

## Simon Perchik

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Bent and yet this nail  
follows single file, slowly at first  
breathing its way back

pulling the well closer --you lean over  
as if one arch calms all the others  
and between your jaws another nail

dangling :a lone death counted in the millions  
so it will mean nothing and the spared hole  
left empty for company, gathers around

where your lips must be, kept open  
till the hammer brings water again  
circling down and this floor takes in

the ice from some monstrous pile  
already elbows, knees :rivers  
unraveling to chase your hand away.

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As if risk was still involved the group  
doesn't move, struck head on  
though the flash has too much sun in it  
--the class wants the yearbook to command  
flame with that relentless sound  
only a chorus can ignite :a single voice  
caressed by others and you almost touch  
the face that once was yours, half  
at a stand-still, half telling you directions  
--its eyes left open the way every grave  
puts together those small stones  
left alongside :flawless voices  
--a cleared mountain pass  
letting you through where the Earth  
is almost nothing in itself.

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Held taut and its wires

already invisible --you trip  
and the radio rears up

stumbles, takes a bow  
half puppet show, half  
some hole in a dead tree

--you bait the radio :a Mozart tape  
that lures even trees  
--out in the open and they obey

do what music says, led  
by a violin held up  
the way smoke is told to face downwind

and the children form a single line  
as if they were still giggling  
--how restful it is to saw

and no one says a word  
or smoothes back the fine hairs  
inside these twisted branches.

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What are they building, these stones  
so close to the church  
and all this milling around

--the ants aren't sure  
how their mound will look  
when it's finished, they start

with a next-to-nothing  
set another over it  
then once in place

anything is possible  
--they hatch till the stones  
whose common ancestor is the moon

with so little light left  
though this dirt was over-hunted  
for stones :without a sound

they keep the dead company  
and from behind are carried up  
without getting caught in the glance

at the darkness falling through  
to help you find a place to die  
alone --a stone tied to each leg

they will bring down  
without a struggle, single file  
one on top the other.

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You can tell by the curtain  
how the play will end, this sill  
dusted word for word  
till your ear slides along  
the feathers and you hear  
a door open the way  
between the passenger's side  
and just one wing  
so there's a spin in the works  
though under the hood  
an old campfire is fed  
live songs laced together  
with stories about ghosts  
--their smoke covers you  
--even the tires  
glistening, half wood  
half songs, surrounded  
by miles no one remembers  
and the invisible shadow  
alongside your eyes when the door  
opens on the driver's side  
divides the sky the way lightening  
sees what's coming and the curtain  
makes a gesture --spread-eagle  
then climbs slowly  
to become your arms  
--you don't move  
--from this height the sky  
fills with some moon-lit constellation  
still burning in the dark  
--you can make out the beak

the claws clasping your lips  
suddenly rock, lowered here  
to watch over the dead  
the falling birds  
with not enough air to breathe.

**Simon Perchik** is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *Almost Rain*, published by River Otter Press (2013). For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities” please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com).