

2024 JAMES APPLEWHITE POETRY PRIZE SEMIFINALIST**BY JANE SHLENSKY***Ghost Apples*

An early ice storm glazes house and orchard,
grass spears, icicle roof fangs,
tree limbs gleaming in muted light,
the sun behind a curtain of haze.
Remaining fruit softens under ice and drops,
leaving empty shells like blown glass –
ghost apples, they're called – hanging
on their stems. And under heavy trees,
twig casings fall and break, melting
crystal scree shattering at their roots,
beautiful, dangerous, and brief.

In the frozen orchard, I stand and witness
until I lose feeling in my toes, considering
if my apple life, too heavy for grace
that surrounds me, will drop away,
leaving the shape of all I've been –
for a day, an hour, the length of memory,
a life transient as ice. Watching my step,
I head for the house feeling brittle,
waiting for a thaw

JANE SHLENSKY, a veteran teacher and musician, holds an MFA from UNC Greensboro. She was selected as winner of the North Carolina Poetry Society's 2023 Poet Laureate Award by North Carolina Poet Laureate Emeritus Joseph Bathanti, and her work has been nominated for a Pushcart four times. Her recent poetry and fiction have appeared in several magazines and anthologies, including Pinesong, Kakalak, moonShine review Journal, and Nostos. She also has a chapbook, *Barefoot on Gravel* (Finishing Line Press, 2016). Previously, she appeared in NCLR Online [2015](#) with a travel essay.