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Cutting the Last Hay

Warren Hatch

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Cutting the Last Hay

She stands on a tractor that pulls a swather, floating,
 careening softly over purple heads of alfalfa,
 silver under the harvest moon.
 She balances on the grating over the axle,
 her arm across her father's shoulders.
 They orbit a vast field, spiraling in to its undisclosed center.
 At each corner she and her father observe a station of their faith.
 She pulls the hand clutch to her, and he disengages the swather blade,
 spinning the wheel to pivot the tractor, not braking.
 This is the rhythm of their worship. North, East, South, West.
 Sometimes she leans against the wheelguard
 on the long passages between corners.
 The metal of the wheelguard sweats with dewfall.
 There she traces fine rust etchings that seem to whisper to her.
 Sometimes, the field ahead of the cutter bar grows a furrow—
 a running pheasant.
 Her father brakes for pheasants when he sees them—look there, he says.
 Often she sees only bent alfalfa closing on their passing.
 They never fly—and some crouch before the blade.
 She considers the moon.
 At times she feels vertigo or dozes.
 Several times she dozes, sometimes missing her part with the clutch.
 And on one long passage, her father stops,
 takes both her hands in his one and swings her free of the wheel,
 to the ground.
 She crosses the ditch. A meager fall stream speaks in its bottom.
 She follows it to a weir gate
 where the water is high enough to drink with grace.
 She is tired and has not reached the center,
 but she is glad to have seen pheasants running,
 cleaving the fields under a harvest moon.

—Warren Hatch

Warren Hatch won the 1995 Eisteddfod Crown Competition.