

The Color of Tearing

After Joan Mitchell's Hemlock, 1956

Some women say red is more ghost
than shadow, more rising than lurking,
welling than draining. Some women
say flies nip at the sweet running edges
of a child's skin opened to breathing
light. Some women say more blue,

always. Red is just memories: a mother
who never returns, a lover's pants
badly creased, the distance between
father and daughter, tinny and coiled.

Some women say blue is screaming
from the mouth, like the sizzle of hairs,
red too sharp, too fast, the lost breath
of running, the crisp hard earth on a back
at landing. Some women say the color of the tear
must be the dark green of a pine: the thump

of a zipper catching, the pied hum of a baby
being born still. Some women want to say being torn
is yellowed separation, like two pages spread
to empty them of spatulas, dust pans, small mossy statues
that fall from inside a once white closed body.
Some want. They spend their wanting like coins.
Some want color like the promises

of gold, a shimmer kissed on the mouth.
Some women know shading, patient
beneath each embrace, know what comes
after, separation and the whisp of clothes
unclinging, electric body unplugging
from the leafy pull of another body.

Some women know: The sky pulls out its hair
at our distance. A mother tries to explain impermanence
to her small child. The sky listens. The sky wants
to fall down on both of them, wrap them
in a tight cold band of breath and water.