

In Manole's Orchard: A Re-visioning Of the Romanian Legend

A long time ago, in a land with more crows than days unaltered by loss, Prince Negru Voda ordered stonemason Manole and his faithful masons to build the world's most breathtaking monastery. Manole and his masons worked hard but the walls kept collapsing—no sooner would a wall rise than return to the ground, crumbled. Only the orchard stayed tall.

On a night without constellations, Manole wandered his dreams until a fairy told him: *Manole, if you want to build a wall that lasts forever, you must build it around the first woman who appears at the orchard.*

On a day without clouds, a man must choose between the promise he made to a prince and the vows sworn to his beloved. Manole's young wife came to visit; she brought a basket of fruits and wine to share with the masons. The first woman must be the last. Thus, Manole buried his wife alive inside the church walls. He had nothing left to give to a god or country.

The monastery was called the *most beautiful in the world*. Ensuring nothing so perfect would ever be built again, Prince Negru Voda ordered his soldiers to pull all the ladders away from the roof, stranding Manole and his masons on top. The men tried to escape. They made wings from shingles and tried to fly, but none survived. No sooner would a man rise than return to the ground, crumbled.

Where each mason fell, a stone appeared—nine stones total. In the place where Manole crashed, a salt well *watered by tears* appeared. The stones, the well, the wife, and the wind remain at Curtea de Arges monastery in Romania.

*

I run my mouth across the rim
of a line by Blaga

In this orchard
wherever we fell amid fruit
there was a tree turned coffin

I felt that by laying my hands
on the ice

I would know more
about turning to stone
in a story

molecules condense
to a point where motion ceases

but nothing
stops

And the wind is a woman
known for her furious
whispers, known for hissed questions
no life ever answers

Some speak of a brick
which keeps the structure standing
but I know
her voice
is a blizzard,

chilled into wails

and no legend is foreign
to the girls we raise
inside it

O Manole, did she bring you
an apple?

Or was she the tumbled fruit, the orchard's
footfall?

A man buries what he loves
& stays faithful by swearing

forever
in a country of stone-faced
icons

no wall is silent