

Acts of Autumn

Sometimes I can still see where I am
though it takes an act of autumn to do it.
What astounding yellow and russet.
It's the silk screen of the earth
above dull plum dirt like an anchor.
Maybe I won't drown today.

I'm in Pennsylvania for this flamboyant amber.
They say the trees already turned.
They can't imagine how meager my ration
in Los Angeles is. *Turned?*
What do you call such glared illumination,
this staunch pink, this flagrant assembly
of lacquered orange across the commons?

Even the air smells delivered, reprieved.
I walk through Penn State on codeine.
I am a child in Philadelphia again
with piles of leaves to step on
and no one can make me stop.
I can muddy my shoes if I want.
I wear nine hundred-dollar boots.

Leaves are serrated like ritually severed hands
and my eighth year of death and amputation
I carry with me the way some women
wear a gold locket or wristwatch.

I have been a lifetime in the tropics.
This monumental maple hasn't compromised.
It's waited for me to come from California
to distill this process and I will
and then drink it.

Maples are a staggering burgundy.
I get drunk touching their bark.
It's the time of the changing.
Air is crinoline, campanile bells,
hard rain a glassy hail and sounds
of women opening their throats
for their named god. He's called Jesus.
They sing because he loves them.

It's an afternoon for dancing.
Leaves like a dress, the rustle
of skirts across polished wood
makes me think of fathers
and linen, muslin, textures
you dry on ropes in the sun.
If you do that again I'll tell Mommy.

Ochre elms are strung tight as ristras,
sandy, camel, they could be strands of beads.
Maybe it's time for a neutral wool sweater.
Something a professor's wife would wear.

Oak leaves are patches of leather.
Strewn gourds in the gutter.
They say I missed the willows by a week.
It's always something.
I couldn't have withstood one more
ravishing display of pumpkin and apricot.

The constellations are falling.
All the yellow and red stars are falling.
It's the tease of maples, floating with fever.
It's the feral teeth leaves of the locust.
It's always like this.
The brief visit that makes me dizzy.

I pull maples from their branches
like eyes from a socket.
They are greasy against my cheek,
a slick canvas sail for a dirty girl
hands filled with skin.
And what are those trees with one red leaf
the size of an open mouth or a child's heart?
Don't tell me.
Everything is waiting to be broken or kissed.

I understand the aggressive filigree
of this world, its fan shaped ginkgoes
like so many concubines surrendering
their umbrellas. It's a silk rebellion
within the walls. It just takes a man
a thousand years to notice.

Driving back to Pittsburgh the core
is shifting in gutted brick and church
steeple factory towns dusted with light snow.
Oaks form the auburn spine of autumn.
They have claws on their backs.
They are glittering like blades.
Everything is still asleep,
drunk, Sunday morning, Halloween.

There is mist and the maples
are lingering like cancer patients
yellowing from chemicals.
I want to tell you the earth
is filled with poisons

but I have learned to bite my tongue.