

# Fall of Empire

## *A Time for Renewal*

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Early August and already I can feel it. I feel it mostly at the fringes of each day, like a photo with its edges slightly out-of-focus. The mornings are cool now, and darker, and in the evenings I look up from the task at hand to find the sun already dropping behind the Greens and everything disappearing into the wash of night. Fall. Not quite yet, but soon. And winter, inevitably to follow.

I am more energized now than at any other time of year, including spring. Paradoxically, as the nights get longer, I awake earlier and earlier, frequently soft-stepping down the stairs to find that it is only 3:00 or 3:30 and then soft-stepping back up to try and lull myself back to sleep for another hour or two. I lie there and listen to my family breathing, the dog softly snoring, the early, bedraggled crows of Brutus, our rooster. I lie there and watch the stars, and rather than wonder at how big the universe is, I find myself amazed by how small it seems. Because doesn't it look like if you really tried, you could reach up and grab one of those suckers?

I used to find it strange that it feels like I am opening at the precise time of year when nature is closing. It is as if I am absorbing the energy being shed by the trees in our forest, the grasses in our fields, and the animals we slaughter, their blood soaking into the dun-colored soil of our barnyard, their entrails buried deep in the compost pile, where they'll succumb to the same process that will eventually take us all. Only to be spread across our fields or atop the raised beds of our crops, bringing all those little shoots to life. Our animals are generous; they don't know how to stop giving.

It is only when I allow myself to see the larger picture that it all makes sense. We tend to categorize these things—*this season is for that, that season is for this*—but of course it is all part of the same balled up, interconnected, cyclical nature of things. We think of spring as the season of renewal, but forget that nothing can be renewed without something having been taken. And so the taking, the dying, and the shedding are all parts of the renewal, no less crucial than the early tender buds emerging from the trees or the first tentative suckles of a newborn calf.

There is so much talk lately of collapse, of the vulnerability inherent to the complex and convoluted systems that, like it or not, we are all dependent on. But I sometimes wonder if we're thinking about it all wrong. For what is it we're afraid of collapsing? A financial system that funnels profits to the top single percent? An energy supply that enables such false prosperity and wreaks such widespread havoc? Perhaps the true collapse was in the creation of and our subsequent dependence on these systems. Perhaps what we bear witness to, in the early years of the twenty-first century, is nothing less than the early stage societal composting necessary to feed the cycle. We have all fed well (though obviously, some better than others) off the meat of these arrangements, and now it is time to bury them with all the guts and shit and detritus of our nation.

Now it is time for renewal.