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Coon Island: Two Poems in Dedication

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Coon Island: Two Poems in Dedication

after Heaney, in memory of my father

Ed Madden

I. Rose of Sharon

There was a sunlit absence,
a chill despite the sun up
and the hot wind,
the hyacinths sunk

back into the grass,
and the daffodils—
the bulbs he dozed
across the yard

with a bushhog—gone too.
So, what was left was just
a Rose of Sharon
no bigger than a weed,

leaning with the weight
of three blooms. She stood
beside it, that June,
in her church clothes.

Now she sits in the quiet
house, or reads, or turns
toward the chair
where he used to sit

and read.
Here is his Bible,
a slip of paper
still marking some verse,

and here is love
like the woodbox stocked
with small logs,
ready for what's ahead.

II. The Angelus

All around the house there are raccoons,
as if their image could deflect the history
of what happened, of whose farms and homes
were here before my grandpa bought the soggy
bottom fields between the backed-up Cache
and the dredged line of Rimmel Ditch.
But here above her chair: two peasants, his cap
in his hands, her hands clasped, a church
on the horizon. Between the couple lies
a basket of potatoes, which masks the small
coffin Millet painted over, the skies
dark with hidden loss, the bells that toll
the difference between what we see and know.
Even from this distance, I hear them now.