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MARK D. BENNION, REXBURG, IDAHO

*And every year . . . it gets worse because . . .
I hear those lonely “lama sabach thani” words.
—Ethan Hawley, *The Winter of Our Discontent**

For years I slid my hands into negotiation,
one raised like an ensign riffing out and in,
the other submitted for the warmth of knuckles,

felt the chafing dwindle down the enemy’s
wrist, and then let go to see if his palms
would open to the sky or pull weeds

out of the ground. The cool heads were vain
and transparent, made the frauds look honest
as I pried for wroth then wrath

under the layers of dirty robes. In wet months,
they bared the twinge in their bones.
Sometimes I leaned in the direction of soldiers

and laughed over burnt parchment.
Yet, once I relented, going all the way
down to the base of the mountain

and blurred the straightaway in the arrow’s
line. Afterwards, I thought of a brother
molding pressure into a sallow calf,

a Nazarite raked under with confessions
and riddles, kings who forgot to think.
Few are like pillars when it comes

to strategy. The rest of us swirl like wine,
slowly, by degrees, giving way
to the sweetest mouth, tasting the sorest want.