

## Three Poems by Alice Pettway

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### A Mind Wandering

The leaves crush  
against my soles, crumbling  
as your mind does  
under its illness, each piece  
separate, each piece the same.

I have walked two hours now  
ransacking the mountain  
for your body, the one part  
of you I might still rescue.  
And then you are there,  
half hidden in dirt and leaves:  
a child, lost. And I, your child

am older than I have ever been  
as I guide your thoughts  
and feet back up  
the long slope home,  
each moment subtracting  
its tiny toll from the bit of me  
that knows snow  
can come any second,  
despite our games  
of avoidance.

In our pauses, you relay  
insect voices, clearer  
than the static I weave

as I cradle your limp form  
between two trees  
who, you say, tell you  
they are dying.

## **Wildfire**

On the mountain incendiary  
grass burns toward the sweep  
of roofs flaming terra cotta.  
Smoke kisses smog.

In the streets, people  
confident in the dark droplets  
speckling the sidewalk cry  
no alarm. Only one woman  
turns, rain stroked, to watch  
the final sigh of flame.

## Hands

I have the hands my mother would have  
if she hadn't bitten her nails for fifty years.  
The same gritty lines, the same awkwardness  
under good jewelry.

I hated her  
hands, her shortened nail beds, swollen knuckles,  
bought crèmes and nail files like talismans  
against becoming like her. But now,  
when the rough skin of my fingertips  
brushes against itself,

I think of her,  
wonder if she treasures her calluses  
and blisters as I now do mine, if she  
despises my oval nails, beneath their dirt:  
a remnant of struggle. Resentment,  
like a flea in the sand

waits quietly  
until bare skin presents itself, then burrows,  
laying its eggs quietly, knowing conflict  
eventually will hatch.