

# THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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**CIRCUIT**

The radio is broken.

Every radio is  
broken.

The knobs of all the radios in the world  
have turned into soup: babies  
and chicken-bones  
float to the surface, surrounded  
by drowned onions and  
Mozart.

Believe me, that static  
is something darker  
than sound: the air is unravelling  
like a torn shirt, the rain  
is electric.

Bits of IBM tape  
are rolling down from the mountains  
choking trees, whispering  
in gardens,  
wrinkling the grass.

Birds  
are freezing  
in mid-flight.

Stanley Cooperman





bedroom bending for a goodnight kiss.

and god bless daddy  
 three four five  
 with his big bald head  
 and his squinty eyes

Eliot says we must be still and still moving. He sings  
 of the photograph album.

Mother liked that poem. Said so in the kitchen.  
 But I never understood it till I saw that deathless  
 (lifeless) three-D

color transparency of Father supersubtly  
 smiling

king of the hill

above an unknown city.

No photo can hold him.

His jet-set tie is about to take off.

He wants to leap up and dance down the hill into the  
 city.

As a son, I am not entirely satisfied with this.

Fathers should be set, predictable,

despite what Eliot says about old men being

explorers,

which Mother repeated to me again and again in the  
 kitchen—

despite Father.

**James Reiss**

**BANANA REPUBLIC**

The man looks like a hood from Chicago,  
Dark, thick, saturated in his own oils.  
Though they abound, he eats a banana  
Like the only one, with absorbed interest.  
Oblivious of heat, the dusty road,  
Aware the natives eat iguana meat,  
He likes the palm's sound of green knives clashing,  
The sea colored like droppings from the sky.  
This is the sort of climate he admires  
Where men eat bananas undisturbed  
Among iguana hunters, embezzlers.  
He likes to be pointed at by tourists,  
Somewhat lecherous to share his life—  
It would be absurd to offer them regrets.  
He eats his banana slowly, peeling  
Back the skin, holding it like a yellow  
Lily with a speckled beige eye that grows  
Till it is slack and wilted in his hand.  
But the tourists know he is up to something—  
Suppose he sees a creamy, lissom nude  
Rising from the peeled-back skin—in this  
dry land

A Lady of the Lake, hiding her breasts—  
There in the sun a ripe meeting of minds.  
They know why he came to this republic:  
To eat a banana on a hot porch  
And make them think it holds a naked girl.  
Once they are sure he has this kind of loot,  
The world's newspapers will not let him alone,  
The government will do its best to extradite—  
Let there be speckled lilies everywhere,  
Wholesale traffic in Ladies of the Lake —  
The man contents himself to be on view.

There are no émigrés, missing persons,  
 A naked girl rises from every hand.  
 Nevertheless it was better to eat  
 The fruit than leave it to rot like a corpse  
 On the table, redolent of some grief.  
 So he must share the girl they think he sees,  
 Eat iguana with the natives just to find  
 If there is anything more potent than his dream.

**Charles Edward Eaton**

### A KIND OF PROTHALAMION

Friday, testing a green bean at the stove,  
 I remembered "I Remember Mama" — *O, love!*  
*have I come so far?* Fridays long before  
 we had TV, back in the olden days  
 when I was nine, I'd go to Mrs. Field's  
 to watch the memorying. Tonight those pearl-heeled  
 feet and the red nightgown curl near the place  
 our unborn children own. I feel a ply  
 there snuggle in my cradling the ways  
 my body feels hot, cold, sweets, and to cry.  
 How do you tell fetal things? Here's this, kneeled  
 in a green bean. Here's the first time I dove  
 headfirst. From our dolphin's back you, too, pour  
 a past, another child I see but not to shore.

**Ellen Kirvin Dudis**

## FOUR POEMS

## Introit

The old Eskimo method  
Of naming a child was this:  
Names were shouted in the room  
Of the woman in her labor  
And when the child heard his name called  
He knew it and leaped from the womb.

