Four Poems

by Claude Wilkinson

Nightfall

When as much
as a gibbous moon
slants shadows
of sweet gum
and poplar limbs
across the tool shed
out back in ways
reminiscent of
Burton Callicott paintings,

between dusk and dawn,
while I’m watching
for raccoon action,

especially for that
rare albino who
showed up foraging
two nights in a row,

the other blessing
is listening spellbound
among a host of peepers
and perpetual nighthawks
thrashing against
the velvet hours.

Our Pear Tree

If Eden’s tree of life wasn’t destroyed
by that mighty Flood
ages ago, there are perhaps somewhere

shifts of cherubim hovering
around its limbs in a lushly secret forest,
checking their blazing sword

now and again so that the odd,
lost and errant moth
or adventurous aborigine mightn’t bite off

another curse and be
changed into wanton gods. But not
bequeathed from on high with sentries

of angels, our pear tree, on the other hand,
was mostly used as food
for my father’s few head of half-Holsteins

and for my mother’s bounty
of preserves, although it may be as close as I’ve
come to understanding the everlasting,

as it just kept offering full branches
of cadmium-green spheres
worthy of Cézanne, even after it was getting on,

had caught fire once, and its
trunk had been gutted by at least two lightning
strikes, even after the death of our faith

in its will to bloom one more season,
though flourishing spread over
its roots and wildly about the rest of the yard

in a patchwork of periwinkles
and showy jonquils. When we moved some years
later, the tree had dwindled to what

seemed like a shell of bark, yet we were told by
the new tenants there that, summer
after summer, it was still bearing beautiful fruit.

Providence

Being the son of even
a jackleg preacher,

Ricky Anderson

should’ve known better,

yet in our boyhood lull
of late August heat

not long before
sumacs would redden,

coming upon a
passel of hogs sprawled

under their shed,
he was possessed

to strip the leaves
from a willow switch

and plow into them
for fun. Though

in their squealing escape,
two or three bumped

the rusty panel where
a globe of yellow jackets

was quietly nesting
but quickly rose in

formation to throw
their whole golden veil

over Ricky’s head and face,
and every other bit

of uncovered flesh
they found till he

must’ve looked similar
to Christ his Lord

after being scourged
and crowned with thorns.

Repast

As for both wake
and funeral, you go with
the best of intentions,
determined not to bring up
anything to do with feeding tubes,
or your opinion on chemo
and life-support, or clichés

about it being better
to go quickly—say,
nodding in an easy chair
after a good day on the lake—
than to suffer vampire nurses,
the indignity of bedpans.

You hope, for the moment,
not to blurt any unsurety
of closure through faith,
meaning instead to concentrate
on the recompense of casseroles,
the lavish glazes on cakes,

subduing all thoughts
of how there seemed to be
a little too much rouge
on the cheeks, how cloudlike
and eternal the casket’s taffeta
looked, when, inevitably,

over an awful pause,
and in the twinkling of an eye,
something like the insipid
“you just never know”
has slipped past your lips.

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