Antidote

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Covenant

The already dried-out fir you kicked down in early autumn, saying *it wasn’t going to make it.*

Which provided a manner of constellation for the journey—
grubs writhing at
the roots replaced the stars; we looked down for directions.
Fog came out
of the ground to remind us it, too, was alive, and thus had its own nothing.

We readjusted our packs. We fled farther into the woods, became attentive
to the crypt of blue, broken-open eggs inside a fallen nest, the flickering
call of a coyote. I looked up, broke our agreement to stay true to the ground.

Beyond a clearing, the streambed with the deer bloating inside it. Skin loosening.

No blood. The space between its antlers formed an empty bowl. Rope
of light thinning out between the tree trunks. I gathered stones,
removed my sweatshirt to carry them. The water so cold on my ankles
I almost growled. Water bugs fanned out from the deer while I tied the shirt
around its neck. All this time you sat on your heels, were watching me.

And I saw the uselessness, saw that my persistence created a rift. The soil
I should have kept watching. And I tried to lift the body up, but couldn’t.

You didn’t move to help. You were a stone or a bear or were waiting

for the next tree to fell. You looked hungry. I used my foot to shove it off

into the one deep pool. The deer sank, almost too quickly. I wanted
to go back to the car for a flashlight. It was getting dark

and the body had been too heavy—I was breathing hard, not yet used to

being defeated. Your face turned away, too cold to touch. I would not catch

a fish with my bare hands. Not that night. There would be no fire. So, the car,

the flashlight I pretended to need. An exit point. You said *I’ll wait for you here*.

That was when I realized the possibility of never coming back.