

SEAN FORBES [GNOSIS]

LONG RIVER GRADUATE WRITING AWARD

After burning my right arm
From a skillet with scalding hot canola oil,
I fainted. I was four.
Perhaps the pain was extreme,
Or the stench of my tender flesh
Quickly cooking did it.
I was losing my sense of touch.

My arm is a geography of scars.
I can point out South and Central
America from my index finger
To the base of my thumb.
The skin becomes darker on my forearm,
Like an ocean, or the spotted River Styx
Where the hair is the rooted dead.

My elbow is a rust color,
Cracked dry like the Sahara.
I cut it once, the blood poured
Out like sweet water, my fingers
Went numb as my grandmother patched
Me up. I was ten, and for therapy
She advised writing to renew my skin.

For years I wrote without pen or paper,
Remembering stories and histories until
I was eighteen. I began to
Tear away all I knew, ideas, images,
Facts delicate as corn silk. My arm
Warmed, my fingers swollen and red,
The pen now steady in my hold.