

# Empire of Leaves

by

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*For the two of us*

## Acknowledgements

*Shrinking island* (one of the few poems in this book that could be understood without being paired with its corresponding photograph) was published in *Narrative Northeast* in Spring, 2018.

I want to acknowledge my wife, the artist Ruth Leavitt Fallon's, many contributions to this book. Ruth is my muse and was with me on our many walks where I took nearly all of these photographs. She was enthusiastic and supportive about this project from the beginning, offering countless insights and suggestions as I slowly assembled and completed the photographs and poems. She was also an editor and critic of both the photos and the poems, and she has been the primary designer and assembler of this book. It truly belongs to both of us.

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## PREFACE

*Empire of Leaves*, a book of poems and photographs, came into being because I wanted to try to go beyond my usual subject matter and methods of composing poems, so I set myself the task of writing poems inspired by my own photographs, most of which were taken on walks with my wife, Ruth; some in the Baltimore Neighborhoods of Charles Village, Guilford and Roland Park; some at Loch Raven Reservoir, Gunpowder State Park, Assateague Island, Virginia, and a few others around our house and in the back yard. As a result, the photographs and poems are very much inspired out of the seasonal rhythms of our life together in Baltimore, Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Not only did the photographs present me with the problem of what to say in response to them, I also had to consider what relationship the poems and the photographs should have to one another. Many poems inspired by paintings and other well known works of art-- such as Wallace Stevens' "The Man with the Blue Guitar," inspired by Picasso's "The Old Guitarist," and Delmore Schwartz's "From Seurat's Sunday Afternoon Along the Seine" --do not attempt to describe or recreate the paintings in detail because the poets assume the reader will be familiar with them or can easily find the images. My inherent problem is that my audience is not familiar with my photographs on the one hand, and - on the other - I am presenting the poems and the photographs together.

Therefore, why should I try at all to reproduce the photographs in words when the audience does not need to imagine them? I decided to simply let the photographs inspire the poems and let the process lead where it would. This means that the poems are not necessarily able to stand on their own without the photographs. But it also means that the photos and the poems have a symbiotic relationship and that together they make one unified work of art.

# Empire of Leaves



*Man is a tree whose roots are planted in the sky*

-- Thales



## Dark Maple

Black flame against a white sky,  
Primal scream in wood,  
Ladder of Shadows,  
Tower of blood;

Within me,  
The living darkness,  
Ancient tree,  
Tendril of vein and artery,

Bones branching into trunk,  
Rib, and spine.  
The brain, a wet ball of roots  
Potted in the skull.

Behind the tongue,  
The quickening seed;  
Forearms reaching,  
Hands leafing out  
Into the light



**Because the Wings Were Torn from Us at Birth**

That wound has never healed.

We dream of flying repeatedly

As we fall through time.

Here, is all the way down,

The bottom of things,

The shadow of feathers

Cast on stone,

The wound,

The discarded wings.



### **Blue Meter**

Someone took the measure of the rain,  
Of the melting snow, the seep of every spring,  
The downhill plunge of streams, the swell of creeks  
Into rivers. Someone dammed the flow,  
(Even drowned a town) as the river pooled  
And deepened in the valley. Someone  
Planned spillways, miles of tunnel, made sure  
Of its purity, had it pressured, pumped under  
The street, shot clean out of the spigot into the glass.  
Pause. Lift it to the light. Admire for a moment  
That liquid clarity you could not live without,  
Being mostly made of it. Hold its chill  
Freshness on your tongue. Thank those  
Who long ago took the measure of your thirst.



## Two Lovers Are Falling into an Inferno

Arms aflail, through the months they fall.  
Flames burn and crumble about them.  
The air cools and darkens.  
Clouds boil with fog and hard, white rain.  
Stars spin through their outstretched hands.  
The sun grows cold and small.

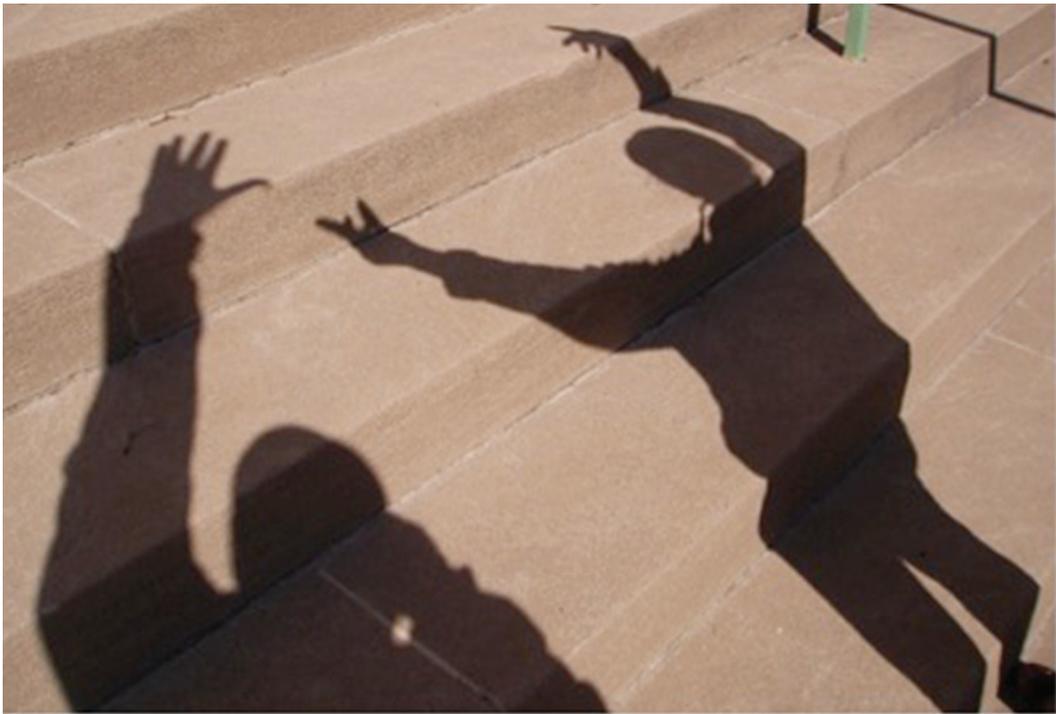
Then a warm wind gusts  
Up from some beginning,

And all through the wet sigh of April  
they hold each other,  
Embrace, in the green shade.

June and their winged children spin up and  
Away, find a place to root above the sky,  
Reach for one another  
And begin their descent  
towards the sun;

The sun towards the abyss,  
A blackness falling  
Into itself;

And again  
The fire,  
The lovers,  
The tree burning,  
The abyss flowering,  
Out of its own frozen dark.



## Shadow Lovers

At dawn, they will stretch  
From beneath buildings,  
From under the hills and trees,  
Walls and mountains, to darken the valleys,  
To lean tall again into the light.

But by the end of the day,  
It is immutable law  
That all shadows must fly away  
To somewhere behind the sun.

Since every dawn is  
A revolve, a world away,  
And new, of all the stones of the earth,  
Which one will cast his shape?  
From which tree will she reach out her shade?  
How will these two who have found  
Again find one another?

This is why their hands almost  
Touch. He calls out  
And she flies.