

First Burn

All day she has pitched dry grass, Hardy-esque,
perched on the stack, helping to raze the block
in a race against shire deadlines: fire risk.

Only her colours are wrong — curls a stark
hedge in English autumn, young fragile skin
dead-of-winter white. But she will work

to feel she's useful, wanting to fit in,
all my cautions thrown to the easterly,
hot from the desert. I've done all I can —

this is the point, the moment beyond me
for which we've struggled, locked like Gabriel
and Jacob, though the outcome may not be

a blessing. She is tall and capable,
strong on the outside — surely that's enough.
To look at her now no one else could tell

what tinder, what touchwood she was made of.
By evening there appears a subtle glow
upon her shoulders, imprinted as if

someone had held her fast; by morning so
reddened and furious she is aflame
with reproaches, and cries: *You made me go*

to England and then you made me come home.
Non-sequitur, she knows, but all the same
I am the mother, I must wear the blame.

(from Tracy Ryan — *Scar Revision*, p32)