

Returning

“We can always come here again,”
my six-year-old assures me, balanced
on the corpse of a fallen ponderosa
on its way to becoming black soil.

She peels back the bark and brushes away
the rotting wood digested, it seems, by mites.
A muscular hoar-haired grain is exposed.
I move my fingers along the resilient core.

No, I think, we can never come back to this.
Earth will embrace the tree and this girl
will shed her skin before I wake again.

—George Handley

This poem tied for second place in the BYU Studies
1999 poetry contest.