

In Ohio, We Celebrate As Best We Can

1

Over the highest hill in Kettering, Ohio
Beth and Wes Vines run
into fields of day lily and Queen Anne's lace,
the test always who can play at dying
well enough—best one dead, first one up.
Master of the Quick Death,
Wes can drop from any low tree
the way he sees gray television Germans do
under Vic Morrow's righteous Thompson sub.

Actually, they play in a junkyard.
What wildflowers there are
grow through truck parts, old Hotpoint stoves.
The orchard that borders
is full is Winesap and June apples.

When they have had enough of counterfeiting death,
they build a tunnel under the junk,
digging and hauling out wagonfuls of cool earth,
shoring up ceiling and wall with crate wood
taken from the orchard first thing each morning.
When the tunnel is finished and wide enough
they play there until the roof falls,
then, buried to the neck, squirm
like cicadas
blind-digging hard Ohio to smell a junkyard.

2

First day of deer season, old Chevy
smokes up 33 South, eight-point buck tied to the trunk.
At every bump, body rises
drops back, rain freezing on the eyes.

Outside Nelsonville, a wire breaks.
Forelegs and head drop, drag behind in the dark.
Taillights blaze.
A door slams. Another.
Two men stand in moonlight,
pass a pint of whiskey once before lifting.

3

I can still smell Jody McLaughlin's perfume :
as we danced in the union hall on Hudson Avenue,
ten years from high school.

Beside us, Dave Hanley—married, one boy—
leaned into Sherri Link.
He had wanted her since we were freshmen.

In near dark they moved,
Jody telling me of a job she was glad to have
what with Reagan
and half that small town looking for work.

As we danced and talked
I thought of the only girl in tenth grade
who would kiss me on a dare.
In the hall after history class
she gave me reason to stand perfectly still.
Any movement and I would begin forgetting.

4

On a low hill, a tire-swing
turns from the last and lowest branch of a maple.
Blond boy, face-down,
sees the earth blur before him,
the turning already an old friend.
In the house down the hill
his grandmother bakes gingerbread, calls his name—
her thin voice, the short ROWEE.
Where he is, rope tightens,
the noise it makes a kind of singing
like the hinge of a door.
Above all this, he hears and is wiggling
from the old 2-ply tire to the crest of the hill,
calling up the taste of her hot ponebread—
wet, soaking with butter.
Over the top he yells to her,
prepares to feel her apron, each sticky-sweet stain.

5

Off to the side of the road in and out
of Carbon Hill, Ohio
there is a place just wide enough for a '68 Chevy.
First warm day in March,
I sit eating apricots and bread,
discussing death with a woman who sees it
as the thing pressing even blood forward.
Crumbs collect in her lap as she talks.
Outside, a great quiet
collides with the notion it is somehow important

to make noisy sense.
Brushing herself, she hands back the apricots.
Cows, wintered down the hollow,
call as coal trucks slow,
shift for the tight turn into Carbon Hill.