Today’s seasonal poem by Stuart Kestenbaum of Deer Isle grew out of tapping maple trees and boiling sap on his stovetop. “What stayed with me,” he says, “is how long it took to get to syrup, and how sweet the syrup could be.”

Essence
By Stuart Kestenbaum

We hand-crank the drill through the maple’s bark, pound the metal tap into light inner layers

where the sap begins to flow, this life blood that will make the leaves unfurl

in another two months, delicately lined like the hands of a newborn.

But now we step over last year’s leaves and the year’s before that

in patchy snow to gather what we have taken from the tree, the gallons of sap

we boil down on our stove top, moisture running off the kitchen windows

as we get down to its essence, over three gallons to make a cup of syrup, so sweet

a transformation, I can’t believe I could have been a part of it. A world that doesn’t

end in vinegar, ashes and regret, but in a sweetness that rises every day

between earth and sky, traveling from the hole in the side of the tree to our joyous mouths.