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Digging a Garden; Why Ira Pratt Cocked His Lead Like That

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Digging a Garden

I rake back, twice, this new place,
once to clear leaves--the fan-teeth
tinging ancient songs, one note for each
catch along this patch
of earth's holy music-roll.

Then the law and order jags of a straight rake
straining to uproot grass so crabby it would argue
even about the sureness of death, holding on
as if possession were enough,
as if roots and prior claim
could hold sway.

A light mist settles as I break earth,
a benediction cooling my throbbing face,
softening the soil. I rise, a dream
in a stranger's sleep, away from the hovering
magnolia, out of the radius of pinestraw
to this corner, exposed.

Chard, onion, squash, beans,
staked and braided plum tomatoes.
This is one version of the future. For now,

my right arm, muscles awake and complaining,
lift rounds of soil up, out, and over
row after row, turning what has seen light
back to face the underearth, turning up
this white chrysalis, some creature inside
learning within its confines how to fly.

Under the overhang of old shrub
strawberry runners deepen to red,
stemming each span of the unknown
with three possibilities. Two paces
distant, a pearl gray mockingbird
trimmed with black wingbands
keeps pace--fearless, taking in
translucent earthworms amazed

to find themselves suddenly
turning up
in this world.

Turned up or turned out
some burrow back to the familiar.
Others, consumed, take flight.

Peggy Shumaker

Why Ira Pratt Cocked His Head Like That

Twelve hours a day, six days a week.
Stamping out barrel staves, cattle tanks,
strong boxes, silo sheeting. At first his brain
swelled, slamming all night the same
steel chants, his bones jamming, misaligned.
They bought real glass for the windows.

A dropped sheet 4 x 8 sliced off two toes.
The strawboss didn't dock him.
Ira walked tighter, repaired his own shoe.
God preserve us from what we get used to.
They paid the improvement on the homeplace.

The knocking in his head slacked off, and he slept.
*Couldn't startle him if you drove a buckboard
through the bed.* He liked Amy saying that.
The day after Easter, he rose early,
checked the nest. Watched newly-hatched robins
open their beaks. Then his hands began to sweat.

Peggy Shumaker