

MONICA BERLIN

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**[No apples on the apple tree this summer,  
and if there were]**

No apples on the apple tree this summer, and if there were blossoms in the spring—those petals falling like snow, all in one day—I don't recall. No apples rotting on the grass either, though, so let me be clear this isn't so much complaint as notation, which is all it ever really has been now that I think about it, just a record kept in some variation on a little book of days. Maybe it was all that water—the frozen ground warming, turned porous, turned sponge, then unable to take on any more; maybe it was the scorching heat that followed—days so dry the light miraged every street corner, miraged every inch of distance from where we stood. I'm no horticulturalist, but what I know for sure: the only perennial this year was invasive, the only thing reliably consistent was how we didn't know where next the disaster only that it would come, inevitable like everything. It's a ghost town here again, and there are ghost-ed towns everywhere, towns designated as such by economics or migration, made such by weather's furious power, made ghost by progress. In a book I'm reading there includes an index of towns swallowed up by the river, cities flooded, levees breached or blown wide open. Spread out before me, a map made before so much of this country moved itself to crowd itself city-wide, before we left doors swinging open, windows leaking in rain that would come and come. So much of it doesn't exist now, all those places now charted Xs of tumbleweed and echo, abandoned tracks

connecting any one nowhere with any other nowhere,  
even a town called Waterproof—which would make some  
people laugh, but not us. Our mouths turn down.  
What I mean about *here*, what I meant to say about *here*  
is that even though traffic rumbles by, even though  
the signals at the crossings engage dozens of times each day,  
even though the population holds mostly steady, is this:  
we are alone here again. All the leavings always the same  
and always at the same time: months of last things,  
those bags packed and set in the foyer, the boxes sent  
via post, cupboard shelves wiped bare, a truck waiting  
half-empty on the curb. Maybe what I mean to say  
is that every town is a ghost town. Maybe what I mean  
to say is that I've come to see all the names we might  
recognize destruction by. We sometimes call it *the river*,  
on faith. We sometimes call it *holy*, in awe. We might  
sometimes, stupidly, call it *love*. Or we might sometimes  
call it *man-made*, shaking our heads in embarrassment.