

Ode to an Arbutus Tree

Peeling, a leper dressed in red,
the papery bark curls
reveal the olive bed
from which they sprang:
a plethora
of golden contrasts.
A polite green velvet glove
hand clasp,
the sea whispers azure
to the shore,
the wind whimpers
in its roar, along
Arbutus Road while its foam
disperses over the grey sand,
amid seagulls,
wallowing over the land.

Here the driftwood
is as an ancient face—
the bladderwrack is tea-stained lace.
Unmoving, silent, onward,
filtering bright,
the tree climbs toward
morning.

The sun is hot-white
with blue highlights,
while drying the peels
of a red tree's quarantined detritus.
Overhanging the sea,
its boughs drape
the water's edge,
the disguised shore
of Vancouver Island.

The long strips
are like paper,
parchment already
scrolled
for an academic
winter,
ensnared in the
wood street,
marked
by the contrast of branches
on fog.

I meandered in the mist
down the long winding roads
of this sunlit city
in a straw hat—
like porcelain,

my neck embellished
by a crocheted collar
bought at a
Garage Sale.

Where pear blossoms fall
littering the ground,
with its dulcet
civic spires
and wood heritage dwellings
with paned windows like eyes,
flower boxes,
peeling painted rocking chairs,
and stone mantelpieces.

Where hermits could live
in Beacon Hill Park
there is an old Fort Camosun,
still rising strong and true
amid the refuse of Victoria.

Stagnant,
they are as old water
running to Arbutus Cove
under the branches of the sea,
staving off the autumn
with stricken hands
covered in leprosy.

*He was disguised,
disfigured,
stricken as if by plague,
driven out,
and quarantined in
Egypt for one year.
The bodies of his
civilians left
small craniums
the size of lily of the valley.*

*His love is a tree
over the water
unto his followers,
dying and groaning
and dying again. . .*

Emily Isaacson