

Potion

On these nights, in the icebox of early winter,
warm spiced cider has become my tonic.

I yank the half-empty gallon,
pasteurized unfortunately,
and tip it into the small pot atop the gas range.

A stick of cinnamon,
a pinch of ground cloves,
and a juiced hemisphere of an orange.
It heats, steams.

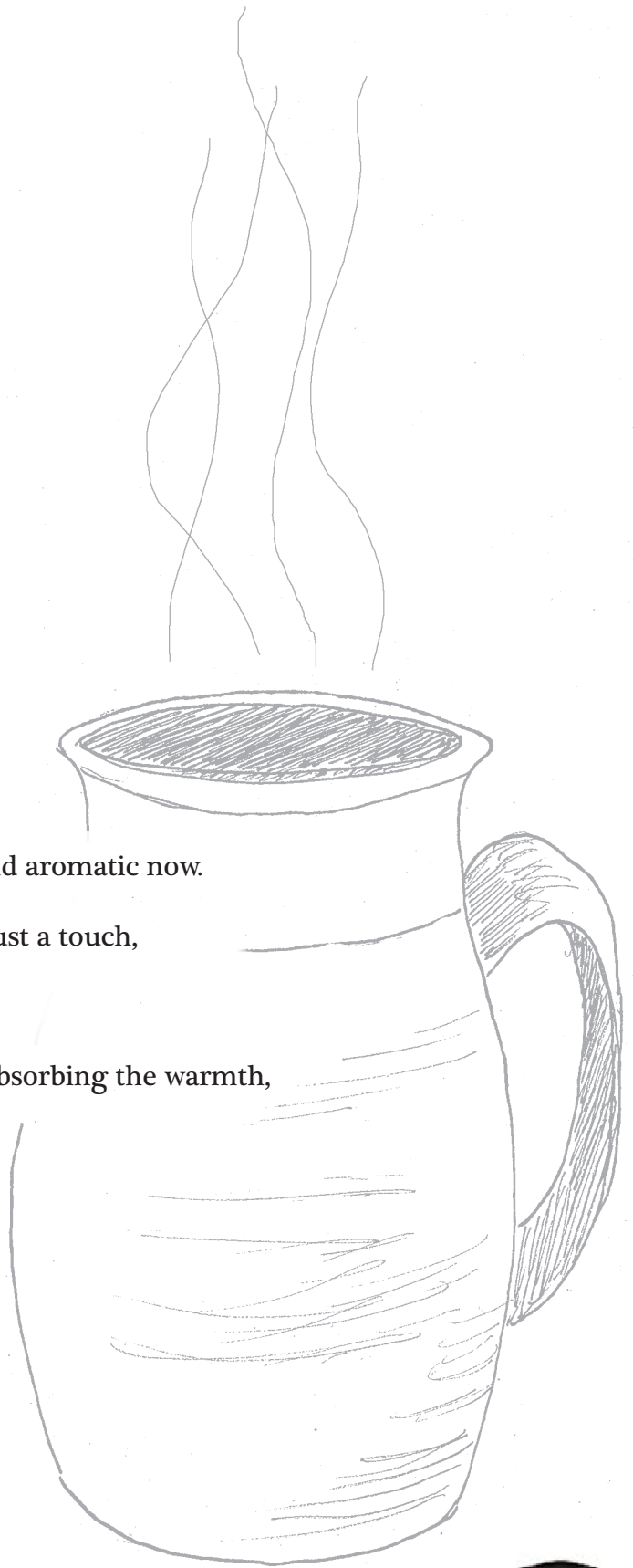
I fiddle with the desiccated citrus,
reach for a paring knife,
stab the rind,
hold it aloft,
a guillotined remnant,
then slice, winding around and around,
intricate in my incision.

Voila! I pinch one end and let the rest drop,
a spiral of orange flesh, mangled.
I drop it into the cider pot, which is burbling and aromatic now.
In an inspired moment, I open the cupboard,
grab the maple syrup by the handle and pour just a touch,
just a skosh,
into the cauldron.

I wrap my fingers around the mug I've filled, absorbing the warmth,
superfluous,
gratuitous,
in this heated hovel of an apartment.

I purse my lips, wary of the heat,
and still manage to burn my tongue,
rendering the delicacy of my process moot.
But as I blow, as I wait,
it gets to the right temperature
and is worth it all, even the scalded taste buds.

Winter has met its match.



Ted Maust
1st place winner of 2011 Fall Poetry Contest


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