So I scream bits of past joy,  
Past pain at my walls to make  
Meaning leap alive into  
The light. Give up. How can I write  
A song about the fear I feel  
When I stare at my hands too long?

I flip through my loves like slides.  
Absurd. How explain passion  
That sprang from the *cruel* way  
Her red pencil slashed through a word?  
His clumsiness unbuttoning  
My coat that long ago cold day?

Dreams? One of the Notre Dame  
Gargoyles is slipping. Its thick  
Stone thighs scramble, then slide down.  
I walk in a brick-walled garden;  
Huge warm bubbles form on the blooms,  
Fusing, dividing endlessly.

Pollen spins in them like sperm.  
I hug the earth, hoping each  
Time for the perfect child: smooth,  
Independent, wise, wild. But I



May be that woman I met in Greece,  
So crippled she couldn't give birth.

The child died and was cut and  
Taken from her piece by piece.

### **The Goddess**

My mother had a goddess for a friend.  
Slim and brown, slightly hyper-extended knees,  
She could hold her liquor and won at cards.  
Once she told how she was ironing  
And her husband was touching the faucet  
And they kissed. Wham! A shock pulsed through  
    them  
Just like in cartoons.

On picnics they made each other eat grass.  
They had a little boy; they bought new cars.  
They started running with a drinking crowd,  
My mother said. When he told jokes that weren't  
Allowed, I loved the way her head flew back  
In smoky, throaty laughter. It was long,  
Long after

That I found out he was a womanizer.  
After he was red faced and hard fatted.  
The boy grew up. She had the house re-done.  
Then one day she noticed that her arms were numb.  
Soon they found her standing naked among  
Her green-and-while striped chairs, holding back  
    screams  
With both hands.

They let her come home for her son's wedding,  
But she stood up and shouted down the priest  
With babble about a dripping beast.  
Now she won't talk to anyone, nor hold  
Her grandson for fear that she'll drop him.  
If they let her cook she gets cut and burned,  
And she won't brush her teeth.

### Encounter

One dead-hot day, when I was midwifing  
Great ice clots from the fridge with numbing hands,  
A boy-o crow, too big for the trees  
And bold as a drummer, flew down to sing  
To me, so close that I could see his fleas.

Head cocked, throat feathers puffed  
Like a dirty ascot,  
He swiftly manufactured  
A manic monologue  
Of low, sweet, rapid talk  
To charm me out of crumbs.

Black crow, black Irish boozing man,  
Just so, fifty years ago, you returned  
To my grandmother. While you begged your skilled  
Hands started on her buttons and she burned  
Like a bride for the baby that killed her.

Old, *verboden* wino,  
I saw you once in the park.  
You shuffled with the pack  
Of bums dwarfed by the elms.  
You heard my cousin say  
"That one's our grandpa."

You stopped and peered with red eyes sad as  
 Rembrandt's  
 At us, the priceless ones. You drank us in.  
 I had your dead wife's mouth ; he, your long bones.  
 I wanted to wave, but my mother had to hide  
 The knives from you. My arm stiffened at my side.

### **Branca**

Branca's eyes were as green as the Drac,  
 Her cheekbones high as unbombed bridges.

For most of the term she was a rumor,  
 The long-awaited Yugoslav whose room  
 Stood empty on Two. Empty, but passing it  
 I knew gray ash was falling endlessly  
 In there, softly filling up her mirror.

Then, toward spring, when the Isère bulged with  
 run-off

And our dorm's giant beech tree,  
 Flaming with buds from trunk to twig ends,  
 Became a tender, splitting paradigm  
 Of all of France, she arrived exhausted.  
 Every year of her life had been breathed on,  
 Fingered, and finally stamped in some office,  
 And her low voice, still one country behind,  
 Scattered phrases of broken Italian  
 Like lost pieces of luggage down the hall.

She slept for two days and woke up starved  
 For faces, mountains, light, clouds, anything  
 Green, or French, bright brass knobs on old carved  
 doors.

While I sipped her pale prune brandy  
She devoured the view from my window  
And thanked me for the parachuted  
U.S. process cheese she ate in Forty-four.

