

October

Come to me, said the world.
This is not to say
it spoke in exact sentences
but that I perceived beauty in this manner.

—Louise Glück, “October”

i

I N T H E G A R D E N, where the middle
Of the month stretches out toward the end
Of the year like the shadow of a drought,

Cast early, wrens fidget
Over blueprints. They are busy in the understorey
With the shape of all the days. The wind rises in the east

Like Juliet in the sun, and four lenticular clouds
Land in the earliness of summer,
The pale shallows of your childhood above our heads.

They seem, the clouds, an artificial intelligence of the sky—
The kind of thing a robot might conjure,
If you asked: *Like* clouds, but not clouds. A crow charts

A taut traverse across them—and below
Her acrid plaint, six or seven daubs of snow
Make a chain of winter ponds along the Main

Range, and the ridges bank up beside the river
At Beloka. Under the influence of the actual
World, the clouds break up like a theory

Too sure to endure, and they are of one mind now,
The clouds and the place we've come, below,
To love, too. And these days we are some of what passes

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ii

Here for thought. Earlier, hearing wrens, with water
From the silver can I filled the bird bath,
And set a rock there, and as I sit here beside

The snowgum now, which pins this small bower
To the hillside, one of the wrens, a shop-steward
In spangled gym gear, lands to inspect

My craftsmanship—the folly
I assembled for just such ease as his—
And flies dissatisfied

To fetch his spirit level
And his crew. Along the creek, poplars,
Old enough to remember the river when it ran,

Begin again in green. All *this earth*
Reinvents itself. All being goes on being, come
What may. Each moment makes itself over

Into the next. The listening world insisting, in its going on,
On what it really is, and in the eloquence
Of its forms—in orogeny, in the black shoulders of the kite, in the clouded

Downs—refuting every next and meagre thesis
Of how all this is said to go. Meanwhile, daily, the world enacts
The patient ceaseless revolution of the real—

Its rebuttal of all that's false. And sometimes we join it,
One morning in October, say, the sunlight
Speaking its soft mantras at your back.

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iii

Last week, for instance, I caught
The same moon as always, her colour
The same as the gravel track to Berridale (I look out on now),

But hiding, when I spied her, or seeking (it was hard
To say which), in angophora limbs
In a lavender dusk by the sea.

And how did she grow so young again
When all we beneath it grow so old?
And where did she learn such buoyancy

When the world's become almost too heavy
To bear? The same moon Darwish loved—
And Naomi Shihab, after him—the moon over Gaza,

Where it will hang again tonight
In the vermillion of sirens, in the aftershock
Of rockets, and where it will shake its head in wonder

At the gift the humans have
For suffering, for mistaking
Each present moment always for the last.

iv

Here in the good luck of our exile
(On these unrequited firegrounds), the silkyoaks
Are putting on a season

For the ages in the lowlands of the east;
They've even dusted up the evening light
With saffron, over Bemboka, and we rise to it,

October

And on Bungarby where we summered once.

At Nimmitabel, where the past

And the future divide, they say,

Like the waters, the carnival is over,

And there is only the present tense

To stand in, expectant, in the dark.

At night it is the accents of geology

That tell you you've arrived; it is frog

Song in the fallen creeks and crickets in the fields,

Where you walk the dogs in darkness, the braille

Of their many hundred feet. Arrival is predation, the nightbirds

And their prey, a needlepoint of terror and finesse,

Re-enacting, below, the stars

That salt the quiet skies above: the lore

Of things, love's wild

Order at its casual overtime,

Calling us back into our lives. Yours

And mine, love. This small universe we are.

Note

the gift the humans have for suffering: I refer to the poem "Moon Over Gaza," by Naomi Shihab Nye, and her lines: *I who have been staring down so long / see no reason for the sorrows humans make*. It is also Nye's poem I think of, along with Mahmoud Darwish's "I Belong There" in my lines "The same moon Darwish loved—/ And Naomi Shihab, after him—the moon over Gaza"

At Nimmitabel, where the past / and the future divide: Nimmitabel, a small town in the Monaro, sits on the divide between the Murrumbidgee, which drains north, and the Snowy, which drains south. The origin and meaning of the pretty name of the town are debated, and some say it's a phrase taken from the Indigenous people of the high country, and that it means "the place where the waters divide."