

# Maryann Corbett

## *Suburban Samsara*

Season finale:

last fall, the street  
was flaked in yellow,  
flecked with sheet-flame,  
leaf-gold layering  
over the lawns.  
The garden buddhas  
sat bare-bellied,  
navel deep  
in a dreamed nirvana,  
almost conceding:  
Not all is suffering.

Arid, this summer.

After, when air  
chilled, and the days  
damped down, cheerless,  
small color came:  
the crabbed rust-brown,  
the dull, dry green.  
No gold this go-round,  
wealth we waited for.  
Only the work—  
the raking, bent,  
the wrenched back.

We, the gullible,

get what we get,  
gold in one year,  
rust in another,  
and always, always  
the empty branches,  
their iron angles  
scraped on the sky.

## **Airheads**

These past few days, our local air  
displays its moves with floating fuzz:  
cottonwood seed scintillulas  
accost my nostrils, haunt my hair.  
They dance like Salome; they tease  
with half-cracked helices of flight.  
Waffling at each offered breeze,  
fluff-head flecks, electron-light,  
ride downdrafts like adagio rain—  
the next half-second, loft again,  
jumping at every chance to shirk  
the settling down, the rooted work.  
Bad moves, but just how I behave.  
The weighty efforts that might save  
my soul, my health, my solvency  
I balk at, loving faddish stuff—  
the fizz of tabloid and TV,  
light music, frothy poetry—  
composing life from airhead fluff.  
No hundredfold of yield is found  
from seed that never hits the ground,  
so I take comfort when I see  
white seed-fuzz piling up in grass,  
brought down to earth by modest mass,  
a ratio that pleases me:  
Some gravitas, much levity.

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## ***Light, Motif***

June night. Light hangs late for us, porch-swing lazy.  
Truck goes by with the windows open, spilling  
blue notes, tenor saxophone lines unwinding  
into the twilight.

Corner. Turning. Gone. But the world is altered  
now, because those measures of hopeless longing  
tumbled on us under this sky whose blue notes  
lean into nighttime.

(Lolling summer, you with your long vacations,  
lawns and pools and languorous blue-note evenings,  
hear it? Here: your end, in a dying line of  
saxophone solo.)

## Checking the Funeral Musicians' Schedule

January, 2006, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Start doing funerals and you notice it:  
the time of year the old people decide  
they've lived enough—that death might be more friendly  
than winter is. Some go outside to meet it.  
They toss the snow from walks in reckless swoops,  
till their hearts bank and dive, and then the sirens  
call us to muttered prayer. Mostly it's men  
who get this easy out, who cheer themselves  
right to the end with reasons to be, to do.  
Their women, cursed by common sense, hang on,  
caged in their houses, living on crumbs of care.  
Their houses keep them alive and their houses kill them:  
Rooms, more and more, resist the readying  
for visits that rarely come. A room at a time,  
they fill with the useless things that will not stop  
singing the litanies of the dead and absent,  
till living shrivels to a room or two,  
a few clothes, dishes, everything hand washed,  
warm water the last solace where the drafts  
insinuate at every uncaulked crack  
to say, Give up, dear. I don't know how long  
persuasion takes. I do know where it ends.

There's nothing for it but to sing, although  
my aging mezzo sinks more every year.  
I curse the cold and salt the icy steps,  
pray at the wakes and sing the funerals.

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**Maryann Corbett's** poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Able Muse*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *kaleidowhirl*, *Nimble Spirit Review*, *Raintown Review*, *The William and Mary Review*, and other publications in print and online. She has recently received a Pushcart nomination. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she works as a legal writing advisor, editor, and indexer for the Minnesota Legislature.