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The Age of Wonders

John Sterling Harris

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The Age of Wonders

In those days there were marvels and I saw them:  
The lombardy poplars along the street  
That were even-spaced and all the same size;  
The hollyhocks that made into ladies in petal gowns;  
The six-sided tiles in the barbershop floor  
That lay in straight rows in every direction;  
The horse-drawn wagons of gravel that dumped  
By turning the floor boards on edge  
So the gravel sifted through;  
Sam Lee, the blacksmith, who could shape  
Red iron on an anvil with a hammer;  
The seeds in apricot pits that tasted like almonds;  
And baby rabbits were born without hair.

A horse could scratch his back by rolling over  
And show he was old enough to ride;  
Pine boards had a grain and could be split  
Along their length but not across;  
A dog’s nose was cold, a cow’s nose wet,  
And a horse’s nose was velvet;  
Wood shavings curled as they came from the plane;  
A bicycle rim without its spokes lost all its strength;  
Frost patterns on windows grew like fern leaves;  
And I could bend a bar of plumber’s lead  
With my bare hands;  
The striders that skated on the water  
Sank when I added soap;  
Bert Weight could scribe a line  
Across a piece of glass  
Then break it absolutely straight;  
And old Erb Matson could whistle two notes at once.

And thus I learned how the world was made  
In forms and laws, results and beauty  
From what the wonders were.

—John Sterling Harris