

Imposter?

by [J. Barrie Shepherd](#) in the [March 1, 2017](#) issue

This smudge and smear of ash feels  
smooth and soft—the brush of feathers,  
angel’s wing—the lightest, slightest touch  
to have to bear upon my brow.

With all that lies ahead I had anticipated  
something coarser and less comfortable,  
the cindered scrape and friction of a burning  
that can destroy in its transforming.

These remains of last year’s palms may prove  
too gentle for the testing weeks ahead, too slight  
to lead the stumbling way beyond the olive trees,  
the ragged hill, the shattered grave, the garden.