



APPROACHING SAMHAIN

When I was seven, I'd go looking for witches.
I didn't want to meet them really
just glimpse them
because I knew that they were there,
their presence palpable in the raw October air
that smelled of apples and rotting wood.
I'd leave my mother's porch in my small shoes, coat buttoned
tight against all creation,
and I'd set out
to go looking for witches.

Under a blank sky I'd walk,
past the neighbors houses, each with its jack-o-lantern,
seeds and strands of freshly emptied innards
clinging to carved out eyes and pulp teeth -
the dead aren't far away, they grin;
under a blank sky I'd walk, while the gray, lacteal light
drained from the day like milk from a cat's bowl.
Under a blank sky I'd walk, to the end of the block,
around the corner, to the end
of the known world-
as if by magic, the neighbors' houses vanished, all left behind
and there it would be;

the lone spindly tree,
the empty lot buried in dead leaves, that forbidden spot
where anything could happen.

*Here, I'd think, Here it is;
this is where they live, I'm sure.*

What child is not caught up with witches
and the ache buried at the heart of everything?
The terrible hand of the unknown tugs on our coats, saying:

Find me; I won't be argued with.

The lure of the incomprehensible pulls like a tide
on a small boat, makes each child a true Celt,
sailing for the edge of the world, a world
that will eat you up alive and spit out your bones, chew
the heart right out of you.

Come here, it says. Don't be afraid;

Who can go there? Safely
grown, who among us can navigate the tides of loss
in our small boat of bones, glimpse the marvelous,
unbearable mystery
and come back?

Is it any wonder we always just miss
seeing the witch?

*The dead aren't far away, she whispers;
It's your life.*

Now I will navigate my small craft
towards that far-off, forbidden spot
where she lives; when I reach that unlovable place,
that fear at the heart of everything,
I'll wait,
wait for her in her backyard.

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