

Karl Plank

as when a mortal flees from a lion . . .

when tall trees burn
or thick waters course past parked cars and playgrounds
when winds savage like dogs ripping meat from bone

some wrap themselves in sheets
of aluminum foil and woven silica
faces near the ground

others cut holes near roof peaks
climbing out with towels tied together
(a prisoner's lifeline)

and there are those who avoid windows altogether
the outer walls the upper stories
a mattress is the ultimate defense they have heard

in every case
the refuge follows the threat
the vulnerability the particular fear

we hope it is some one thing

it is not

josephus records words of a witness
to the ravage of jerusalem how the romans
laid waste to the city

choked the alleys with corpses
and deluged the whole city with blood
then night fell *and the fire gained mastery.*

in the kitchen of the burnt house
was found the skeletal arm
of a young woman in her twenties

hand outstretched reaching for the step
into the dark beyond flame and flood
beyond foul breaths of fury

