



Brian Cronwall

October in Carmel

For Martha Cronwall Johnson (1914–1977)

1

Outside the windows of the hospital, a field of iceplant waits, green and red. Pine shadows lie down earlier and earlier. The sky seems too blue, but this is the best weather of the year in Central California, less fog, more sun, warm. An old voice in another room cries; the shuffle of feet, silence. A pine cone drops on the sidewalk. This room is too quiet, its sheets removed, IVs fallen empty to the floor, lights off; on the bed, the call button curls alone. A blue jay lands on the branch outside the windows, looks in, squawks, then flies off into its own lengthening shadow.

2

death's hymn her casing
sings smaller all lull
hulled awake sleep sleep
flowers all over

suits ties black dresses
lack ties suits songs
sign a book look
leave the leaves

later ladling a few
old news use something
mouthing moundstone
only cemetery tarry

then go on

3

Shadows, less green and red, earlier and earlier.
The shuffle of more sun, of iceplant.
Pine sheets removed.

October squawks, waits, cries silence,
Then flies off for the year.

Feet lie down: warm bed, lights off, quiet.
An old voice looks in the room;
in another room, fog curls along, its shadow lengthening.

But this is the best weather in Central California.

A blue jay lands on the branch;
a pine cone drops on the sidewalk;
the sky is too blue.

4

Reverend Hill arrives late because of traffic
for the Monarch butterflies' annual return.
He rushes in, speaks of larvae, pupae, caterpillars,
and butterflies, of change and departure,
beauty and renewal: later, graveside, he speaks
of ashes and dust blowing over the grass,
of soil tossed across the lowering casket,
of the sun's blessing, pine needles, salt-breeze:
comfort for those who see the Monarchs arrive,
stay, then leave, in cycles like the tides,
like waves hard against granite and sand.

A butterfly lands, flaps its colors, flies off;
waves break as cars drive out of the cemetery,
squinting less then less, farther away, toward home.

5

less fog, more sun, warm.

Less fog,
More sun,

Warm.

Brian Cronwall's work has appeared in *Bamboo Ridge*, *Chiron Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Ekphrasis*, *Pinyon*, *Colere*, *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Grasslimb*, *The Brian Cliff Review*, and in other journals and in anthologies in the U.S. and abroad.

Image from Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture