

The Bear

By Susan Mitchell

Tonight the bear
comes to the orchard and, balancing
on her hind legs, dances under the apple trees,
hanging onto their boughs,
dragging their branches down to earth.
Look again. It is not the bear
but some afterimage of her
like the car I once saw in the driveway
after the last guest had gone.
Snow pulls the apple boughs to the ground.
Whatever moves in the orchard—
heavy, lumbering—is clear as wind.

The bear is long gone.
Drunk on apples,
she banged over the trash cans that fall night,
then skidded downstream. By now
she must be logged in for the winter.
Unless she is choosy.
I imagine her as very choosy,
sniffing at the huge logs, pawing them, trying
each one on for size,
but always coming out again.

Until tonight.
Tonight sap freezes under her skin.
Her breath leaves white apples in the air.
As she walks she dozes,
listening to the sound of axes chopping wood.
Somewhere she can never catch up to
trees are falling. Chips pile up like snow
When she does find it finally,
the log draws her in as easily as a forest,
and for a while she continues to see,
just ahead of her, the moon
trapped like a salmon in the ice.

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