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Take Yourself Back

Diane Wald

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Tying Bean Strings / Robert Morgan

Hoyt Mountain rose cool over its abutments
as we worked away from the creek,
hanging not clothes but threads every
foot on the half-mile line. The clods
seemed sharp as broken glass.
One hand noosed the rough jute
to the wire like filaments the beans
would run and light with leaves, while
the other tied the lower end to twine
we'd later nail at the ground.
Our weft would trap the vines and
lead them straight at the noon
sun. Sweat bees dug and stung.
The lint of hemp and barky lumps
stuck to our sweat, rashed sunburned
shoulders. Wind took the finished rows like
hoisted sails and the field cruised
under its cloth far from harvest. I cooled
my feet in the sand near the creek.
By evening rabbits would cut loose a few panels
as they came out to feed on the young sprouts
and the spans would blow free as gossamer
in the night breeze, evade the grasping runners.
Next morning we'd find the strings tangled
on splintery poles and unravelling like yarn
in the dew, ends swollen
like brushes from wiping the clods.

Take Yourself Back / Diane Wald

Please keep these comments in sequence. I have to move
by the end of next week: the fact that time grows shorter
is just another imperative I can resent. Take yourself back
to whatever you were doing this date in 1953. My brother
hadn't been born long. I was starting school. His face

was something I'd once flail with a hairbrush, later something I wanted to kiss. Someone said, "Don't you kiss your brother goodbye?" and I was afraid that the past was coiling too quickly, felt it around my neck. I am trying to alert you to a slippery fact: that every night passes once of course, but you can usually choose where to sleep. Try that chair in the spare room. It may still be very lonely there, but you will recall tonight quite clearly then, and the sequence of surrounding dreams. If I calculate correctly sixty times three-sixty-five brings me well over twenty thousand, that many nights. I would like to remember a very great deal: even a short life has length, a short life, backwards.

Circolo Della Caccia / Peter Davison

(for Douglas Allanbrook)

Italian butchers love the shooting season.
It lasts at least six months, some places longer.
Thrushes, larks, and other speckled singers
hang up to ripen, dangling by their bloody
beaks, eyes glassy, feather coats bedraggled.
Any old bird who makes it through the season
has lasted out a war—the hunters number
twice any army Italy has mustered—
and this produces natural selection
for songlessness or silence in the woods.
Just scuff your shoe on any gravel walk
and thickets are vacated on the instant
with a desperate scramble and a chirped alarm.
Then hours go by without a glimpse of a bird,
just distant songs of sex and altercations.
You wonder why the hunters mightn't shoot
the swallows that patrol the city rivers
hell-bent as bats, or bag the swifts that twitter
above your head at cocktails on the terrace.
Though songbirds of open spaces, fields, and mountains