Soon her room was filled with wreaths of twigs,  
friends,  
And puppy pictures clipped from magazines.  
We, with our muted prints, could smile,  
But none of us could play the strict, no-handed  
Hopscotch that she chalked in the passageway.

Her fiancé slept with his party card.  
Only her grandmother still believed in God  
And prayed in the house. But she was blind and  
scared  
To eat the sticky prune tarts she adored  
For fear of taking a wasp in her mouth.

And Branca? Somehow she had kicked her stone,  
Leaped and landed in her own space.  
Gracefully as a scalloped chain of wires  
She soared above her country's wild terrain.  
Stubborn as a dialect or a river  
She found ways to surround and embrace it.  
By June she was longing for strange-sounding  
Sausages, for Belgrade's wide, cement heart,  
For wheat, for solid fields of sunflowers  
Turning as one, poppies orange as silk in heat.

The morning she left, already half ghost,  
She came to memorize the mountains.

When the Nazis bombed Belgrade, she said,  
She drew pictures of them with bullets for teeth.  
And when they marched beneath her window  
She flung it wide and screamed with all her hate  
Some strange German words she had heard:

“Ich liebe dich! Ich liebe Dich!” We laughed.  
 Then the train swallowed her up. I thought of  
 People with mist for hair, bodies of loam,  
 People passing by thousands through barbed wire  
 And emerging whole. I thought of Branca home.

**Judith Hemschemeyer**

**“MAN MUSS IMMER UMKEHREN.”**

*(Karl Jacobi, mathematician, + 1851)*

In a barn, in another  
 dimension,  
 they condemned us before  
 we were born, and  
 barely in time.

We came, when there  
 was no moon  
 and the sun had gone dumb  
 in the sky. In an  
 iron atmosphere

the planet was like  
 an opened  
 brain and we swore at the  
 weird horizons.

The demons of

quantum unlocked our  
 gear. We began.

In a barn on a motherless  
 planet, again in  
 time, and more than an immanent prayer in our  
 atoms.

**Marina**

## FIVE POEMS

1                    Hey.  
Hey you,  
    lady going to church  
        on sunday morning  
wearing the old fashion  
        ink blue dress  
    with white silk circles  
        over it all—  
You wanna know where  
    Jesus is?  
    He's hiding  
with the hippies  
    in central park  
        smoking pot  
at a love-in.  
    Hey lady  
you always take your dog  
    to church on sunday  
        morning?  
That's good.  
    Jesus likes that—  
They say last year  
    in chicago  
Jesus gave alleycats baths  
    in buckingham fountain  
        before he got all  
arrested  
    for exposure.

- 2           At the city zoo  
I went for the toilets,  
    of bowls there I  
        found two;  
the first had no roll  
    of paper—  
The second bowl had a roll  
    and a half:  
    I thought the second bowl  
        must be for those who  
        just visit the zoo,  
        so I shit  
        in the first.
- 3    I was going to Mount Rushmore,  
        to see the famous faces.  
        When in view of the mountain  
        I came to a seductive halt::::::::::
- A He Mule, (his redness roused obvious)  
    mounted up a She Mule.  
        Her ears went straight up  
        and all the while they  
stayed straight up—She never moved  
    off the yellow highway no-passing line.  
Our dozen tourist faces  
    went blushed to the core  
    going to mount rushmore.  
Back on all fours,  
    His redness diminished;  
the She Mule moved off  
    the yellow line to eat  
        some sugar from my hand—  
She poked Her head

through my open'd window  
and licked my face  
for more sugar.

Imagine me on the way to  
mount rushmore being licked  
by a She Mule for sugar—  
Imagine me coming back from  
the nearest store  
with more  
sugar,  
looking for She Mules  
on yellow lines:::::  
On two feet there must be  
some mule in me,  
Undiminished . . . .

4           Wrap me in earth!  
              Wrap me in earth—A casket of clay  
with worms and moths and secrets  
and bury me in the breeze—  
              O' deep in the sky  
              O' mortician of May!

