and began to read. His voice, which gave life to clipped but generous words, was not unpleasant.

The paper pleased him. Its subtle humor showed on his tanned face and crept slyly into his eyes. When he finished reading, his hands rose momentarily to his mouth concealing an imminent smile. As he bent forward over the paper, studying it intently, his fine brown hair showed thin over the top of his head.

The Chill Hearth

Reveling in the steady warmth
That was his glowing heart
He drew a magic fairy ring
To keep intruders out.

But heedless dancers in their turns
Ignored his charmed wall;
He would have crossed the mystic bounds—
But dared not break the spell.

From lack of fuel the hearth grew cold;
Blazing logs were ash;
And chill, he envied distant fires
Built of the common rush.

—Ina Marshall

Priestess of the Year

Bertie M. Layne

It is not necessary for me to take pensive journeys along country lanes or on the banks of streams to be aware of the solemnity that marks the decline of all things in the autumn of the year. For even though I might not have the good fortune to see the passionate beauty in the colors of
the leaves or to feel the chill that permeates the air at the hour of dawn and at the time of twilight, I would be in possession still of that mystical sensitivity which the clairvoyant mind experiences when in the vicinity of the dying. For the spirit of nature, through some incomprehensible medium, calls to me at this time more forcefully than at any other. This spirit of nature, which in the spring became a laughing, dancing girl with flowers in her hair, laughing and dancing so that at times tears fell from her eyes in the midst of her merriment; this spirit, which in the full force of the summer became a virile young matron married to the arduous tasks of man, assumes now the role and vestments of a priestess to administer at the vesper time of the year the extreme unction to all dying things.

When she calls me, I release my soul from the limitations which the romance of the spring and the toiling of the summer had imposed upon it and urge it to be off to join itself with nature while she is yet in contemplation of the year’s completed work. In her musings she has much to confide to her intimates before she withdraws herself. What does my soul gather in this autumnal association? What new secrets does this priestess of the year reveal upon which the soul might nourish itself to expand and grow and live eternally? This harvest is richer and more lasting than the garnerings of a diligent and tireless farmer in Ohio. I learn in this communion such themes as the utter futility of all that is only material, since there is constant change and ultimate decay governing all things. I see more clearly, because of this change and destiny of decay, that I am brother to the corn shock and the honeybee, for I too must become immersed in the universal solvent of death. But this priestess also extends the cup of her Eucharist and a surge of fresh faith in Nature’s wisdom and in the justice of her system. I feel also a growing breadth of love for all my brother-things, the sensible and insensible with which I share a common destiny. Hope fills me too. I have hope with the swiftly dismantling trees that the sap of new life will rise again, and also with the decaying seed of corn that it will grow once more. Thus the dying of all things in the autumn of the year gives new life to my thoughts. The decline of nature inspires the resurgence of my soul.