

When it Rains in May

Behind a thin overcast left from yesterday's shower
the moon, not quite full, seems thin too, translucent,
disappearing in the growing light as nighthawks
thrum like small engines in the distance, cactus wrens
chatter, and quail start their territorial calling.
The air is cool, the morning gentle for a change.

When it rains in May, it probably won't in July
when it's supposed to, so yesterday's sprinkle, though a relief
from the record-breaking heat, was a reminder of summers
when by August pears, despite the pumps, had lost
most of their leaves, the apples and peaches were half normal size,
the cottonwoods down by the wash had turned yellow, and cattle
out on the range lay down thick-tongued in the dust to die.

Up at the university, scientists
read rocks and tree rings and shrinking polar icecaps.
Up on the rimrock they decipher unanswered prayers.
Down here the message goes round by word of mouth.
Hasn't been this dry in twenty years says Tom.
Since the fifties says his dad, and his dad says
Not since McDonald's well went dry after the war.
Alberto says his grandad says said his grandad said. . . .
Not since the last time says Jack and that's God's own sweet truth.