The Seed Gatherer

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Abstract

Grandfather, you signaled summer waving your railroad cap at sprout-hungry rabbits...
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by
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English 4

*Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

John XII, 24

I. THE GARDEN

Grandfather,
you signaled summer
waving your railroad cap
at sprout-hungry rabbits.
Crawlers,
harvested from night grasses,
you unwound in the tulips.
Garters,
harrowing the soil,
sped from your lank shadow.
Sage and thyme,
expanded in hotbeds
of old storm windows,
you dried on an apron
and crushed with a firebrick.
You powdered roses
with a cheese shaker,
and popped snapdragons
for seeds and another spring.
With wet scissors and twine,
you snipped and cinched lilacs
for neighbors or strange children.
On the heaviest days,  
you drew up a chair  
to the ripest delphinium  
and wished for a hummingbird.  
But when the spider mums,  
summer sleepers,  
yawned and nodded  
their watercolor caps,  
you turned inside—  
waiting,  
clouding cold windows,  
leaning toward the first crocus.

At noon  
you boiled  
leek soup,  
and watered  
the flat of zinnias  
on the dim kitchen sill.  
Sparrows tapped  
the rusted tray  
of anise and millet  
behind the pane.  
You strained to hear  
the small beat  
of furious wings.

Afternoons,  
you mapped gardens  
on old paper sacks,  
and sorted marigold  
from marjoram seeds  
on the cellar floor.  
Later, when the picket fence  
barred the sun,  
you climbed to your sleep.
II. THE HOUSE

Longer nights
bred frosts,
bending the asters
and weathering
the stonecrop.
Winds whipped the laurels,
and hurled crabapples
at the north windows.

Snow planed your garden.
You stoked the squat furnace.
Upstairs,
you rocked
by the bay window
and shivered,
rolling with blunt,
brown fingers
your wisp-ended
cigarette.

Outside,
in the pitching winds,
a cocoon was anchored
to the bedroom sash.
Soon, you knew,
it would unravel.
And that day,
up with the sun,
you would turn
the earth
back from sleep.