

Falling: The Code

By Li-Young Lee

1.
Through the night
the apples
outside my window
one by one let go
their branches and
drop to the lawn.
I can't see, but hear
the stem-snap, the plummet
through leaves, then
the final thump against the ground.

Sometimes two
at once, or one
right after another.
During long moments of silence
I wait
and wonder about the bruised bodies,
the terror of diving through air, and
think I'll go tomorrow
to find the newly fallen, but they
all look alike lying there
dewsoaked, disappearing before me.

2.
I lie beneath my window listening
to the sound of apples dropping in

the yard, a syncopated code I long to know,
which continues even as I sleep, and dream I know

the meaning of what I hear, each dull
thud of unseen apple-

body, the earth
falling to earth

once and forever, over
and over.

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Source: *Rose* (BOA Editions Ltd., 1986)



The son of a personal physician of Mao Zedong, Li-Young Lee was born in Jakarta, Indonesia, to Chinese parents. After fleeing the country, the family settled in the United States in 1964. Li-Young Lee's mother came from a noble family, with her grandfather serving as the first president of the Republic of China. Upon arriving in the U.S., Lee's father became a Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania. Lee's poetry is filled with vivid imagery and creates an atmosphere of silence, much like the poems of China's classical poets. His work often fades from reality into dream worlds, and is punctuated with an attention to the senses.