

I thought it got emotions from its roots in
earth, intelligence from needles in the sun.

I thought it must make
sense of everything.

Basque shepherds carved their love poems in
its bark and cut Lascaux-like glyphs of antelope and girls.

Those
Basques—Matisse of the plains, gouging desires into a thinking
tree that seemed to come striding over the horizon, like a verdant
thunderhead, mushroom cloud of true benignity.

Sooner or later, we
all knew, lightning had to strike, and when it did we saw it.

The bolt
came down like knowledge, but the tree did not explode or burn.

It
caught the jolt and trapped it like a mythic girl.

Its trunk was three
feet through.

Lightning couldn't blow the ponderosa into splinters,
and couldn't burn inside without some air.

A week went by and we
forgot about it.

But lightning is a very hot and radiant girl.
When
heat bled out to bark, the tree burst into flame that reared into
silence under a cloudless sky.

Brain of ash, what can you tell me
now?

What were your thoughts, concerning history?

—James Galvin

Show and Tell

This is the wave of gravel where she let me off on the edge of my
life.

This is the gleaming edge, past agencies and scrap.

This is the
edge of a blighted field where God idles his tractor.

He thinks he's a
thunderhead in drought.

You think God doesn't have a tractor?
You
think he doesn't have a blighted field?

This is what he's thinking:
not yet, not yet.

Look, there's another panic button lying on the
ground.

Look, here comes another wave of gravel.
Look, here

comes night.
You think God can't give up?

—James Galvin