

NICHOLAS PIERCE

Four sonnets from *Pierce Junction*

Kennedy Heights

No one knew what to make of the pear tree,
why only one side sprouted fruit, as if
the branches were opposed to symmetry
or cursed. Strange, yes, but easy to write off—
till a few dogs died digging at the roots.
Around then water mains began to break,
children complained of headaches and sore throats,
rashes bloomed after showers. Poor and Black,
the residents had a time getting anyone
outside the neighborhood to listen, answer
the phone, explain why nothing had been done
about the pipes, the purple soil, the cancer
cases increasing by the month. “Don’t worry,”
they were told, meaning, “Not our problem, sorry.”

Exodus

Soon after Albert Lusk fell ill, his wife
began recording in her Bible: *Days
since we've had running water. A relief
and burden. With it will return my stress.*
She knew the water was behind his cough
and fever, but convincing others—that
was hard. *Doctors won't listen, claim his life
is not in danger, that he simply caught
a cold. Bedrest and patience, they prescribe,
when sleep is all he has the strength to do.*
Not a month later, he was gone. *I grab
at nothing in the night, surprised anew
each time. The bed remembers him, the sheets
his smell. At the front door, the dog still waits.*