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Gathering Hay

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Five Poems · Gregory Djanikian

GATHERING HAY

Vermont, 1982

Under a sky munificently blue,
We pack the last of the windrowed hay
Into bundles, fork and heave them skyward
Onto the pick-up and its unsteady pile.
Two acres in five hours. Seven loads.
By some, a half-day's work, though I'd
Dispute it. Back at the barn, we pitch
The hay up to the loft where already
A mountain of it has risen
Through our doings. Or rather, yours.
This is an art I have not mastered,
Has taken me twice the time to do
The half you've done, though I ache well
By any measure, enough to wonder
By what faith or will did the first
To settle here endure—Andersons, MacKensies,
Browns—who with scythe and pitchfork only
Heralded the winter in, survived, begat,
And made a life out of the stubborn land
They're buried in. It is a thought
I can't hold on to, a whispering here
And not quite here, before it passes.
For want of something better, I say,
"This last load killed my back,"
Thankful I lasted long enough to have
The ache I do, the sweet complaint.
But later, as we sit on your porch
Facing townward, the house behind us,
The stubbly field behind that, thick
Enough for your horse to graze on,
You say quietly, "It feels good

To have my hay in for the winter,”
Just that, though your eyes betray
What you keep to yourself and hidden.
It’s the old story of time and weather,
How too much water can cure a thirst
Beyond its wants, how some this summer
Have lost their first crop to the rain,
How some will lose the second, the cut hay
Rotting and fungal in the sodden fields,
How some may lose both, the farm, themselves.
You’ve timed this harvest right. Had luck.
Enough to go on for another season.
Enough, at least, to make you say,
Though ruin will in time undo us,
“It feels good.” It is enough
To sit beside you
And hear you say it.

AGAMI BEACH

Alexandria, 1955

There were the black flags flying
All along the beach and we knew
We could not swim. There was the sea
Turning too dark and churlish
And there was someone wading in
Too far and standing for a moment
Half in air, half in water.
There was the sand shifting easily
Under his heels and the current
Sweeping him out and out.
There were the cabanas and the sound
Of my sister crying and my feet
Were burning as I ran toward them
But there was my father moving already