

# The Roaring\*

by Rhonda Pettit

Gorie was certain of more than a farm boy  
 had the years to prove, but it came to him anyway  
 in petals and thorns, ridge rock and creek beds.  
 Opposites didn't attract; they revealed.  
 The legs and bobs and feathers, how right they looked  
 sitting next to broad fedoras in long sedans  
 driving across the magazines sent home  
 by Uncle Frank, who'd left for factory work  
 in Cincinnati. The T's where long, slender necks  
 met collar bones, the caverns beneath them,  
 the other landscapes he imagined there.  
 The tsking scowls of mothers in the church yard  
 after service, their dresses fading prints  
 too soon to be sewn into aprons  
 or pajamas. The thin lips stretched across  
 slowly shaking heads of farmer fathers  
 walking up from fields and barns at dusk  
 wondering what could follow such dust-bitten  
 exhaustion and be better? Gorie knew it now:  
 Something was happening in cities a farm couldn't grow.  
 Crops that needed no soil. Herds that tended  
 themselves. Hungers that made the grass and grain  
 mere words in old poems his mother clipped  
 from the *Falmouth Outlook*. This was the kind  
 of revelation that could wear you out before  
 you had a chance to live it. He was feeling  
 the nineteen-twenties in his adolescent blood  
 but living far from the roaring and the jazz.  
 He couldn't hold a note with both hands  
 but that didn't stop him from singing *Show Me  
 the Way to Go Home* away from his elders,  
 imagining what that city home might be.  
 He had to settle for that while the thick  
 quiet of a farm evening was nothing  
 but eternity, its box of open country  
 enclosing him. All he wanted was Now  
 But Not Here, a longing that thinned his bones  
 as he stared beyond the cow-studded ridge  
 north to the horizon, a thousand ridges away.

*\*The next three poems are part of a sequence-in-progress that explores a character's journey from a traditional rural boyhood to Modernity in the mid-20th century.*