Never has a bee been jail'd for rape,  
never has a rose refused  
to be so commonly mounted!

A bull eating roses was busted by a bee;  
the bee buzz'd round the bulls  
balls and stung one and died—  
The bull ran screaming through  
the field with a mouthful of  
roses.



- 5 I hardly  
notic'd  
the glacier laughing  
among the snowflakes—  
Snowflakes getting  
prepared  
for the big push.  
I gather'd my wife, my daughter,  
my son, and my dog  
and we ran down the street  
in chicago  
that goes to mexico  
yelling like  
paul reveres:  
*"The Glaciers are coming—  
The Glaciers are coming!  
Run for your life!"*

Ron Lang

**FOUR POEMS**

**Among the Cannibals**

I spear on my fork  
raw pieces of my father's heart  
                  "Eat and his strength is yours"

It is dull brown and bloody  
like calves' liver.  
                  "Eat and his strength is yours"

It is shrunken and hollow.  
It has gnawed at itself  
for years.  
                  "Eat and his strength will be yours."

**Seeing My Father Again**

My father the cricket  
sings under the dead leaves.  
The vegetable weight of years  
presses on his black armor.  
He is still scratching  
his thin legs in the dark.

**Cornered**

Cornered. Like a starfish  
I cut off my arms  
bury them in the sand.  
I roll out with the tide,  
a bloody wheel  
dreaming regeneration.

**Black Frog's Pity Poem**

Feel the pulse in the throat?  
Odd that a black frog  
has a jugular.

Wind is one of three  
diseases all frogs  
suffer once in their lives.  
It shakes their long, thin  
hands like leafless trees.  
It dries their skin.

There is only one cure.  
They crawl under moist  
flat rocks.  
They bury their hands  
in their throats.

**Gregory Orr**

**TWO POEMS****Field Guide**

*For Jerry Evans*

Listen, how the words flourish  
as we walk the finite paths  
between the fields of infinite events of

lupine, spiderwort, and shooting star;  
birdsfoot-trefoil, indian  
paintbrush, blue-eyed grass,  
puccoon; of prairie-dock to come  
and spring ephemerals, gone beneath the shade.  
We stop, match names of things  
to what is there, and listen, now,  
how after we have passed, the plants  
revert to seeds and syllables.

### **Definition of Itself**

It is enough that  
this perfect oakleaf  
is melting through the ice  
and resting  
in a perfect, two-inch deep  
sheer-ice wall outline  
of itself,  
under a quarter inch of  
clear ice-water  
cold to the touch,  
symbolic of nothing.

**Richard Dauenhauer**

PORTRAIT OF THE RATTLESNAKE AS A PORTABLE JOY

20

This is the time.

Suppose it is called Coulter's Cafe, Waynoka, Oklahoma.  
Population indistinguishable. Some magenta carbon  
pungent menus.

Morning: old farmers

Evening: young farmers

A fat man volunteers—he caught a couple of rattlesnakes **fuckin**g.

Boys, I was curious about that (jerking around  
back there) and one got out from under the bar.  
One bite and I was gone. So Frank and Harry  
who I was with—I've been bit!—I yelled and  
they walked me to the car. I couldn't even use  
mouthwash in the hospital. Alcohol speeds up  
the blood. .

Hand shows frantic cuts made on the way to the hospital.  
Fat saved him.

(It slowed down the poison boys)

HARLEY ELLIOTT

Advice on where to go to find  
 rattlesnakes,  
 all the places he knows.  
 A farmer of the territory.

Although  
 we have a place filed away. A mesa turning in our minds,  
 half-asleep on the night drive down. There is a  
 question of what changes may have occurred in the  
 intimate caprock,  
 or that the snakes may be fewer this year for  
 reasons we have no ideas on.

This is 4 of us drinking coffee & cleaning pancake off our teeth.

The thermometer as a signal:  
 it must say 57 degrees. Otherwise  
 the snakes will  
 not  
 come out.

