

WHEN LEAVES DROP

By Annin Brothers

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor/author OMAR HUSSAIN writes: Memories and roaming thoughts crackle and hum through the spiraling stream of consciousness our narrator gifts us in this piece. With every ellipsis, with every rhyme and passage, the melancholy of what was once here is juxtaposed against what can never be—an apparition haunting us all. There is great nuance within the poetics of “When Leaves Drop,” allowing the reader to gently work through the story’s tension, often found in the endlessly hypnotic and repeating refrains, harkening back to autumn—everyone’s favorite season of gloom, the season where pretty things soon turn dark and die. If you’re in the mood for something Allen Ginsberg might have penned, don’t miss this piece. Quote: I’m feeling naked confronted by this gentle mouth rent by a smile, and I’m sort of clinging, clinging to this cleft gentleness. And into this space – of my eyes, her mouth – this sky blue is pouring forth... and suffusing my nakedness with beatitude and breeding an incomprehensible new beatitude in me.*

When Leaves Drop

by Annin Brothers

What do you think of when leaves drop..?

Rasp an' rustle... much like my soul... that's lost track of day. A day lost to eternity, to a silky petrification – the flesh's forgotten shadow.

Rasp an' rustle... much like my soul... that's lost track of day... ripped out of the times by a swirl of memory. A memory gone berserk, that's turned back the time. Memory: go crazy or fall...

Rasp an' rustle... much like my soul on a lost day... craving a fall into oblivion, into mindlessness, into nothingness – to forget her eyes, lips, voice, heartiness. Craving a fall... losing a foothold and dropping... clutching (nothing to clutch at) at the air – and falling, at the raindrops – and falling, at the whisper that is dropping along with me, along with my soul... I can hear: it's always there in me. I'm reviving the stillborn sounds: "I invite you to..." No, time was short... too short... Rather this than cuddling her in a crazy patchwork of loose dropping rags...

In times gone by, before you'd got yourself entrenched in this life bodily or mentally, it looked like a space frozen in time, like so many paints on canvas that had gotten sick with lifelessness and infected the picture – a landscape, a still life or series of portraits?. The picture seemed to be saying: "You've no business here. This isn't yours. This is far away." You looked away and backed off... and got nearer, none the wiser... Now you're a paint drop in the picture, coolly gazing down from the canvas, a paint drop from the Artist's brush, all the way from a world of play and paint coitus into the world of cooling highlights... It's just the wistful nostalgia for dropping leaves that makes it into this world on occasion...

A noise is getting louder. A whisper... scant of breath... is building up. No, no whisper – it's the wind, a gust, not scant of breath. The wind is gusting, forcing its way into the picture... crack! – the dry hymen is gaping wide – crunch! – the particolored shell is splintered. The noise is getting louder. A rasp is roughing up the air all around: rasp an' rustle rough and ready all around the ruts. The wind is battering the trunks – violent... shaking the boughs – violent... tearing at the tops, shedding leaves, alive as yet, veiny, blood still in the veins – heartless...

tipping up the heads, the dead heads of the dead flowers, frightening the mortals and frightening death – feisty and gloating... The noise is building up. Rustle – air confused. Gusty rustle... air compressed, wave after wave. Shrapnel! Raindrops clear, by the cloud, lashed and entwined so loud. Shrapnel lashes the space, rendering it opaque. Gusty rustle – wave after wave – is deafening. No leaves, those. The leaves are dropping overwhelmed... recoil and drop... clutching (nothing to clutch at) at the air, while the dripping air rags drop all the way past memory, only to float in memory and never drop – and drop unaware, and plop into oblivion, and plop on your face, splattering, spreading snot and blood and memory all over the cheeks, the lips, the eyes...

The noise is receding. The rustle is subsiding... along with the dead leaves. The leaves are dropping... Rustle... rustle reverberating. That's no rustle – it's a whisper, not an echo – it's scant of breath, a tremulous sign. The leaves are dropping... and whispering... and whispering: "She's coming..." Whispering as if she were there to keep a tryst...

What do you think of when leaves drop..?

