

October 2016

## As the Leaves Turn

Holden Etcheberrigaray

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### Recommended Citation

Etcheberrigaray, Holden (2016) "As the Leaves Turn," *Inklings Magazine*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/inklings/vol3/iss1/10>

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# AS THE LEAVES TURN

holden etcheberrigaray

She liked Spring, and I like Fall.  
An online personality test had once explained  
This mean she was an optimist,  
And I was a grim-faced pessimist.  
But anyways, I felt smart, knowing things like that.  
So she laughed, half covering her mouth with her hand,  
As I imparted my bit of wisdom.  
But in the end I admitted Spring was still  
The prettiest season with its  
Green and yellow and pink hues painting  
The drab slate-gray landscape.  
And she admitted that Fall was actually the prettiest,  
With all the trees catching fire and burning  
Orange, yellow, red.  
We agreed in solemn voices,  
(Sagely nodding our heads)  
That Winter was too cold and bare and  
Summer too hot and overgrown.  
We agreed, almost crying, that it was cruel  
(so cruel!)  
How Fall and Spring had to separated like that,  
Apart from each other,  
As if by jealous ugly lovers.  
We watched each other carefully to see if the other  
Meant the metaphors we spoke  
As real analogies.  
But our gazes missed,  
Our smiles thinned out into flat lines.

Well, it was Fall then,  
And maybe I should have been happy,  
But I wasn't.  
The leaves twirled in the air,  
Falling slowly, gracefully-  
In a way that looked like it wouldn't hurt.  
They fell to their deaths like  
Falling into bed.  
They lay on the ground, released,

Dying, twitching in the wind,  
Accepting their fate to be stepped on  
And ground into the pavement.

I fell too, but it definitely hurt.  
I fell down the stairs, I fell from heaven,  
I fell out of my chair, I fell back,  
I fell fast, I fell in love, I fell into her arms.  
I wasn't pretty or vibrant;  
I wasn't orange, yellow, red.  
My brown hair was soft but limp,  
Like the dead leaves that are blown away  
Piece by piece by piece.  
I gathered up the brightest colored leaves I could find,  
Salvaging them from the sidewalks and  
Thinning grass, and presented them  
As a bouquet in decay.

"What happened to your knees?"  
She asked, half-crumpling my gift in her hands.  
I looked down and saw what she meant;  
Beyond the hemline of my skirt,  
Both knees were a bloody, raw mess.  
I had fallen twice while trying to find her,  
And had simply ignored the stinging pain of ripped skin,  
Brushing off my dirt covered palms  
Without another thought.

She made me sit down and carefully  
Picked out the tiny pieces of gravel,  
Mopped up the thin red blood with a tissue.  
Her bouquet, abandoned beside me,  
Slowly blew away in the wind, but  
I was too intent on her soft fingers  
Caressing the tender flesh of my knee,  
And the fact that she was taking care of me,  
To try to stop them from escaping.  
I caught the last leaf between two fingers, at least,  
And put it in her hair like you would  
Put a flower behind your ear.

Winter wasn't like we had declared it,  
Frigid and empty.  
It was too full of warm moments and laughter.

Outside, I shivered endlessly, but  
It seemed more like an excuse  
To get her to take my hand,  
(My gloves always forgotten at home,  
Hers, conveniently, left behind as well)  
Our stiff, frozen hands intertwined,  
And between our pressed palms  
We created a little pocket of warmth  
That would not die out,  
Could not be swept away with the wind  
That stole our scarves and hats.  
How could we say Winter doesn't have color?  
What about the raw red of her cheeks and nose and ears?  
What about her evergreen eyes?  
We'd run into her house with our teeth chattering  
And wrap heavy blankets and quilts  
Around us and lean against each other,  
Our peppermint scented breath  
Gradually warming that sleepy space.  
Even after the quivering had gone from my bones,  
My body would still shake;  
Now with a kind of anxiety,  
A kind of anticipation.  
Her wool sweater was rough against my cheek  
As I rested against her shoulder,  
And she smelled like cinnamon  
From the scented candles her mom put out,  
And because she had been baking.  
I wanted to know if cinnamon was also  
The taste of her cool skin and lips.

Eventually, the dead trees came back to life  
And sometimes as we passed the blooms and buds,  
I saw tears in her eyes and her mouth formed  
A mysterious misty smile.  
When I asked what's wrong, she only said  
Her heart was beating fast with the promise  
Of blossoming hopes and warmer weather.  
We gathered fallen cherry blossoms by the handful  
And threw them up in the air.  
We let them bury us like snow, only softer.  
"Do you still think Spring is the prettiest?" she asked.  
"No," I said, shaking my head,  
"You're the prettiest."

I expected her to laugh at the awkwardness  
Of my statement, call it corny,  
But she only blushed and turned away,  
Her mouth open as if she was trying to figure out  
How to reply, but could not.  
"I like you. I love you. Te quiero. Je t'aime. я люблю тебя."  
I gave my confession in English, Spanish, French, Russian,  
Any language I could.  
She turned back to me, a pastel petal  
Stuck to her bubblegum colored lips.  
I reached out and took the petal,  
My fingers skimming the edge of her mouth.  
"You should kiss me," she said,  
Her voice softer than I had ever heard it.  
And she didn't taste like cinnamon;  
Something sweeter and lovelier instead.

Summer was exactly like we had proclaimed:  
Sizzling hot in the sun, so lush it was frightening.  
But even then we were able to find oasis,  
Just as we had found warmth in the dead of Winter.  
We would sit by the pool in cheap plastic chairs,  
Eating ice cream that melted so fast  
It ran over our fingers,  
Turning everything into a sticky mess.  
We leaned against one another,  
Squinting in the glare,  
And it felt like we were melting into each other.  
Her sweat on my skin;  
My sunscreen rubbing off on her.  
We were hesitant to get in the pool  
Because the cement burned our feet,  
And the lifeguard was a sticker about running.  
But finally we would lock hands and walk fast as we could,  
Yelping with each step,  
Before jumping into the deep and  
Letting the blue-tinted chlorine water swallow us whole.  
A minute later we'd burst up gasping,  
Laughing and shivering slightly.

Time seemed stagnant,  
Or else moments were melting together.  
There were three weeks I remembered  
As one sole scene:

Us lounging on the cool cotton sheets of my bed,  
Waiting for the defective air conditioner to work,  
And fighting each other for time in front of the fan.

But eventually the temperature dropped down  
To something more reasonable,  
And school started again.  
The vibrant green of the trees collapsed  
Into that orange, yellow, red.  
It felt like we had come full circle,  
Only  
I was happy this time,  
And not just because it was Fall.  
We raked big piles of fire colored leaves,  
And jumped in the center like little kids would.  
We buried ourselves under their vivid hues,  
Just as we had buried ourselves  
Under blankets and snow in Winter,  
Cherry blossoms and kisses in Spring,  
And several gallons of water in Summer.

"This time last year, I fell for you," she told me.  
"Me too," I replied.  
I still had a faint scar  
From where I had scraped my knee.  
But if we had fallen last year,  
Over and over in a surreal kind of way,  
Every time we locked eyes,  
We were not falling anymore.  
The constant reminder of death in the deteriorating leaves  
No longer calmed me in that quiet way.  
I was a living thing, and she was too.  
So, we jumped out of the leaves and took off running,  
At first playfully chasing each other,  
Then holding hands,  
Our footsteps synchronizing,  
And we were running towards the next season,  
The next year,  
The nebulous future,  
And forever.