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Capons

Jim Walker

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Capons

Across the weathered chopping block
 He laid his rough-skinned hand
 To measure where to kill,
 Then took the fowl, trussed it,
 Steadied the red-handled hatchet high
 And thundered down like demons
 One blurred master-stroke.

I watched
 Hunched behind the dirt-caked wheel
 Of the green John Deere.

He strung it from the clothesline
 Dripping like a cloth rag from a red-dye vat,
 Wings flapping as if determined to crash to earth.
 I thought of the time I fell off my bike
 And cried my way into the house streaming blood
 From a split chin, yellow shirt turning orange,
 But this was different. His head! His head!

Past the green pasture's fat grazing Herefords
 And the smelly pigpen with its Poland China boar,
 A proud Rhode Island Red strode cross the grass oblivious.

Too soon, his man's fist enclosing mine,
 Red handle in my palm,
 I closed my eyes in the heft of lift,
 The slash of death, and felt the hot blood
 Spattering our still-clasped hands.

—Jim Walker