

Last Apple

Dawn lures her each morning
where she stands barefoot
on the splintered deck.
Steaming cup warming
her hands. A brown fleece
blanket wrapped about her when the chill
demands. She watches

southern tree line of box elders and mulberries
bird sewn in summer's end
along the unused track of the
old county lane.
Grown to eat the sun. Deer
track from the west
to mill about the base of the

crab apple tree apart from and older
than the tree line,
trunk leaning north. For this season
out of the reach of the scrub tree
shade. Almost horizontal
base for the upward reaching boughs
growing back to the light.

In spring, she smiles at the does balancing on hindquarters
reaching up for the flowers
or later tiny green bulbs,
front hooves running
in the air. Fawns
bounding between sun and shade.
Far from the starving of winter

Now, one boney limb stabs back north in October's wind,
an odd compass needle bobbing beyond the shade
Bits of twigs standing out
Static arm hair.
Leaves long fallen
from beneath the final fruit,
a dull maroon dab

absent this morning her waiting ends.
Before the groundhog begins
its daily search for windfall and the
deer return this evening,
she hurries inside for her long stored cache
and throws several apples under
the tree to keep herself from starving.

Behind the Winds

November wind spins the tire swing from the unmoving firth of an oak branch. Grass has overgrown the gravel drive of the abandoned house. Covering the doors and windows on the lower floors, silvered plywood has begun warping. Deeper than the whispering of tall grass in the wind, the swing rope eats away the bark of the limb.

Outside Altoona, eastbound I-80, gouges in the snow lead from the shoulder to the crumpled road sign—Iowa City 98 miles. Yellow plastic emergency tape secures the cab, already blown over with snow. The driver would have had to climb out of his door like a submariner must emerge from a conning tower.

Along the bike trail at 7 am. A rabbit warms itself in the new sun edging into the opening of hedge branches. Night frost evaporating from its coat.

Sunset on the patio of Caribou overlooking the UHAUL sign—the light for ‘A’ has burned out.

In his garden, an old man turns his soil. Jamming a boot to the edge of the garden fork. Across one row and back, blackening the earth. Remnants of pepper plants, hoed and buried. Chopped tomato vines turned into the widening plot. He cannot dig deep enough. The earth does not feel the scar.

Sunday morning, a young woman enters the door of the coffee shop at 7am. She wipes at her eyes smearing the muddied mascara. Patterned flats grind sidewalk salt into tile as she approaches the counter, orders coffee, pulls some bills from her coat pocket. She props her chin on the cup, warming her hands. Outside against the piles of snow, cars line up in the drive-thru, stop, and drive on.

In his back yard, near the budding crab apple tree, a little boy holds a Mason jar of fireflies up to the sickle moon to watch them disappear as they flash.

On a bed far into the night, a dog flinches in its sleep. Lying in his side, chest rising and falling quickly, pawing the air. A hand reaches out from under the quilt. The woman touches her dog’s shoulder. Runs her fingers down his flanks until he breaths easier. She closes her eyes believing that dogs dream only of running in spring fields.

After an hour, the lights were switched on. He looked up from where he had parked to the shaded window of the apartment. Tire treads clapped across the brick lines of the cobbled street. Several people smoked on a dark covered porch. It was too early to call her. He could taste fall’s coming.

Rain. A late spring rain at dusk, straight falling. Tender. A little girl with a backpack on her deck in rain boots making paths through the Silver Maple helicopters . A treasure map leading to the edge of the world.

Reunion

The closest we got
was a 2 hour car ride to
camp at the lake
some Fourth of July after
I had dropped out of college and
before I crawled back.
Sprawled in the seat of my LTD
Marlborough ashes blown in the
highway wind, he dozed
sweating tequila on my upholstery.
Camping meant sleeping
in the car at night
for an hour between bottle rocket fights
and water skiing
behind a fat-assed pontoon boat.
He worked double shifts for AMF
then making more money
than my father ever would.
“Do you remember the day
our draft numbers
were first read on tv?
I would have died first,” he told me.
We were only sophomores
that day we watched
in 1971. We didn’t follow
anyone to Asia.

Catholic school brought us all together. “No, Sister. I don’t speak Spanish. I speak Mexican,” he told his second 1st grade teacher. She was the only one who smiled. Together.
My mother warned me of them later, when we shared a little league team. He taught me to swear in his tongue. I shared the Italian version. Sister never knew.
An old aunt once told me that Disneyland opened the year I was born ...the closest I would get to that world was watching Mary Poppins at the Paramount where mom sent us to avoid being blinded by the lunar eclipse. He couldn’t afford to go. I met him later at the park to shag flies.
That Monday, we served early Mass for Monsignor. Latin Mass for the old women who spoke their rosaries in whispers, rising and kneeling in arthritic unison, accepting bits of host on shriveled tongues. Leaving the church with wetted fingers signing themselves in some hope.

He passed out in the sun on the 5th.
“My people don’t burn,” he announced
to the rising moon.
Sweating beer on my upholstery
heading from our last road trip.
A woman loved him in Arizona
It shocked him, I heard.
She named their son after his father
so he cried in his pride, “Bless me Father
for I have sinned.”
But Sister was dead then and the

Monsignor.

He came back one last time

We met at a bar so many of us

that August, where my own daughter

brought drinks to us. He didn't know

who she was until he

touched her cheek, her neck,

and she bent to his ear

whispering

while he looked me in the eye

until he could no longer stand it.

Even she knew he would be the first to go.

Spider

I find you in the bathroom
watching the depths of the sink cross-legged atop the
counter beside your reflection.
“I don’t want to have this conversation again,” it tells me.

I wonder how you have folded the length of your legs into that bundle leaning forward, head tilted to hear the
echo of the drain? The whisper of a May breeze circling the sink?

I expected tears.
You tap the sink with the end of a brush. It is a hollow sound. “Can we
talk about something else?” you ask?
Four of us, still as porcelain.

You unfold a leg. Stretching it to the yellowed tile floor. Like blowing out a
match, you exhale into the sink. “I can.” I see the side of your face staring at me in the mirror.

“I hate spiders,”
And you blow again into the sink, forcing the spider closer to the drain.
You might kill it there, and leave it like the flies on your
Mother’s walls so long ago.

Left them to harden, too insignificant to be fed upon. She could appease you in
youth. Now there is no one.

My silence
channeled you to sleep splayed over the couch, feet bared extending
beyond the worn blanket. Your face in its nightly pose, the color of lily petals
folded up for the night, the color of the empty sink.

Standing on the Bridge

No sunrise yet. From the bridge rail
a lightening sky
reflects in the crawling river darkness
I wonder how streams of fog rise out of the waters
hugging the bank—a gauzy shawl
hy grandmother wore on late summer nights
when she sat alone on her porch. I felt I could see
olive skin beneath it.

A solitary egret, shadowed in the darkness,
seeking breakfast, stands
one foot on the sand bar
the other in the river
with tiny twigs of legs
scratching drawings in the sand.
Her head, the hood of a cobra
unswaying as she waits.

Autumn nears with the coming sunrise
breathing cinnamon through the trees too low to
melt the fog. Looking down
the egret has flow. I missed its fishing story.
It saddens me
that the trees have yet
to turn and molt. I hope to notice that day
and when the egret strikes.