

Ghost Apple

Rain froze fast as it fell
glassing every twig and drift.
The clad birches rattled like bamboo slats,
and the apple trees fretted and dipped
the tip of every branch that did not shatter.
Coat over coat enclosed the old fruit
dried to its stem,
then it shrank in the bitter dry wind
scourging down from Saskatchewan
across the East Coast.
Neither windfall nor nose-height
for the deer that folded their front hooves in
and rose *en pointe* like dancers
among the orchard branches,
foraging even for such withered food.
Still it held in place
as some fruitful things do past reason
and beautiful beyond their time.
Ice persisted for weeks
as the last flesh flaked and fell
through the glass globe's hollow floor
until it dangled, a glittering
empty ornament of its last glory,
brave, with every pock and curve
preserved from the inside out,
but the heart-meat vanished
licked clean by loss and air.

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Bottled Messages

So many wash up on my own beach.
Others break on the rocks and dissolve.
Some snag in the flotsam
and return to me unrecognizable and smirched.
Still, I keep reaching back, pitching in,
words on the waters,
sending my small flotilla into the great Atlantic stream.

To the west, the sun shoots its white cuffs
out of the margins of its sleeves of cloud.

The Canada goose militia
is marching between the cut ricks of hay,
ownership in their glittering black eyes,
but here they are transitory as the tide
returning but owning nothing.
Muttering amongst themselves.

In a year that has lost the skill of conversation
I keep wanting to speak one true word
into the bleak silences,
about our roots under the droughty ground
reaching for one another,
about the echoes from far off hills and habitations still rising,
on a crystalline night. Far off,
still heard.

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The Missing Girl

What grief it gave you that her body lay lost in the leaves, the downfall of that year,
at the margin of the wood. The day they gave up the search, what fresh sear!
But she did not lie undiscovered. A daily wind
returned to offer its murmured obsequy.
The visiting clouds kneeled to wash her in a kind
rain. The scarlet maples donned their winter sere
and covered her with their pall of fallen glory.
Though to think it gives you pain, in an impartial good,
a thousand creatures fed from her munificence
as from the sainted ancient queen's whole treasure
given to feed her poor in famine, while the frugal ground
bore her gently in new gestation, long after all her light was found
and gathered into the bright beneficence
that first gave it for the world in so full a measure.

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Survival In the Key of G

Night's stone rolled off. The day opened without instruction.
Pain arrives for another tutorial
next-door child with a new violin scraping ligaments on bone.

In the back wood, Spring forages
in jerks and short dashes.
Oaks shift from foot to foot for a better view.

The compost mound under my window coughs spurts of dirt.

The chipmunks are awake.
Ground shimmies with their remodeling.

Up the drive and down, the salt-truck broadcasts its poisonous pebbles
though the night's crumbs are already pecked up by early sun.
Infant daffodils will halt and brown, collateral damage.

There is always some slippage to mourn
if you have energy or inclination. Some enmity -
deer-chewed buds or new carnage in a small nation across the sea.

Out front, a flounce of robins drops in to pounce and tug.
Worms have no heels to dig in, but they pull back.
We cheer the season's birds but we also say to the worm, *resist!*

Darkness has its way with us. Might as well
put paws to the earth and scrabble.
The Cooper's hawk has us fixed in her keen eye.
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Tilt

The ground tilts south outside my window
in the house on the side of a hill. The pines
follow a true vertical,
buttressing their trunks on the downslope,
the ash and the pawpaw
chose right-angles to the lawn
and lean untidily,
but then the whole surface of the globe is a hill
wheeling through space. We all lean
one way or another
trying to keep our footing
trying to hold our heads up.

The all-day-soup is in the pot.
Vinegar cleaning smell spears my nose.
We are spinning past invisible stars
in these few familiar dimensions
among the whole horde stacked like dinner plates
or spooling like sausages
from the unimaginable factory of creation
in which we are line-workers.

My task: dicing this cucumber,
wiping tiles,

writing the galaxies down.