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Donald Mace Williams

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Soapberry

by Donald Mace Williams

I let it get too dry in our bad summer,
Its first, my seventy-first, some worse, some better,
And in a day its leaves turned brown and fell.
This is a tree designed for hardship, meant
To go long rooted journeys dry as a camel,
To bow with the wind today, spring back tomorrow.
What I forgot to consider was its newness,
Its roots, not weaned yet from the soft dirt ball they groped from
Like just-born trout with egg sacs still attached,
Slow, yet, to butt through dense soil not pureed
To feed young trees but tough like all things here.
We ease our children's way through gristle and crust,
Through hail and thunder, love and government,
And yet their roots draw back or atrophy
Or, like mine, squirm around the hard spots. Still,
It may mean something that at last my tree,
Watered, these days, as if, though well adapted,
It yet needs love and coaxing, put out leaves
As green in late September as in May,
And if the winter's not too harsh, may live.

