

For Mark Bartholomew

It seems that each spring
just when I gather the apple leaves
into a tight, neat circle on the lawn
the wind will rise out of the west
quicken and scatter my morning's work

Or just when the snow finally melts
from the meadows and the days of April
begin to lengthen and the frost eases up
and the fiddleheads sprout along the stone wall
to challenge the cold grays of winter
the basement fills with water

It is good that I have learned long ago
to cease forcing answers from the workings of this world
to listen, instead, for the counterweights
that will surely fall into place
to balance even this ache that has found its way
into everything I have done these past six days

Mark, I will learn to not look for your quick laugh,
your shy sideways smile, as I pass the rooms where you taught
but to leave open a space within for your spirit to seize me
with a grip as sure as your infamous hold on a coffee cup,
as true as your damnable ease at filling an inside straight

And then I will know that you have found me again
that you have given us your life as a gift
that will always move — as all good gifts must do —
and that I shall have to do my part to keep it alive
to meet the despair of this world
with a force of love and hope and wonder
made stronger from having known you

—DOUG RAWLINGS