

THE YEAR OF THE ROOSTER

James Cushing

Oh no, cries the man with the broom.
Oh no, cries his pregnant wife, running
office to office, clutching a basket of apples.
The summer has left them long and filigreed.
His nametag read “Nothing is cheaper than passion.”
He told me he tried to avoid thinking about what drunken Dad
told him when the first call came:

“You just died. You only think you’re looking at this
watery twilight, telling yourself you’ll wait a week.
It’s too late! Your mother lies naked on her back,
her widespread thighs observed by furious men,
and you want to cry *Escape!* but it’s too late.”

And in the second half of life
he has no one to bless or spur with fragrance.
He hears a distant pendulum, imposing sleepy laws.
Weary now of acres filled with broken vines and brown grain,
weary of the taste of how many cheap but nourishing sunsets,
he remembers stacks of poker chips, the loping sun,
a shiny blue lace dragonfly.

He remembers the carpet hopping with fleas,
wrapping his jeans in plastic.

He remembers an organic orange,
the kind that maims the mouth.
Then, a month of nothing but apples...

He picked up the heavy book
of poems, read it quickly, put it back on the display case
just as he had each day for thirty years. Above him,
skies never came down bigger or faster.

He asked a guy for a calendar. Trains, harmonicas,
crickets and frogs spat through late April twilight
leaving holes for ideas to breathe through. A perfect
night for Wagner or Cervantes, he thought, but never both.

But long ago in heaven, Wagner and Cervantes sat together
eating pastry. "Look," said Cervantes, pointing a cruller,
"Down there, in an inn, a man sits reading aloud from a book.
We must squeeze into it together, Ricardo, like unborn twins."