

Ellen McGrath Smith

## **Corona: The Apples in Winter**

The emotions go somewhere. Like water, they find  
their own depth and go somewhere.  
The salmon-smudged sunset unravels December  
as Saturn comes in to make judgments,  
name debts. Sadness not anger  
erects the soft fence around everything.  
Inside the soft fence are razors embedded,  
and love does not know what to do  
in the churchyard. She waves at the traffic;  
that's all; and the traffic is one long tough  
sinew, a cobra bewitched by digestion,  
a thigh that remembers each hand  
that has stroked it, though none  
of those hands is around anymore.

Though none of those hands is around  
anymore, one can still see them  
waving, descending like birds, wings  
spread out to caress. The apples of  
so many eyes falling into broad barrels  
with frostmetal staves; kisses belying  
the fear at the core that the love  
will not last. The churchyard protected  
by razor blades whispers its vespers  
to sleepers whose sinews stretch  
fitfully in their aloneness. It whispers  
to wave those hands down from the sky.  
The children's toes spread as they gulp  
in the magic with fluttering eyes.

I gulped down the fluttering magic of our lies,  
their blue intonations, their tragic salt angles  
of elbow and crotch, the marzipan whites  
of the fingernails, eyes. And bewitched by  
digestion, I writhed through the musky tall grasses  
and moaned to find something I'd lost.  
Love waves against traffic; that's all  
in the past, she proclaims through the fumes  
and the sunset-tinged mist. Halogen eyes  
pick their way through the deepening dark.

## *Kestrel*

It is mild for December. The mulch still has flavor  
and I still digest, writhe to leave you behind  
and to try to adjust to aloneness. The red peels  
of kisses, stems, our bodies twined blotch the sunset.

Our kisses, our bodies twine into the sunset  
that writhes its way into the deepening dark.  
A scalloping pattern of salmon until all the blue  
intonations are gutted with black. Little heart,  
little baby—the swaddling clothes are embedded  
with razors. Trust like a stable abandoned  
the day after Christmas—a rental some truck  
must pick up with the star losing luster  
by daylight. Hope has a taste like blueberry,  
banana, shape like two bodies perfectly fitted  
together. Fingers send rays out that shine  
in the night, lose their luster in daylight.  
The apples are well in the ground by December.  
Their task is to somehow remember.

Their task is to somehow remember  
the trees that produced and then shed  
them. I can remember the sound  
of your breathing, the soft of your ear  
melting into my mouth, can remember  
your hand on the arch of my spine  
and the way love climbed over  
the soft fence, the hard fence  
to meet us where traffic seemed,  
suddenly, to stop. That was lovely.  
The dirt that sifts through cannot mute  
the dank apples unravelling. Frost  
cannot strangle their screaming.  
She put my hand on your hand, like this—

like this hand on your hand as we slept,  
like this hand on your arm as it held me,  
two people falling, fell into  
each other, dug into each other,  
the dirt of each other, the drug  
of each other, the lock and the key  
of each other. And love was the mother  
nobody quite gets in this world; it made us  
both children no longer regretting this world

and lovely—the traffic just stopped  
and the stable was full of the blue  
mother cradling her child. The livestock  
they'd rented so docile. The steam of their breath  
was suspended in floodlights, unending.

In unending floodlights, suspended,  
the courthouse stood knowing its morning  
would come. It was chalkwhite,  
unflinching with right  
and with wrong. Love of justice  
and love are not ever the same. So  
the baby turns into the monarch  
and heart into brain, and the body  
is led like the livestock up onto a ramp  
that's not steep though it makes  
all the difference from danger to safety.  
Again, I choose safety, the core of the moon  
breaking down in my fist, as I listlessly look  
for a place to dispose it. My love,  
the emotions go somewhere, they find—