(Now I watched this thermometer go to 58 degrees. That is,  
 the boredom of the scene was memorable. 3 of us sat on red  
 high gloss enamel benches. A jeweler crossed the street and  
 opened his shop. He stepped into the shop, locking the door

behind him, and turned to look at the glass cases and linoleum, which was well understood by all concerned. There were also some dead flies in the corner of the cafe window. There were some dogs who walked up the street, looking solemn. I was at a slight angle to the thermometer in the cold, my finger curled around my peter through the pocket of my pants).

The mesa  
beyond the Cimarron River

Before that:           some railroads, red knife blades of jutting  
rock, windmills. All of this our minds are past,  
focusing on the mesa.

A prairie dog town is just previous, where there have  
always been Prairie Rattlesnakes, and 3 of us want  
to hunt there now, first. We say:

it might be good.

it is warm enough.

it is probably too windy to hunt on the mesa.

The fourth person wears a cream cowboy hat and says—

I doubt it.

Of course he is right  
(we  
are  
all  
fools).

He doubts; usually thoughtfully and correctly.  
Sometimes it becomes a game:

I saw a coyote wiping his ass behind that tree.

I doubt it.

Of course we  
allow him the doubt  
as it seems he is  
beautiful with snakes.  
They will be  
after the mesa,  
lying on the mounds with chins tilted up. Their  
bodies a pastel red  
to confuse them with the earth.



The memory of the mesa, like an insignia lasting a year, has outgrown itself. The mesa is too small. But rocks and ledges, tiny from the road, begin fitting into spaces of the memory. The fence, two certain posts, the certain place in the wire that had been crawled through before. Going through the barbed wire, there is a hope it will recall itself being done before: A formal and magical rebirth of the event. This does not work.

The hiss as a jacket grazes a barb, pieces of conversation, or the wind being stronger than times before: do not allow it. Going through the wire the new beginning of the hunt.

The History Of This Particular Hill  
a common mesa

no more distinct than any other to the eye driving by. There have been other people on it in other years. Some college kids with potato bags and forked sticks, a farmer or two.

A kid who lives in the history of the region for  
pulling himself up to a ledge without looking,  
thus getting struck between the eyes by a  
sunning rattlesnake.

(He lives  
and becomes a farmer afraid of snakes).

Our snakecatchers are metal. Quarter-inch brake  
rod fitted with springs, etc., clamping jaws at  
the end that close around the snake. They are  
4 feet long.

Used in old grocery stores to get boxes of cereal  
off the top shelf. Here  
they are the same  
as a gun,  
metallic noises smooth hard  
an alien piece  
carried into the landscape.

A heavy linen close-weave  
sack to put the snake in and  
nylon cord to tie it with.

The snake will lie quietly in the dark.

Toward the vertical rim of rocks; scrub brush and boulders, though recognizable from past visits, have changed; the light different, as if something had been broken slightly or changed minutely as in a kaleidoscope since the last time. The hunt can not be extended from the mind. It begins again  
within a new frame.

Cautious weighing of the placement of the snakes,  
whether or not we are early enough to catch them  
just as they emerge from the crevices.  
Or whether they will have scattered downhill by  
now, into the tall grass slopes. So  
a tender eye on each future footstep.

This is a portrait of  
the Western Diamond-Backed Rattlesnake  
(Coon Tail)  
(*Crotalus atrox*)  
to 8 ft.

A perfect and natural creation.

Word most commonly used to describe it: brown

Actual colors: buff, black, cream, gold, white,  
grey, various earth yellows, and  
brown

A vicious killer.

A devoted husband (or wife).

Brutal. Sly insidious clever relentless brave fearless  
easily antagonized cowardly ruthless deliberate tenacious  
evil courageous noble. Responsible.

All that is human in the above is false.

Within the crevices of rock, fissures vertical and  
horizontal on the rim face, snakes coming out into  
Spring. They lie velvet, flat, at the opening. The  
4 of us walking the base of the rock wall, eager to  
see the first of them  
the snake that will be imposed upon or  
dissolve back into the crevice, escaping.  
Our bodies and clothing unconscious.

