

JANET YOUNGDAHL

THAT WINTER

Broken-slate ice shingled us to the couch,
horrified as a magpie devoured
a still-chattering chickadee.

We are still not speaking. We roll the potted
fig trees onto an old carpet runner, bang them up the front
steps, through the house to the back porch

for the few warm hours between hail
and late snow. Each night, the odour of fig trees
matches our sour-seeping discontent, relieved

by heaving them back outside at first light. Lilacs
halt before opening, each branch a stunted purple
staccato. Mulberries weep, apricots refuse

to bud, plums jab pointed leaves into the shivering air,
dueling tender green against pitiless rain. The saturated
fig pots become sodden flannel shrouds:

bedded too long, the leaves begin to rust. The final
snowstorm releases the argument
we have been holding for months. No longer ours,

it stalks grimly through the garden, trowelling up frozen
leaves and half-dried rose hips,
flinging dead grapevine over snow-covered

arbour, shredding its pelt on the newly birthed
thorns of the rugosa. The anger
culls ice from the apple trees—rivulets

puddle in the slurp of roots, heat urging the drunken figs
to feast, sun on their tongues at last. Bathing in scent,
bees crowd to the smallest blossom, eager to forgive.