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Catawba-Lachman

To:

CATAWBA EARLY FALL 1977

to Vera

Picked near the front porch in July,  
With magenta flowers,  
green-golden,

The horsemint tea in the turquoise cup  
still savors of summer as the apple smell  
rises from the meadow lap.

Pink yarrow  
before the fireplace  
looks rich with the creamy white  
in their silver pot -  
in back, the soft blacks in the fireplace.  
The thick florets  
cast little exquisite shadows on the concrete hearth.

Outside,  
hemlock glitters in light autumnal,  
sun still high, leaf cover thinning -  
now big patches of sun  
light the still glowing green of the grass  
under the two great oaks before the house.

Vera,

this is our autumn, our glory-prime  
of final fruiting, our time  
of great individuation, each  
tree a different color, each leaf,  
and on every leaf many colors.

In the wind sweep  
long slim trunks swing,  
each tree at its own tempo  
and Ah!  
fingertip titillation of leaves.

In the frosty night  
already through windblown boughs  
of the two old oaks before the house  
you can see stars.

I'm clearing the land:  
Think!  
the axe  
deep bites white heartwood;  
gracefully the tree,  
limbs outspread, falls back  
at the speed of a sigh.

The scythe tingles in the ragweed  
feeling the beautiful curves of earth  
with a knife -  
level with the ground hold the blade,  
tip up a bit - and with a slight hip twist -  
and as with a musical instrument freely and precisely  
swing!

I unchoke the grass  
freeing the apples,  
carving close to the edges, revealing the meadow -  
Ah! - surely, Vera! landscaping's  
the most satisfying art  
(Spencer Holst and Edgar Poe have said it).

With mad abandon the tree wind  
infallibly graceful performs ballet.  
To watch the wind  
in the Bolick's pasture toss the hilltop  
acropoli of trees, first behind the twin maple  
then a heartbeat later the turmoil  
overwhelms our hill where I stand.

Free the line  
of the land, of Flattop Mountain,  
starting at hill crest above  
the ballfield, down glide,  
cross Citadel path in front of  
Main House (where are two old cherry trees)  
past cottage through woods down  
through Bolick's pasture till the mountain ends - or begins -  
by our Boone Road entrance at the old Ranch Motel.

Clear! Clean!  
of cluttering:  
ugly weed,  
the rag, dull, colorless,  
uneven tops obscure.  
the beautiful sweep of earth-forms  
the long graceful lines of this ancient mountain;  
its wiry texture  
betrays the wind with its stiff jig;  
- and how unlike! - grass is grace!  
trembles confessionally on the earth breast -  
reveals as it covers,  
perfect earth fur.

Swami Muktananda says  
the world is Shakti, Chiti, Mother Kundalini,  
what Jews call Shekhinah, and Christians  
Holy Ghost, Spirit of God, of Truth, Creator, Comforter;  
in the beginning the Spirit of God  
moves  
on the face of the deep.

Red, ruby, rust, orange, flame, maples coral,  
pink, peach,  
Birches light yellow, oaks copper, gold,  
hydrangeas rose  
a-stipple on each other and the blue blue sky.

Muktananda says the enlightened may see  
the sport of Shakti  
vibrating forth in many forms, revelling  
on any dirty city street; but even the fool  
may find it here -  
the grass aroma  
sun sparkle on leaves  
leaf chatter and laughter;  
long smiling mountain lines,  
ecstatic moan of swaying trees, each a violin,  
the wind hugely bowing.

Yes, joyous Chiti curls herself  
giggling silently like a child  
hiding in a game,  
into the dazzling pure close white hearts  
of little sapling locust trees and sassafras  
where I grave my axe  
to preserve the grass.

I went down to the spring - white snakeroot's  
tiny snowballs and rank leafage of big dark green hearts  
by the path - all gone, leaves fill the path  
(the hill's north side is frosted soonest)  
- and - late September glory!  
- pink, rose, red, coral - different  
colored maple leaves' starry forms on the glossy  
semi-clear dark green water, rippling, speckled,  
like a trout's back, of the old pool.

I remember coming here first over thirty years ago,  
jungle all 'round the pool, murky brown  
and icy the mountain spring water  
where we bathed, you  
in a black suit and white cap -

Vera, we were young then; boys  
nearing forty now, frisked 'round us,  
heard Homer far-eyed on the hill, sang  
Bach among oaks and hemlocks,  
played ball among the apples, rode horses  
with us in the horse show ring and around Bass Lake,  
climbed Flattop, Saddle and lookout tower,  
drank from the spring below the Saddle;  
Grandfather Mountain we clambered over,  
ladders, Nose, Attic Window, and  
roasted wienies on the Linville Peak.

Part 2

Ruddy copper oak leaf's  
heraldic flame  
in the deep gentian sky -

a lemon yellow butterfly breezes erratically 'er  
gracious hydrangeas  
nodding and bowing  
deeply rose now -

Below cloud-ribbed satin sky,  
like a shell, so small  
because of woods all 'round us,

I lay, private  
like a clam 'neath its pearly heaven.

Cold bright blue gold red October day,  
come in with a shirtload of apples  
cold hard juicy packed with mordant taste of the apple.  
How is it firm with such liquid? -  
Cool dewy nights with white moons  
strengthen the apple.

Vera remember the cornmeal -  
you cooked wonderful hot cornbread  
in your eight by eight pan  
for Irene and Wat that day we ran out of bread?  
From that small square white paper bag  
I made pancakes -I had no  
syrup but made some, once from brown sugar,  
once from a black cherry dessert mix,  
both delicious on the cornmeal pancakes.



Vera remember that late August day the Orkins came  
to exterminate

Powder Post Beetles and fleas?  
and both our houses plagued with this perfume,  
we holed up in the Office with  
the two cats Elmer and Willow?  
and how the lights went out in that  
most terrific thunderstorm in memory?

I ran to the gas stove in the other house  
and coming back with a pan of boiling water made  
us mugs of delicious herb tea.

Phyllis and Hutch and I went over the place  
to the topmost campfire meadow,  
choosing a garden site,  
also through the Citadel, the Cabin  
overgrown now with daisies and blackberries,  
and the Main House,  
discussing their preservation  
and we went into the woods behind the Crafts Cottage  
and rescued a pine over which a dead tree had fallen  
till before the house our eyes grazing  
the beauty about us as one strokes a cat

our eyes play among the upper apple trees,  
turn down, maple, hydrangea, cherry,  
up to the Citadel, then the lower orchard,  
again and again,  
like a landscape remembered from a dream.

It was a dramatic cloud-streaked sunset, the big pine  
before the cottage picked out by light,  
and later as we ate at Holley's  
we watched the heavy cloud bars  
settle above the majestic silhouette of Grandfather.

The place has your quaint charm and sweetness,  
friendly, unpretentious, homey,  
it says "How beautiful you are".

And now snow!  
freakishly early - October 13, 16 -  
snow on the apples, the hydrangeas  
strange sight - but beautiful,  
the gracious postures of the apples  
bowing low as they offer their ruby treasure  
all haloed by bright radiance of white.

I've cut my way up the hill.

Now I must topple the skyline goldenrod

loosely attached to eight foot stems

like big tassels

intensely yellow tops

velvet fit for kings' doublets

tall tassels tossing

graceful weed.

Blowing Rock, North Carolina