Hands and eyes awaiting snakes.

The imagined snake—circles of light dappled on the  
diamond back.

Whirring of a grasshopper as an omen to the snakes  
presence. The snake unaware  
thoughtless in its circle of being  
reacting to sky, stone, grass,  
climate, as we move toward where it is hidden  
all yet to be discovered by each other.

the rock wall surface  
glistening  
granite blinding  
flecks of silver dark blue  
patches where cracks disappear  
into  
the heart of the mesa.

A winter landscape would be:  
mesas quiet under snow on the prairie  
At the core of each a

cave of snakes.

Walking  
the eyes walking ahead.  
There are repeating patterns of rock, two silent  
snake faces, long grass streaming from the rocks,  
turquoise sky over the rim above, two  
snake faces  
as they are realized  
a frozen blood  
as the image emerges clearly from the rock  
and grass and is  
finally understood  
is the beginning  
of the dream.

Rattlesnakes:

two heads, as if carved from the rock. Slow, cold,  
electricity of the four eyes.  
Dust colored heads  
caught in the silence.

The noise of scales on rock as one pulls back and disappears. The other breaking, turning, to go headfirst into the mesa center, presents a loop of body.

I reach out

Fear is that which crawls on its belly  
That which walks upright  
Which wakes in the elliptical lidless eye, the  
black-lashed blue iris.

A snake thrashing violently in  
dealing with a ruptured world

And there is the fear  
of its frantic hypodermic kiss. Chance desperate  
strike that switches the balance of power, restoring  
the hunted to a hunter.

The snake contorts, attacked by the supernatural.  
Clear amber poison runs out onto the metal of the  
snakecatcher.

Rattling.  
Rattling

Rattling  
 Rattling  
 Rattling  
 Rattling

Subdued

it drapes from hand to hand. A mosaic length of diamonds and stripes. Forefinger tight on the blade of its head, thumb and fingers behind its jaws; the snake displayed at the end of a process. Now

less snake than once, less a segment of the landscape being briefly: property.

History Of The Uncomprehending Snake

born in                      country surrounding Waynoka, Oklahoma  
                                     (grass rock sky earth water)

length                        47 inches  
                                     (grass rock sky earth water)



age

3 yrs.

grass  
rock  
sky  
earth  
water

Controlled by  
turning to and away from  
a subject of

Heat

(the snake striking a black hat; ignoring a white hat  
the sun having soaked into black).

Only a small percentage of Untreated Rattlesnake Bites  
are fatal.

It is 8%

perhaps it is 12%

The 100% being so volatile, all  
unique bodies. Holding the snake by its head, a death  
apparatus to a certain percent. Open mouth frozen  
into a strike at space. Pink webbing of the muscles,

two delicate hollow teeth, as spun glass in the sun.

Seen as

a beautiful involved mechanism

as the hand that holds it

as the snake itself

the eye of the snake

which is lidless, grey-gold,  
a centered black slit

the pit of the snake

heat sensing organ  
between nostril and eye, by  
which the snake turns and  
returns, receptor of the  
sun, subject of the sun

the skin of the snake

which lives

the skeleton of the snake

geometric  
master of motion

the penis of the snake

which is double-headed

the tongue of the snake

which glistens black and  
is double-headed, disappearing

the rattle of the snake

at the ends into infinity

which is the pure  
voice of energy

Whether or not any of the 4 of us, holding the snake,  
are within the  
unfatal percentage.  
If a gnat flies into my face.  
If my fingers wet against the snake  
begin to slip.

There is a movie run in the mind, of the snakes head turning,  
signals being sent, the heat receptor, muscles, bone springing  
as the snake obeys the message of the sun. The flickering  
movie of the mind; double needles sink beneath the skin.

The punctures bead with red.  
The blood becomes confused.

This remains  
imagination. The snake is lowered in the bag and  
then enclosed. At the mercy of my hand as I carry

the snake  
rides inches above  
rock and grass.

