

Capons

Across the weathered chopping block
He laid his rough-skinned hand
To measure where to kill,
Then took the fowl, trussed it,
Steadied the red-handled hatchet high
And thundered down like demons
One blurred master-stroke.

I watched
Hunched behind the dirt-caked wheel
Of the green John Deere.

He strung it from the clothesline
Dripping like a cloth rag from a red-dye vat,
Wings flapping as if determined to crash to earth.
I thought of the time I fell off my bike
And cried my way into the house streaming blood
From a split chin, yellow shirt turning orange,
But this was different. His head! His head!

Past the green pasture's fat grazing Herefords
And the smelly pigpen with its Poland China boar,
A proud Rhode Island Red strode cross the grass oblivious.

Too soon, his man's fist enclosing mine,
Red handle in my palm,
I closed my eyes in the heft of lift,
The slash of death, and felt the hot blood
Spattering our still-clasped hands.

—Jim Walker