Stump

John Gery

A hollowed-out trunk in a field, a tree
I never knew – catalpa, maybe, or elm –
to us a shallow fort we soon outgrew,
it withstood a hard decade of winters.

Look at it now: fat stub, a small lump
stuck in my imagination, like a crumb
brushed under table linen. Frost,
no doubt, had killed it, or who knows,

a rare pestilence of scarabs. Yet glued
still to the inside wall of my cranium
it remains somehow, faded, to be exhumed
like this, its jagged edges splintering

above that hide of snow we loved
to puncture with our boots, stumbling
into its core. And it has worn through
the years of my forgetting friends’ names,

the number of dead in the Arab war – a mere
trace of nothing, a place where I scraped
my knee once, sat on its roots and cried,
though who can recall what for.