This is the account for us

At 3:30 p.m. on April 4, 1959, we walked upon  
a mesa  
holding bags  
containing rattlesnakes

At 5:20 p.m. we untie the cord and lay the bags upon  
the ground. The snakes appear one by one. Re-sensing  
the sun and landscape.

Gently folding into the fissures of the mesa  
carrying our impressions into the heart of the mesa

as the snake carries my being

as I carry the being of  
the snake.

One of us wears a watch

Two of us speak

One of us wears a cream-colored hat

Three of us smoke a cigarette

One of us sings

Four of us will marry

One of us will carry a gun in a different land

after imposing ourselves  
on the snakes

circle of power.

This is the time as we speak of it.  
Rattlesnakes  
will have  
spoken  
of it differently.

Harvey Elliott

## TWO POEMS

## Burly

It must have been the fall of nineteen-fifty  
When Burly and his boys moved into the house  
Just below the flume half-way up  
On Screwball Hill—and after a fist fight  
Or two, we were all friends. It was just then  
That chain saws were getting common  
In the woods, and Burly (who was running  
His own gyppo cutting outfit) managed to get  
Hold of, finally, four saws (all used)  
Which he liked to bring home with him—  
Babied them like a bitch licking her pups.

And I will always remember  
One night in spring, just as it was getting  
Dark and the lights were coming on  
In the little valley down below, how Burly  
Said, Listen here, I want to show you boys  
Something, and then there on the front porch  
He started the saws and took wire and hooked  
The triggers at full blast, and all four saws  
Raging and snarling at once an almost deafening,  
Resonating uproar, the sound spreading out  
Through the dark woods and across the valley  
And Burly hardly able to stand up he was laughing  
So hard, holding on to one of the porch piers,  
Throwing back his head and laughing so you  
Could hear him even above the wail of the saws,  
And that strange gleam of lights in his eyes.

### Coon Hunting

We used to go coon hunting sometimes with Burly  
On moonlit nights, you just follow the dogs  
And run and stumble, down across Little Greenhorn,  
Up over Cedar Ridge, down through Woodpecker,  
Around the back side of Screwball Hill  
Or over to Sonntag—just run after the yelping  
Dogs until dawn. Sometimes they would even  
Actually tree a coon, and Burly would put the beam  
Of the big flashlight on him (the blinking,  
Defiant eyes up in the tree, like small yellow  
Reflectors) and would shoot him with the twenty-two  
Pistol. Lena went with us of course, she  
Was supposed to be his housekeeper, her brooding  
Eyes and voluptuous body and full mouth  
Even at sixteen, which is all she was, though  
We boys of course didn't know it and wouldn't  
Have thought anything about it if we had, though  
Sometimes I admit it got bothersome having to wait  
For them a half hour at a time.

It was years  
Later when I saw Burly again. I was a teacher  
At the college by then and had gone up  
To the Fourth of July parade in Nevada City  
When there he was, a little drunk and in every  
Other way exactly as he had always been—he even  
Remembered me, knew I was a teacher, was willing  
To make allowances. I asked about coon hunting  
And he said, yes, he still did, and as we talked  
I realized something that I didn't know when  
I was a boy, that to Burly coon hunting was an art,  
One of the finest things in life. He had bought

A place down in Penn Valley—plenty of coons  
At first. Then he began thinning the ranks  
Until one night when he had treed the biggest  
Old boar coon you could imagine, he saw it wasn't  
Going to be the same after that—so he called off  
The dogs and he left the coon in the tree.

He did a lot of thinking then, and he decided  
To invent a coon-net. Blind the coon with  
The flashlight, send someone up in the tree after him,  
And bring the old coon down in the net—even take  
His picture if you want, though it's a lot of bother  
To carry a camera. He said, I've caught that  
Same old boar coon seven times now, he hates it  
Worse than death, says to himself, here comes  
That damn fool with his net again, God Almighty.

**Bill Hotchkiss**