

## March Poem



A wife should never go out of town in March,  
Hysterical, strident,  
Packing her bags and flouncing off to Mother's,  
And taking the kid, no less,  
Leaving a fortyish balding man behind her,  
Unless she really wants to start something.

He might decide to make some maple syrup,  
If he lives in Vermont and has a maple tree.  
He might be a New Yorker, just moved up to Brat,  
And know a man who has so many buckets  
That lending one would be no big a deal.

The bucket-lender'd teach him all he'd need to know.  
A tap's made four feet from the ground, three-quarter-inch across, two inches deep.  
Spile inserted, container at the ready.  
For sap to run, the temperature must be below the freezing point,  
Followed by a thaw. Then pressure in the cells increases, causing sap to rise.

Being a city boy, he'd find the process fascinating.  
And, if he were a writer, he'd want to tell someone.

Her leaving him would almost justify his finding someone he could share this with.  
He would be bursting like that tree he'd tapped.

Of course, he wouldn't have a sugar shack.  
He'd have to boil down his syrup at the kitchen stove.  
He'd do this every night, after coming home from work,  
And it would keep him up till very late, the kind of mindless chore  
That leaves you free to think, and work at other things.

He might be tempted, home alone one night, to click his way into a universe  
As populated as the Brattleboro sky at night with stars.  
*Spile* and *run* and *sugar shack* would find their way into his conversations,  
At least at first. He'd make a game of seeing who would know  
The definition of those terms that rolled so freely from his tongue these days.

And if he were a New York or New Jersey man,  
He'd almost surely have a shrink.  
A therapist, I should have said, a female therapist perhaps,  
To let him ramble on for fifty minutes and then tell him what he thinks.  
He'd talk about his late-night chats with someone so tuned to his soul,  
He'd rather play the transcript of their talks back in his head  
Mornings, in the Subaru, than books on tape.  
Better than Brontë! Is any mistress curiouser than Fate?

Of course the gleanings of a day from just one tree would not yield much.  
A half a cup or maybe less, boiled down.  
He'd probably burn a batch or two.  
And that would fill him with a sense of loss he would equate  
With losing one's own child. (Which he would know about first-hand,  
Having just in some way lost a child, at least for the nonce.)

One day, soon or late, the bucket would be dry.  
The very warmth that makes the pressure in the sapwood rise,  
Continuing too long, subverts the cycle,  
Ends the run.  
And just as well, perhaps,  
For those exhausted slaves of Hecate whose alchemy of sap to syrup's done.

A wife should never go out of town in March, but if she does,  
And comes back in a couple of weeks  
To find her husband more attentive to her needs,  
More inclined to listen to what she says,  
And better in the sack,  
She should just eat her pancakes and never stoop to ask  
The story of the sap.