

Three Poems by Kris Johnson

THE APPLE TREE

If you had a garden, you would plant
an apple tree. If you had an apple tree
you would make pies. Lots of pies.
You would invite your friends
round for pie and say *we picked
these apples from our garden.*
You would send them home
with bags of apples.
Your daughter would read in its shade
and swing from its branches.
Summer would be better.
And in winter you would pull
a bag of peeled, chopped
apples from the freezer
as if autumn never ended.
Your property value would increase.
And when it came time to sell,
you would tell the buyers
that you planted the tree
from a seed, which wouldn't be a lie,
because it could have happened
at a house with a garden.

GHOST ORCHID

Though my daughter is not yet five,
already she has a small ghost inside her.
It arrived in the form of a question.

Will I die? she asks with an air that suggests
she doubts the inevitability of this condition.
Yes, I tell her, all living things die.

I try not to linger on this cruelty. Such waste.
She does not understand that her question
opens the door to my own death, my mother's.

As she aged, my grandmother's hands
became roots, desperate for life beyond
her body. Perhaps my daughter's misgivings

are justified. Think of the impossible
flowers growing in moss-slung bogs.
In black heat they open, die, and are born again.

PROMISES

When you're tired and it's October and the mornings
are dark and your hands are cold and the condensation
has returned, you find yourself thinking about promises.

How you gave the house your word: to repair
cracked plaster, fix taps, replace broken tiles, to paint
the window frame before the wall begins to stream,

before the wood becomes so mildew-black it grows
into a forest. A forest you enter when sleep does not come.
A forest blackening like nightfall, like carelessness, like crows.

Think of the roof, feet above your daughter's head. Think
of what you said as you kneeled beside her. *You are safe.*
There is nothing to fear. Be grateful the house keeps its promise.