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# Bare

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Bare

I.

Daddy knew naked  
trees intimately  
by their skin  
against his fingers; he knew secrets  
of bark that his father once whispered.  
I want bared intimacy with winter.

II.

A ring around a winter moon  
means snow in a day or so.  
Ever heard that? Count the stars  
caught inside the ring  
for the number of days  
the snow will last.  
Maybe it won't even snow;  
perhaps it's just  
a celestial bowl  
of moon soup  
peppered with stars.

If you put a hair from a horse's tail in water,  
it'll make a snake.  
Ever heard that one?  
Neither did the horse  
I tried it on, and she wouldn't listen  
to reason when I tried  
to tell her that old sayings  
hold fresh truths.

Old truths belong in your deepest pocket,  
and just because someone  
accidentally told you the truth  
you subscribe to  
does not make you squint  
at bright or turn your back  
to the sun or lift your feet  
while swinging.

III.

Rivers can't run backwards,  
unless, of course, a major earthquake  
rings the church bells in Boston  
like one did in 1811 when

life turned on a simple axle—  
flat, edgeless; nothing fell,  
so no one got crushed;  
now we rotate, rise like comets  
until our air gets too thin,  
then we pretend as though we lived  
on CO2 all along, act stunned  
if we fall, as though we didn't think  
we could, as though no one ever has.

IV.

No, old truths won't sue  
or harass you to tell your story  
until you run from them, twist and stomp  
through waist-high grasses where woods  
used to be, hide face-down  
beside your flattened path;  
so easy to just lie—  
or be placed—  
remain where the road crawls  
to the left and the view kneels on the right,  
with mountains behind  
clouds burst with sun;  
just sunstreams, no voice  
like in the movies  
but you have stories;  
words arc inside the uncracked you,  
sparks within geodes.  
Touch your pocket for proof.

Did you know that geodes grow  
from the outside in?  
Hollow rooms of crystalline walls  
do not insist that all space be filled.  
We grow like geodes,  
if we're lucky. And if we're not,  
we grow filled with dried mud and grey  
clay, without round  
stones in our pockets  
or green leaves in our hands.

V.

We don't know trees  
without their clothes on,  
in the winter, when touch  
turns our fingers blue,

the color of numb.  
We search for identities  
that the wind shed  
in a serrated-edged heap at our feet, pick  
through jagged crimsons, saffrons, ochers, coppers, maroons,  
chestnuts, hennas, ambers, and umbers,  
look for perfect; press their swells  
and veins between pages  
of a hand-me-down book;  
both crumble with age,  
turn the color of cardboard;  
blame the glue, the paper, the leaf;  
start over. New year, new clothes,  
new resolutions to do it right  
this time. We mean well.

VI.  
Never thank anyone  
for flowers;  
the flowers won't live  
if you do. Ever heard that one?  
Flowers belong to no one,  
I'm told. Every flower  
I've transplanted  
from tight plastic sleeves  
seemed grateful for air  
but wilted for water.  
True, flowers don't belong to me;  
they belong to water.

VII.  
Sweet gum makes the best whistles.  
I don't know sweet gum in winter,  
and I forgot how to make whistles.  
I want to know sycamore  
by more than height,  
sumac by more than red-rung ladder leaves,  
scarlet maple by more than blood veining;  
sassafras and teaberry ache  
to burst the red buds  
swelled on the back of a pink tongue,  
spray a dry mouth;  
cedar's spice preserves  
warped chests  
filled with paper dust,  
makes fenceposts—

crooked, like tired farm hands—  
outlast the shade of birches.  
Trees bleed when cut;  
cedar blood never clots.

VIII.

I once found a pod-like cocoon;  
black and ridged, like it belonged  
to the belly of a large cockroach;  
I put it in a jar.  
Weeks later, I checked it;  
a bittersweet-crimson moth,  
the irises of a god's eyes in its wings,  
lay dead at the bottom of the air-tight jar.

IX.

Don't worry; you're alone now.  
They never read past the moth;  
moths eat spaces  
in the winter clothes they make,  
leave us bare.

X.

Last spring, the two-hundred acre farm up the road  
auctioned as "parcels" of one acre each;  
now, crisp, young houses sprout; bare-naked  
saplings—greenhouse grown—  
supplant fully-clothed trees.  
I walked through winters'  
wind-strewn garments there,  
hunted mistletoe among branches of one-hundred-  
years-old oak and elm.  
Mistletoe is a parasitic plant  
that wants to evict the host that entertains it;  
life is the rent a tree pays.

XI.

Ever heard that a whirlwind in summer  
means dry weather? Leaves dance  
to wind instruments,  
broken sound through trees,  
and they leap, spin, and fall  
like drunken ballerinas.  
Not many leaves blow  
into my yard these days;  
and the ones that do

splatter the yard with accidental color  
like smocks of four-year-olds  
with jars of fingerpaint.  
My leaves blow into a neighbor's yard  
where I get blamed for the mess.  
From up the street, a white  
whirlwind spins foam cups,  
gum wrappers, and straw papers  
then dies at the foot of my silver poplar.  
Squirrels walk electric tightropes.

XII.

You ever hear that  
a sundog is a sign of foul weather?  
a rainbow's promise  
of lightning, rain,  
hail, and strong winds?  
Red sky in the morning  
and a sundog in the evening  
of the same day means  
"nature is seething."  
I saw two last week.

XIII.

You know a good man  
by how many animals he loves.  
A man who loves cats  
will adore his wife.  
Have you heard that one?  
Nature knows our intentions  
are good, believes in our faithfulness;  
that's why she hides  
cyanide in peach seeds.

XIV.

Hairs from horses' tails  
do not make snakes;  
you can prove that.  
But if you can prove  
that you know heat  
from the inside out—  
the way blisters hold  
liquid fire from the sun—  
as payment, I'll give you  
three peaches a week.