1977

Canning Time

Robert Morgan
Bartram’s Ixia / Robert Morgan

To find in the deep
swampglow a blue
light near the ground
between pools of stagnant
ink, bright
as a fly tied with lasers,
a kind of antilight
lost for nearly two centuries
revealing itself a few
inches out of mud.
The color takes root
in the retina and
drains into recognition—
as the ground will in
a few days draw
this special candlepower
back down the stem.

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The floor was muddy with the juice of peaches
and my mother’s thumb, bandaged for the slicing,
watersobbed. She and Aunt Wessie skinned
bushels that day, fat Georgia Belles
slit streaming into the pot. Their knives
paid out limp bands onto the heap
of parings. It took care to pack the jars,
reaching in to stack the halves
firm without bruising, and lowering
the heavy racks into the boiler already
trembling with steam, the stove malignant
in heat. As Wessie wiped her face
the kitchen sweated its sweet filth.
In that hell they sealed the quickly browning
flesh in capsules of honey, making crystals
of separate air across the vacuums. The heat and pressure were enough to grow diamonds as they measured hot syrup into quarts. By supper the last jar was set on the counter to cool into isolation. Later in the night each little urn would pop as it achieved its private atmosphere and we cooled into sleep, the stove now neutral. The stones already pecked clean in the yard were free to try again for the sun. The orchard meat fixed in cells would be taken down cellar in the morning to stay gold like specimens set out and labelled, a vegetal battery we'd hook up later. The women too tired to rest easily think of the treasury they've laid up today for preservation at coffin level, down there where moth and rust and worms corrupt, a first foundation of shells to be fired at the winter's muddy back.

Woodburn / Robert Morgan

Goes out digging through underbrush, flushing thickets, throws ahead to pines and lushing runs a footlog. Shards of a castiron stove are exposed in the gully. Roots hiss and sap foams from a burning stump. I've fit flames all night with a pine limb lest their rabid spit touch the cedars. Fire walks on outcrops and rhododendrons to the summit where an