

Graham Hillard

## **The High Branch**

*to a childhood friend*

Of course I believed you when you said that  
you could hang longer from the high branch

of the live oak that divided the field, marking  
that place as certainly as a fissure—the roots,

your father told us, as long as a dozen grown men.  
Still, we did what we had to do, toed again

footholds deepened by this habit, grasped limbs  
as known to us as our bodies, changeless

in an unremitting season. I knew even then  
that it was fear that kept us, sealed our hands

to the perpetual bark so that we dangled, slim,  
wingless bats, from that height. That the fall

was only the first of many rendings, a pain  
so sharp I could almost teach myself to want it.