

Beneath the Apple

The house a-tilt with laughter, jazz,
and tipsy friends, I eased
into the yard, and took a breath
of dark, chill evening, pleased

to leave drink, smoke, and my old friends.
I lumbered to the apple
in the darkest corner, near the fence,
and underfoot, a windfall,

crushed to paste, infused the air,
its sweetness lush with rot.
(I ought to take it down, the apple.
But that's an afterthought.)

Too much to drink and my house full,
I leaned against the tree,
and stared back into yellow windows,
perplexed—why now?—to see

my friends, whose lives I know too well
and who know mine. We share
long histories but decreasing time.
We make good laughter bear

what laughter can, which is a lot.
I saw my smiling wife
finger an old friend's bright new hair
and risk an honest laugh.

A hundred feet away in darkness—
and I knew what she'd said
and what her laughing friend said back,
her hair a fevered red.

I leaned into the teeming tree,
fumbled, and emptied myself
onto its peeling bark. The dog
strolled over, took a sniff

and emptied himself too—two mammals
depositing their salts
against the boundary tree. I named
and then unnamed my faults

as I stood under unplucked fruit—
a spiteful woodland god,
I thought. Or tried to think. The god—
or was it I?—guffawed.

I sauntered up the lawn in joy,
a ghost. Nothing was mine.
The house, the friends, the night. I loved
that moment: Dead. Divine.