**Populus tremuloides**

Cheryl Slover-Linett

Early October she walks toward sun

meandering amid downed aspen,

flaxen streaks deep in woods.

A great horned owl unfurls wide wings,

glides low, shoulders bowed.

A deer startles, bounds off.

She lies down on still-soft yellow

cradled by the mother root,

single body from which all ramets rise.

This trembling giant, ancient being,

first to return after fire:

subterranean flesh spared.

Eyes stare out, old homes of branches

that litter the ground, liberated

from service to the whole.

Crowns dance, winds release

a shudder of leaves that snow globe

the air, flat stems kindling delight.

She wishes to be a leaf and spiral,

land gently. But she’s more trunk,

sturdy, gnawed on by elk,

nourishment in the twilight of winter,

dark scars on pale bark.