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PATIENCE WHEATLEY

Harvest

The neighbours
in their garden
she watching him plant fruit trees
in the first hot April sun

We hadn't seen her for weeks—
and she held her jacket
close around her
and you could tell,
though she wasn't thin
or even pale
that she was ill,
for instance, her red hair,
had lost its sheen.

Only a few days later,
that first Saturday in May,
he knocked on our door before breakfast:
"Beth died last night":
eyelids pink with tears.

Later the daughters,
in-laws, cousins, aunts,
and another women, red-haired too,
stood in the garden turning faces to the sun,
chattering over punch and coffee,
while he, with hectic cheeks,
drank Scotch,
showed off his fruit trees,
glancing at the new red-haired woman,
reminding me of what I thought
I'd seen that morning
in his eyes as well as tears:
the imagined harvest in his new orchard—
plums, apples cherries.

Patience Wheatley's poetry appears earlier in this volume.