

## What Else

The way the trees empty themselves of leaves,  
let drop their ponderous fruit,  
the way the turtle abandons the sun-warmed log,  
the way even the late-blooming aster  
succumbs to the power of frost—

this is not a new story.  
Still, on this morning, the hollowness  
of the season startles, filling  
the rooms of your house, filling the world  
with impossible light, improbable hope.

And so, what else can you do  
but let yourself be broken  
and emptied? What else is there  
but waiting in the autumn sun?

-by Carolyn Locke

## Autumn's Door

*I have been following the seasons around and this one, autumn, is here again, new, turning the sumac red. The clouds are heavy, hang low, and scud across the horizon, dragging their dark, ragged edges over the brightly lit grain stubble. Sometimes it's as though a door has opened into the landscape so that we can see clearly each leaf, the sharp outline of each grass blade, and know for an instant just why we are here on this earth that is so loaded down with beauty it is about to tip over.*

-by Tom Hennen

## The Fragile Season

The scent of summer thins,  
The air grows cold.

One walks alone  
And chafes one's hands.

The fainter aspens  
Thin to air.

The dawn  
Is frost on roads.

This ending of the year  
Is like the lacy ending  
of a last year's leaf  
Turned up in silence.

Air gives way to cold.

- Yvor Winters

## The Wild Geese

Horseback on Sunday morning,  
harvest over, we taste persimmon  
and wild grape, sharp sweet  
of summer's end. In time's maze  
over fall fields, we name names  
that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves. We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow.  
Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear,  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.

-Wendell Berry

## **It's Monday Morning**

mid-November, the world turned golden,  
preserved in amber. I should be doing more  
to save the planet—plant a tree, raise  
a turbine, put solar panels on the roof  
to grab the sun and bring it inside. Instead,  
I'm sitting here scribbling, sitting on a wrought  
iron chair, the air cold from last night's frost,  
the thin sunlight sinking into the ruined  
Appalachians of my spine. I know it's all  
about to fall apart; the signs are everywhere.  
But on this blue morning, the air bristling  
with crickets and birdsong, I do the only thing  
I can: put one word in front of the other,  
and see what happens when they rub up against  
each other. It might become something  
that will burst into flame.

*-Barbara Crooker*

## **Autumn in the Fields of Language**

Without wind the yellow leaves  
hang slack. Maple, elm and oak  
  
lift torches to the blue of heaven.  
A scarlet burning bush ignites the air.  
  
Evergreens comfort the eye,  
relief from all that fire and gold.  
  
When my last warm season's done  
and time's come to leave this world  
  
of words, bright fields of language  
where I play and sing, let flame  
  
in me some final brilliant work  
like autumn leaves in changing light.  
  
May I rejoice in having had my say.

*-Jeanne Lohmann*

## **Evensong**

Near the gravel pit just below  
the crest of Norman Hill, two  
fox sprawl, end of day warmth  
  
rising from earth. Across the road,  
hay turned into windrows rings  
William's field, gold against green  
  
against gold. To the west, sun  
flowers itself down the ladder  
of the sky, as heavy clouds break  
  
to reveal burnished red of ash  
leaves, a fox's tail disappearing  
into the undergrowth. At this hour,  
  
what isn't prayer?

*- Todd Davis*

## **Autumn Day**

Lord: it is time. The summer was immense.  
Lay your long shadows on the sundials,  
and on the meadows let the winds go free.  
  
Command the last fruits to be full;  
give them just two more southern days,  
urge them on to completion and chase  
the last sweetness into the heavy wine.  
  
Who has no house now, will never build one.  
Who is alone now, will long remain so,  
will stay awake, read, write long letters  
and will wander restlessly up and down  
the tree-lines streets, when the leaves are drifting.

*-Rainer Maria Rilke  
trans. by Edward Snow*

### Footnote to Autumn

Old boulders in the autumn sun and wind,  
Settling a little, leaning toward the light  
As if to store its summer—these remain  
The earth's last gesture in the falling night.

This then is age: It is to have been worked  
By the forces of frost and the unloosening sun,  
It is to bear such markings fine and proud  
As speak of weathers that are long since done.

--Loren Eiseley

### Over in Montana

Winter stops by for a visit each year.  
Dead leaves cluster around. They know what is  
coming. They listen to some silent song.

At a bend in the Missouri, up where  
it's clear, teal and mallards lower  
their wings and come gliding in.

A cottonwood grove gets ready. Limbs  
reach out. They touch and shiver.  
These nights are going to get cold.

Stars will sharpen and glitter. They make  
their strange signs in a rigid pattern  
above hollow trees and burrows and houses--

The great story weaves closer and closer, millions of  
touches, wide spaces lying out in the open,  
huddles of brush and grass, all the little lives.

--William Stafford

### Reluctance

Out through the fields and the woods  
And over the walls I have wended;  
I have climbed the hills of view  
And looked at the world, and descended;  
I have come by the highway home,  
And lo, it is ended.

The leaves are all dead on the ground,  
Save those that the oak is keeping  
To ravel them one by one  
And let them go scraping and creeping  
Out over the crusted snow,  
When others are sleeping.

And the dead leaves lie huddled and still,  
No longer blown hither and thither;  
The last lone aster is gone;  
The flowers of the witch hazel wither;  
The heart is still aching to seek,  
But the feet question "Whither?"

Ah, when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than a treason  
To go with the drift of things,  
To yield with a grace to reason,  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season?

--Robert Frost

Sent in Autumn, 2021