

Gathering Maple

Nora Delaney

They lie mulching:
those five-fingered folios—
the scant leaves that dapple
into humus on the damned concrete—
palmate, veined and lobed,
like unmitten hands in winter.

The thought of them leaves
bitter breath on the palate
like the word *Acer*—the Latin
for maple. So far from the sweet
syrup we had when my father
made pancakes on Sundays.

As I walk by, I see him. He suffers
the same color-blindness I do.
And I wonder if we see the same
gold that ekes through green.
I pick a leaf for him—mottled,
burnt and awaiting its own rot.

It's clear the sugarglow won't last;
it compacts the acrid season into earth,
as October grows old slowly.