What... what makes my head spin so? I'm still small, very small... what makes my head spin so? Entwining me are the flowery bands of a merry-go-round; in this space, in this translucent coil enclosing feeling and flesh right across the way is her... her gaping mouth, seemingly quite near... but I'm very small... It's smiley, and I'm feeling naked confronted by this gentle mouth rent by a smile, and I'm sort of clinging, clinging to this cleft gentleness. And into this space – of my eyes, her mouth – this sky blue is pouring forth... and suffusing my nakedness with beatitude and breeding an incomprehensible new beatitude in me...

"Hannah!" Her aunt's voice cuts the merry-go-round short... turns the rainbow phantom into blurry autumnal stained glass... unclutches Hannah's fingers and drops the lost us (much like the autumn does the lost leaves) onto the cool leaves, the glass leaves.

"Hannah!"

We've come to and are rising on shaky legs and stagger – to each other, as chance would have it – on shaky legs. Something has brushed me – but I'm still too small – something has brushed me, something intangible but exciting my flesh... I know the smell of grasses and of the pond and the smell of apples on the porch and the smell of the dump, abuzz, in the ravine. They get my nerves tingling and let me go and are forgotten only to come back on occasion. Something has brushed me and rung a bell – but then I was still too small – and reverberated in me as an unbearable echo...

"See you," she says, she smiles... she goes. What brushed me goes, too. But what brushed me stays put inside me. It's what – but I'm still too small – it's what she... she smells like...

What do you think of when leaves drop..?

It's always there in me: "I invite you to..."

I can see myself in a rag of space suffused with autumn. Inside me is... a premonition. It's unexpected and momentary. It could have been my fancy. I'm feeling but unable to explain a thing to myself, but I am feeling, I'll always be in that rag of space, for all eternity. This isn't my autumn. Mine is the sort of autumn that cross-hatches the air with charcoal rain that spatters faces and words and leaves me to myself.

There's a different autumn in that rag of space, one that you can't help gifting...

I'm amid that autumn. I want to cheat the premonition. I'll be calling her next and let in her voice as part of the space, and it'll bring in and scatter fragmented and momentary sketches, as fragmented as the moments themselves. And she will enter my space, with the premonition as good as gone... How silly of me: it won't be gone – it'll just lurk... in the patterns of these airy

sketches, grimacing and laughing at me in secret... only to reappear as suddenly as it vanished, to reappear and triumph: "I'm no longer a premonition, I'm there in actual fact." What a silly idea!

I'll be ringing her next and saying... and hearing her voice. I'll say right away:

"I invite you to a show."

"Aleck! A show?!" The air would blot the watercolor splotch in response, a crimson watercolor splotch... with a smile in it. In the same response the air would be full of glowworms, turquoise glowworms with a smile in them.

"Look out the window," I'd say softly.

The air would be aflutter in response, as if brushed by something. In it there'd be silhouettes of her hands, palms up. Falling on them... seemingly falling on them are leaves. The leaves are brushing her fingers, the fingers are touching the leaves. And feelings are heard to be shuddering between them... in her space. And the air is aflutter... in mine...

"Yes, a show," she'd say softly.

I can see us in this rag of space suffused with autumn that can't help being gifted, for it is the show and is making a gift of itself... There's so much space all around, but the rag that's captivated us is getting ever smaller and smaller... I can see us in the tiny rag of autumn. It's fluttering and whirling, much like hundreds of multicolored rags of autumn, spurred to this gyration by Chopin's passion... "They're close by," whisper the leaves about our lips. So close... the leaves have grown silent... the lips are aflutter, aflutter... What a silly idea. As clear-sighted as foresight. I can see a rag. This is no autumn, not our autumn – it's a fragment of spring. In it are lips... ever so close... "Go!" No, I won't say that – that'd be spurning (it's passion stirring) lips away from lips... hers away from his... nay, hers away from mine... in our rag of autumn. It's a

long way from lips to lips... but just a moment apart. What you do is recover the moment. Recovering is a stirring of passion and lips. Hugging is a stirring of passion and lips. I'll be pulled to her – recover – spurn... and: "Crazy!" in her eyes, and the tears and a curved mouth...

I can see a rag of autumn. Hannah is flat on her back among the leaves... cooling like her, with the fingers spread like hers, rid of their pain like her. I'm on my knees nearby. Why do my fingers keep shaking..? Why..? I only know they were aflame with the passion to recover... they were hugging, entwining – it's a passion thing – entwining her neck in order not to let loose the clots of words, the fragments of a cry that might get this rag of autumn full of holes, our minute rag of autumn, with, a moment ago, *The Autumn Waltz*, the closeness of the lips, the bounty of the eyes... Eyes... her eyes are looking as if they weren't looking. Asleep – shan't wake her: let her relax. I'll bundle her up in leaves: the leaves are hallmarked oblivion. Well, tomorrow... I'll call her tomorrow... as if nothing's happened...

