

## From the Middle Summit

Emily Hoover

when we lived in the mountains, it was aspen  
we saw on our weekly hikes neon green leaves  
pristine against slender trunks of gray ash

snowfall gone, but its presence felt in my cheeks  
the bones of winter prominent, like a clavicle,  
even in high-altitude sun we settled in alpine

desert after being wed in a butterfly garden  
the previous spring we were shrouded in clouds,  
but didn't know it & like the cloud we didn't last

seven years after those hikes, seven months after  
leaving our life, I watch my lover ascend a canyon  
of fiery aspens hovering above us is a wispy cloud

that offers respite from the central Nevada sun  
that stains my skin pink he carries his weight like  
water, with the same sureness that you had when

you'd look through me & say I'd never leave my  
chest heaves when I quicken my pace, place my hand  
on my lover's waist as I pass him, my calves pleading

at the middle summit, aspens dance, their rust-  
colored leaves glistening in the afternoon sun shower  
I remember when we'd dance in the kitchen without

music, how close my ear was to your heart, my hand  
encased in yours I don't miss the rhythm of your  
heart in my ears because I can hear my own heart

in my head as my lungs recover from this uphill climb  
love is a place for accidents, hearts spilled like coffee  
my boots slip song of my own breath catches my fall