CELLAN JAY

OLD FRIEND

In the past ten years,
I have made hardly any progress at all toward
perfecting myself

and, dear friend,
I wonder what we would have to say
to each other now

were we to scrape
back our chairs again in the noisy restaurant,
sling our purses over

the chair backs, order wine,
and slip into the warm bath of our old conversation.
Do you remember the time

we met in the basement café
on Charles Street? You arrived with snowflakes
in your dark hair,

crazy for Derrida’s
Lover’s Discourse, while I looked chic in my vintage blouse
made of some pre-modern

fabric that lovingly embraced
its antique stains. In my dreams, you appear strangely
robust, and though all I know
about dreams tells me you are
just another facet of my broken-hearted and abandoned
self, it is fine to see you again.
Ordinarily placid, today these gravel roads tunnel through bright flames of blazing birch and maple behind which a row of conical firs confer. Blue jays streak across the road, love flares between a pair of late-season flickers canoodling on a naked branch above a stream—what with all this incandescence and birds, I can barely keep my car on the road: a thin filament of joy ignites in me, burns briefly, hot and blue.

Dark and cold fall out of the sky in equal measure now, shutting us indoors with our animals and cooking smells. Fallen apples rot in the grass, unraked leaves glisten under a greasy slick of last night’s rain.

The cats and I take up our evening positions, one sprawled between my knees, the other curled in the crook between my ribs and elbow. The lake view out the windows slowly drains of light, replaced with polished reflections of our indoor selves, our minds filled with mild epiphanies in this fire-warmed room sealed in with stars. In a minute, I’ll shift the cats, get up and poke the fire one last time.
I still can’t see newly fallen leaves—
the crimson sugar maples
and baked brown oaks—
without wanting to carry home
a collection, to iron them
between sheets of waxed paper
and mount them on pieces of
stiff white cardboard,
the whole covered in plastic wrap.
It seems so long ago
that my last installation was exhibited
in my grade three classroom,
to general approbation
and praise all around.