The Forked Path

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I REMEMBER standing on the roof top of a tall building, concrete and steel flung high and proud into the night. I remember the city lights below, some piercing white, others weak and yellow, all blinking uncertainly in the darkness. And I remember thinking: Who are you standing alone on a roof top with the wind at your throat, alone in the night, with the stars above and the lights below? What is there here for you? Why are you here?

Is it the stars? The stars from which one can only look down? Could you breathe the rarified air of the stars? Or the narrow path of light to Vega? Could you walk that path?

Is it the city? Is it for you to be one of the swarm that alights each night from the "L" and walks over the pavement-hidden earth to his particular layer of a certain building on Such-and-such street; that cooks a can of food over a gas burner, that eats and throws the can into the incinerator? That puts on a clean shirt, and walks to the movie-house to see Tyrone Power make
torrid love to some beautiful blonde? Is it the city, with armless magazine vendors beside their stands on the corner? With all-night-service drugstores, giving off mingled odors of hot pork sandwiches and rubber hot-water bottles? Of Jewish merchants treading stealthily the thick carpet of their chromium and pastel-decorated dress shops? Of the street at night, lighted yet gray, crowded yet lonely, shrieking horns and motors and voices trying in vain to conceal the pall-like silence of the city vacuum—hollowness, noise, and people walking in it, living in it, sleeping through it?

Is it for you always to be here on the roof? To long both for the purity of stars, and for the men in the streets of cities? To long for each, to weep for both, to stay here, alone, knowing neither, having nothing?

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**Pear Tree in December**

Helen M, Pundt

White in a white world, silver-tipped,
You stand in frosted glory,
Stars upon your branches
Where once the fragrant blossoms swayed.
Still and serene you stand.

Tell me, are you content in this calm moment
Of perfection,
This hour when all colors blend
And none alone startles the brain?
Do you not remember with a wistful sigh
The young touch of tender flowers,
The lushness of green days,
The agony of arrow-splintered skies
And wild rain?
Do you not recall the precious heaviness of fruit
And due fulfillment?
Is this white wisdom all you need?

Are you content?