

THE CHERRY PICKER

The cherry picker carries a cheery persona:
ripe red fruit, succulent juices
whetting the tongue,
whiff of white blossoms.

Nut brown, the orchard worker
sweats under scorching suns,
uplifted arms bronzed, and bulked
from too many cherry pickings.

Denim coveralls, work gloves and Grebs,
the cherry-picker's an assuring sort,
filling cornucopias and bellies
with sweet satisfactions.

The Cherry Picker, men's *servant*, eases our labour,
reaches and moves unlike any ladder; lifts its bucket
to uppermost limbs, for pickers plucking
peaches, pears, persimmons and plums,

fuzzy apricots, damsons and orange nectarines.
Jellies and jams will be made therefrom,
butters, brandies and wines
for our pleasure.

Ascending heights, men venture
where songbirds perch, mending wires,
cables and grids; string Yuletide lights
for good measure.

Window cleaners use these cranes,
arborists and house painters;
firemen, saving high-up people,
and even cats caught in trees.

One morning at seven, the Cherry Picker
arrives on the green beyond my window,
ready for important work; circles the grand old Willow
rising six stories high, too broad to hug but partially.

Vast as Ozymandias's trunkless legs of stone
two colossal joined thighs dance,
gnarled hip in illusory motion,
graceful despite its massive girth.



For decades, backrest for the weary,
its breadth conceals tykes at hide-and-seek;
its canopy shields from harmful sun,
from raindrops nurturing grasses green.

Workers buzz around the Willow,
flit about the site, estimating, tagging, tying, tugging.
Their plans, you see, extend beyond,
to others scheduled for the Cherry Picker.

Thick-wheeled bucket truck traces a lane to the waiting Willow.
Cherry Picker, Man Lift, Basket Crane, whatever,
elongates its neck, a giraffe browsing tree leaves,
positions itself for the deed.

I love this Cherry Picker's sign!
Bold black letters discerned
from my window innocently boast:
"Shady Lane."

High up, a chainsaw sets about its limbing,
relieving the lane of its shade.
Whirrs, and whizzes — a whining dentist's drill,
sending shivers through the Willow.

Severed limbs hang on by a splinter,
refuse to let go, bend o'er, snap —
crisp *crack* — and fall with muffled thud
against ungiving ground.

Stretched along still green grass,
luxuriant limp locks lie
like seaweed left behind
on level sands.

Soon gathered up, thrown into the Chipper,
— cheery as a Cherry Picker —
chopping, chewing, grinding, spewing (dissonant racket),
distasteful as a brackish river,

swallowed up, spit out,
limbs bleed sawdust, blanched blood,
Chainsaw and Chipper
the new birdsong.

Hard hats, long, browned and sinewy,
gauge the lean; eyeball the direction,
determine the lay — the fall, that is; speak of gravity,
face cuts, back cuts, notches and wedges, all very clinical.

He leans his back into it.
Chainsaw whines, lets fly a screech,
pierces the massive trunk,
skin wrinkled from one hundred years of giving.

A sword, it slices, splitting age-rings,
foiling a century of silent history.
This kingly giant groans, a thunderous crack-cracking
and heavy-footed, falls.

It's only a Willow, the arborist says,
Only a weed, the developer says,
A weed, the foreperson says.
Needs uprooting, to make way.

I'm sure I hear it cry out,
were woodsy things capable —
it only lies lonely, reduced, delimbed,
waiting for the bucking:

quartering into logs
destined for some fireplace to ease the winter,
perhaps a patio, rustic fence or garden seat.
Or the Chipper.

The day the Cherry Picker came,
chainsaw and Chipper,
the day they stole its fruit,
leaving a trunkless rooted stump

I wept with the Willow.