

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.

FALL SCRAPS

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.