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Currants and Ferns

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ROSAMOND FIELD

CURRANTS AND FERNS

Unnatural for me,
It feels like craning my neck
To recognize an absolute.
In the old orchard the other Sunday morning
I saw what looked like one—
A circle of light inside my eyelids
When I closed them—a white
That moved away as if to disappear.
I wasn't trying for absolutes;
I just happened to close my eyes that tight
Because pulling ferns out of the currants
Is hard work.

When we first moved to this garden,
The ferns were green, tropical, high like palms,
Mediterranean jungle flown feathers
Flocking this far sour soil
Where unnoticed currants grow.
Someone said that years ago
This was a man-high fern valley
Where persons walking through fell,
Faint from the sweet heavy odor.
But no one said we would wake seeing
One morning not green but rusted fronds
July had burnt brown like fall.

And it was also said that ferns have
A special kind of not true root.
Whatever they have latches them down
Into the dirt so hard it takes
All my full grown weight on the rake
To pry up and tear them out.
Not only weight, but slow skill
To get the whole clump up without
Parts broken off.

When the great wad of fern comes suddenly unclung
Spattering my face, I wipe
And watch for worms
Unhoused on the turned over underside,
And this confirms what I suspected—that
The serpent came up out of the ferns,
Not down from the trees.

For the trees are, in my old orchard,
Still the place of angels; their rope knotted,
They climb their unseen voices
Out to the farthest branch of the branch,
Swinging down or lying there
Giving the signal to blast off.
Tests, dangers, countdowns
Rolling out of the trees
In sounds blossoming the air,
Like petals down onto grass.

Now that we have lived through all the seasons here,
I can hold aside fern and find the red gems,
Hidden, where the value is—
The light and dark of liquid beads
Veined, clustered, lighter than,
On the Christmas table half a year away,
The tart currant abstract of sun
And green and air, made firm.

When I finish digging, and before
I spread the lime for sweetening,
I plan sitting down under an apple tree
(One preferably not with angels)
To close my eyes to try to glimpse,
Slow drop by drop, the rare red seeping through its cloth
Into its bowl, there
Absolved of greens, restored
From seed and shade and aboriginal weed,
Ready to be remade, sealed
And stored away, like wine.