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Two Poems

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Every now and then I hear American English spoken in a way I could listen to all night, perhaps it's the accent or dialect, often I can't quite understand all that is said. But it sounds lovely, like singing. Like Rainier Banks. Black, 60, asthmatic, lifetime janitor, named after a mountain in Washington. He told me a story. Some years passed and suddenly I remembered hearing him tell it. That is, I remembered how the story *sounded* and not the story itself. So I made up a story. The voice is his, the words mine. In this "voice" poem I tried to let the words be equal to the sound and the story equal to the song. Nothing fancy. Coming from certain mouths our language is full of natural music. You just have to find the right mouth. You have to listen.

—*Edward Harkness*

RAINER BANKS TELLS ABOUT GEESE

Old Man Goose he
big mean and nobody
give him no lip.
When he in the barn
them other geese they
stay in the sun.
When he drink from the pan
them other geese they
stay dry.
One day old Mrs. Goose she
get run over
flat out
on the road.
Never even cry.
Old Man Goose he
go to her he
blow the dust away he
drag her yonder.
The clouds hang low.
Then you know what he done?
Why he come back he
grab the biggest goose
whip him good he
take that man's wife
all for his own.
You see
geese is just like people.

ARE YOU THINKING

Are you thinking, as you read this, that poetry has gone straight to the dogs, the cats, the terrible apples that drop year after year to rot near the tires and molding heaps of newspaper in Mrs. Roat's orchard, Mrs. Roat, who never let you throw bricks in her goldfish pond because she was a witch whose charred face nobody really quite saw, not even Ronnie Triplett, the strongest kid on our dead-end road, who actually pried up a manhole cover one time in the grass behind the bowling alley and fell to the bottom of a sewer pipe and just stayed down there kissing the cold slime, who was singing The Star Spangled Banner in a voice delicate as a bat's eyelash when the cops pulled him out, is that what you're thinking?