

# For Ken Brown on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday

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*Nancy Mackenzie*

The theme tonight is "Regeneration."  
Not – "Who invented love?" but  
"Why do the effects of invisible tethers,  
felt as light spilling and piling up east to west  
every morning of your life, offer a new day  
to learn to love  
everything?" To be  
the miracle of illumination  
looking blindly with eyes of colour to feel  
the heart's way to the soul? Regenerating  
as if fueled up by love and miracle  
you could possibly last another day like this.  
Until the one eye of God blinks  
in a snowstorm, among birch, or willingly,  
again and again on a transatlantic flight  
that has you coursing through meridians of time.

Let us be  
careful, lest the soul's tethers catch  
on the delicate wrist pulsing with love  
and hold us down when we would rather soar.

I thought I'd tell you  
about editing the *Reforestation Standard of Alberta*  
as a metaphor for how each of us  
complicit in the logging of the province's forests  
can be replanted as a new forest  
and the process amended annually  
so as to get the mixed species numbers right,  
but stars got in through the back door  
where "my" Lombardi Poplar clung  
snug to that wren's nest  
and it was early morning, again,  
in Edmonton, where our parents met their spouses  
—mine skating at Garneau—  
music allemanding across avenues.

And now this: felting, the soft darkness winging  
into this century as their ghosts  
dance among the dreams we dream.

# All Soul's Day

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*Nancy Mackenzie*

All of life is foreplay  
focused on transcendent spiritual climax  
exactly at the beginning of a winding country road  
that takes us past hawthorn, fairy mounds, elm.

The Old Country never looked better  
its ruins and tapestries  
memento mori (remember death)  
counting backwards to the start.

I saw indigo willow groves stark  
against prairie wool, early stars  
and your eyes, the mountains glooming  
in the gloaming, a sorry thing  
to turn your back on me. But how else  
do you expect to start over? I count  
as one of the reminders of blood  
flowing in your veins. O brother. Thou art  
cast into these circumstances with me.

And whether or not you believe  
in heaven or hell, the day returns  
with many returns. The day of the dead.  
All Souls. Surely this day will dawn

and the blue gaslight in the room will wither  
so that dark acts may be whisked away on a west wind  
or blown out like a candle.

Yes, the hours grow older, the light finds its way in  
from across the hills through filmy curtains.  
And it is not a west wind, but an *Aos Si* (Gaelic Spirit)  
radiant before the firelight  
offering to incinerate every deceit in exchange for allegiance.  
O brother, I offer to propitiate this spirit  
as I gather my inheritance. Will you dream the dream  
with me?