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The Flying Snake

Robert Morgan

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Snowlight / Robert Morgan

Grandpa knew for certain it would snow
if he went out early to grind
his coffee in the backporch mill
and saw the glow behind the
mountain steady and close
as lighted cities.

He thought snow an electrical
condition of the air, a discharge like
St. Elmo's fire on the high
peaks that spilled down and
coated everything with angelic smuts,
fleshing the limbs of a dead pine
so they smoked and flared in the
early sun, giving body to the light
after its long descent to
corposantly suffer weight
among the branches.

Stirred by shadows on the sun
and currents in the ground
the aura signalled its approach.
Before evening we'd see the wind
charged and wrestling its host of sparks.

The Flying Snake / Robert Morgan

The giant rattler that lived in
the rocks above the Gap Road
watched teams and passing
riders from its summer ledge,
almost invisible in moss.
If bothered it could drain
its black feet into a crevice
or, provoked, spring on horse or driver,
raking the neck with its
loaded fangs and flopping off

into the brush below the trace
before one had mastered
panic enough to
shoot the leg-sized whip of lightning.
Four settlers had died, and many
mules and oxen.
Even the old Cherokee formula
of singing the snake its own song
was useless if it struck before seen.
Once a posse climbed up in the cliffs
and shot a dozen small ones but
the old killer sank back
into the mountain, and seemed
to know just like a crow if one
was coming armed.
It was great-grandpa as a youth
who thought of tying his seine net
around the yoke and under the chests
of his steers, and drove standing
in the wagon with a shotgun in the hay.
That cool August noon the jarflies
sang like rattlers in the trees
and ripe huckleberries
sweetened the air.
Flying squirrels swept like bats
in the high branches of the oaks, and
way down the valley he could hear
Aunt Tildy's chickens
routed by a hawk.
Coming near the rocks he crouched
to cock the gun and let the team
nose slowly into the shivering
spots of sunlight.
He heard the cold thunder necklace fling
off the shelf above and as it caught
in the webbing by its barbs he
just had time, before it
thrashed free, to raise the
barrel and cut the jewelled blur in two.
The head piece bit a rock
and soaked the ground for inches
with venom. The tail twitched on

for hours like someone dreaming.
The two halves filled a half bushel
and he sewed the sixteen pods to his hat.
Years later he'd imagine spiders
falling from the sky like snowflakes,
and mad dogs and angels in storms,
and once in a nightmare he shot
by mistake Jesus as he came
through the east in Rapture light.

Divining/Dennis Schmitz

small world, the intricate
root protruding: imagination that makes
orchard trees
so close they knit

inevitable distortion.
what then is the sky but delayed shadow
the eye a failing

source of light?
after memory what leaf
won't seem faulty? witness poor Van Gogh
at Arles sketching real
orchards until "ideas were the eyes
of the eyes" & the dark of the mouth,

damaged night. overhead on my work-
shed the gross acacia
crawls the metal
roof though I thin
it—the West is angular & cerulean
in the limbs where the bowsaw
still hangs teeth
up.