

Poetry Porch: Poetry

Gift

By Miriam O'Neal

Tea berries—little jewels set in satin green
wreaths. Low enough to the earth we'd kneel,
leaning into the fruit's slight perfume.

Picked and nibbled,
their pucker set our juices flowing.
Whatever name others gave,

checker berry, wintergreen,
they were one more mystery,
in our deep familiar.

Ground cover reliable and tender—
in mossy humus on the Outwash Plain.
Sure as schist's shape and pine's pitch,

as scrub oak's dull browns in November
or lady slippers' magic spring pink sac.
We learned what second-growth is made of—

what comes after glaciers or men have stripped
and shaped a place or thing. Human kits, we prowled
in light dappled by sassafras and scrawny birches,

wading each small brook as if the first
to cross those mossed rocks. Split
freshwater clams, their nacreous swirl

of rose and indigo and pearl our gift.
Never lost in those days in those woods,
we always found our way home.