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