

FALL IN LANGUEDOC

Officials in Japan are running out  
of storage space for the ocean water  
used to cool down Fukushima's  
nuclear cores. Tens of thousands  
of tons, all newly radioactive,  
with talks of releasing it all back  
into the ocean. Across the globe,

we fill a tractor load—two or three  
tons of grapes—in four hours  
with a team of eight. What would  
a hundred tons of our juice look like;  
a thousand? I try to measure the ruined  
water in tractorfuls, but run out of room  
in my mental valley. How diluted  
does a radioactive ocean have to be  
before it stops killing everything  
it laps up? How much longer  
will the waters stand us?

Here, the Hérault's been low

all summer, thirsty, only two storms  
filling her throat. The *gorges* dried,  
scratchy. Her rocky bottom cuts  
into my kayak's belly, though  
the carp are fat, the seaweed  
an impenetrable forest. Here, slung

between the map's bright red pins  
that mark each nuclear throne,  
I imagine the steel drums planted  
beneath us, beating out a cold,  
toxic tune. The foxes are hungry.  
Tourist-trained, they visit us  
at picnic hour, panting, patient,  
catching grapes in their skinny mouths  
swarmed by flies, fleas trampolining  
from their fur as they polish  
avocado peels of their fatty linings.

From a too-hot summer, the vines  
have fried, harvest light this year.  
The last fat bulbs were stripped  
in the night by wild boars, though

Christian is diligent in his midnight  
rounds, has caught half a dozen  
perpetrators already. At lunch time,  
he brings me their pink meat  
in a small Tupperware, cut  
neatly into strips.