

Grasshoppers

I walked a yellow field an August day
In bright and arid heat
That sucked the moisture from the skin
And stilled the birds—
Deterring every motion of any living thing
But grasshoppers.

They buzzed and snicked their wings
And rose in waves ahead and popped
Like corn in a heated pan.

I crossed my field again
In the low sun of January
Through blue and crusted snow that covered up
The stubble, but shrunk away
From protruding sunflower stalks,
Attesting last week's thaw.

On nearly every stalk
A grasshopper—a husk
With dry dead legs that wrapped
Around the flower base—
There since some October night
When seeking some reprieve
From autumn cold,
It climbed the highest thing
And clung to plant and life—
Like an old man gripping
Rocker arms or property
Or office to ward off coming frost.

—John Sterling Harris