

DIVINE TIMING

Our priestly scientists
disagree whether fire
entered the world brought down
from the sky or welled
up out of the earth.

First red-stained white flowers
decorate uplifted branches
Aesculus glabra
erect in blazing candelabras.

Then perfect white flowers
cascade in many falls
of sweet flame
Robinia pseudacacia.

Finally *Hesperis matronalis*—
escaped at dusk
from the ladies' gardens—
spreads a lavender bloom
across the darkening
forest floor.

Together, their odor sets
the western world aflame.
Blossoms in flame.

THE YEAR OF NIL AND NIX

No live music
No harvest dinner
No intimacy
 “don’t know you”
No ash woods
No public laughter
No dancing in the streets
No professional drama
 (plenty personal)
No interest in poetry
 ‘twas ever so
Damned little joy
No full-faced smile
No Election Day dinner
No turning back
 the clock
No celebration
No condolences
No family get-togethers
No drinks at the bar
No hugs
 no embrace
No silliness
No religious service
None of your business
No singing together
No live music
No friends visiting
None of the above
No hope in the herd
 you dog
Are we in this
 together?
No hemlock groves
Never to return
Nothing to fear
 but...
Not now, no fear?
No lack of fear
No feeling
 but fear.

CRANKY OLD MAN

He's strolling by a row of little-leaf lindens
planted between the Elks parking lot
and Lafayette Street, his home town
when a late October breeze gusts up,
he's showered by gold coins but no,
on closer look they are yellow leaves.

DUSK ON THE YEAR'S LONGEST DAY

Hot in the afternoon hours
while I napped in a chair on
the sidewalk in front of Dalai Java,
a cup of coffee on the chair's arm.
This morning our large crew
cleared brush from the walking trail,
an old railbed running to Stanley.
A young farmer's wife broke my slumber
by asking if she had left me enough room.
"For sleeping," I said, I don't need much."
It turns out she is married to
a grandchild of a farmer whose
land I once surveyed in a thunderstorm.
We laughed, and she was glad
I survived to laugh at the memory.
She had locked her phone in and herself
out of her car, borrowed a phone inside
to call her husband to bring the spare
key from Geneva. When she left,
I almost went back to sleep but
thought home more comfortable.

Some relief in the coolness of evening,
after a long day of leisure and work
dancing the Toledo two-step with my sicklebar
flinging it out and drawing it back
following its two-cycle breathing, oily smoke,
I am back at dusk reading the last few pages
of the long biography of an American
woman poet born in the 19th century
whose talent was matched by her
self-destructiveness. She played with
matches. Pity does her no justice.

8 AM ALREADY STAINED

I've got a small stain down
the crotch of my blue shorts,
but it's not what you think
though that's always a
possibility.
No, it's maple syrup.
I already had two nice brown
eggs broken in a bowl when
French toast appeared to me
in a vision. What is it Homer Simpson
says? "Mmmmm." So
a change of plans, instead
of a bowl, a quart jar half-full
of an egg, milk, ground cinnamon
and real vanilla, capped down
and briskly shaken, poured
into a small pan over halves
of the big rounds of Heidelberg
"French Peasant" bread, sozzled
around, fried in the big cast iron
pan with butter, turned, deposited
on my plate, buttered (again!)\
drenched in syrup and eaten
with such gusto that the stain
does not become apparent until
I am washing the dishes.