

What Gathers

Twisting stems weave
green to red against leaves
raindrop-shaped and tender,
shelter for blue-black berries.

We taste pure purple. We gather.
We touch our tongues to juice
we've asked to grow for us.

We children in our northern gardens
gather dark sweetness of saskatoons,
indigenous fruit that taught Ojibwe
beadwork patterns of vine and leaf
—winter's longing, worked by hand,
reminder of a hot day to come,
promise bright against threat.

Doubtless that was part of it:
what was gathering long ago,
the rush of other, the great change,
foods, woods, bison, prairie,
gods, songs, goods,
all about to alter.

We touch our tongues to summer.
What gathers now we do not know—
some low rumble on the globe's edge.

We gather. Nail tips and lips
stained, we do as our blood asks.
These berries the same berries
our ancestors plucked,
rolling a thumb against the curved edge,
teasing ripeness, readiness,
old ladies joking: Find me a man
can handle a woman like that!

Swoon in July sun, in sensual acts,
the fruit asks. We do as it wishes, we gather,
chilled still by long winter—
always just behind us, always just ahead.

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