I can see myself in this rag of space suffused with autumn. I've a premonition: I'll always be in that rag of space, for all eternity... I want to cheat the premonition. I'll call her now, and she'll be there in my space... with the premonition gone... While the lips and lips... hers and his... ever so close... in a fragment of spring..? Nope! I shan't cheat the premonition, I shan't call her, I shan't let my passion entwine her neck... I'd rather stay in my rag of autumn for all eternity, and it'll travel from day to day... until one of them gets lost...

A phone call... hers... not mine... it's a sign.

"Hi..! Aleck? What makes you silent..? Pray speak..."

"We are no longer an item. And pray... no more words."

The air has stilled in response, as if all the leaves have dropped and not a single one left. And there'll be no more words... save for those unspoken: "I invite you to a show."

What do you think of when leaves drop..?

Rasp an' rustle...

The leaves are falling... and whispering... whispering: "She's coming..." Whispering as if she'll be there to keep the tryst with them...

"Hi, Aleck. Here're some lilies for you. I'll stay with you."

Hannah will put the flowers next to you. She'll produce a handkerchief from her purse to wipe away the slithering snakes off your granite face and the yellow leaf you thought up. Then she'll gaze for a long time into what's long past...

"Don't cry, honey." You'll say: "It's okay. You've got a family and two kids. They're your happiness. What about us..? You come to me every autumn, and we're together again. Don't cry. It's rather better than me bundling you up in a crazy patchwork of eternally falling rags..."

The rasp an' rustle of my soul full of chuff that's lost track of the day...

Do you remember that day..? It seems to have got lost. You're out on the balcony. Leaves and raindrops are falling. And then all of a sudden you see far away a rag of autumn... that autumn... and her and yourself in it... The leaves are falling, clutching at raindrops...

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Author's note demands thinking. We don't like to think. When we eat ice cream, we don't think, we just experience emotions, anyone can guess what kind of emotions we experience. When we read Joseph Brodsky ("A man comes to the ruins again and again, yesterday he was here, and the day before, and appears tomorrow, the ruins allure him..."), it gives us gooseflesh. When we read "The Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemingway, our feelings cry: "How!?" When we write a story, we just follow our emotions, nothing more. We see images, we listen to the sounds of words, and write. What have our thoughts to do with it all?*

Some of our friends told us that they didn't understand what we were saying as we spoke both at the same time. When we write a new story, we usually pace around the room with our emotions... and with our tongues moving like two hands

of a pianist. Time and again we stop to write down what we've just heard, and our tongues keep on moving like two hands of a pianist. And rest assured we understand what they—our tongues—say.

As to "When Leaves Drop," once we were standing on the balcony. Leaves were falling, clutching at raindrops. And a wild jealousy from a distant autumn engulfed us and made us crave a fall...

AUTHORS' BIO: *Twins by birth, Gemini by jest of the stars, always and everywhere together. They studied psychology, literature, and languages. After graduation, they worked with teenagers coping with physical and mental disabilities.*

Their stories have appeared in Down in the Dirt magazine. Apart from reading and writing, they collect American Xmas and seasonal music. Their favorites are "Blue Christmas" (Doye O'Dell), "Christmas Candy" (Margaret Whiting, Jimmy Wakely), "A Christmas Festival" (Leroy Anderson), "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm" (The Mills Brothers), "An Old Fashioned Tree" (Gene Autry), "Silver Bells" (Doris Day), "Too Fat for the Chimney" (Teresa Brewer), "Up on the Housetop" (Bill Boyd).

EDITOR'S BIO: *Omar Hussain is a writer from the San Francisco Bay Area, transplanted to Ann Arbor, Michigan. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in Ellipsis Zine, Spelk, Dream Noir, the Drabble, the Potato Soup Journal and (mac)ro(mic), among others. Omar's beta-test novel, The Outlandish and the Ego, debuted in late 2017. It received some praise, remarkably. His story **iDentity** appears in this issue (Fiction).*