

Masthead Logo

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# Produce

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meet each other bent toward the same light  
they might discover they share  
a language, and in speaking it open the mouth  
of something they'll have to feed for years.  
See how close and warm they sleep, though.  
This is an old story, and people will pay  
to hear about it, this falling—  
call it waking, call it a long release—  
into love. It has to do  
with the storage of the heart, the hunger  
we're willing to risk on the outside  
chance of getting home.

## PRODUCE

No mountains or ocean, but we had orchards  
in northwestern Ohio, roadside stands  
telling what time of summer: strawberries,  
corn, apples—and festivals to parade  
the crops, a Cherry Queen, Sauerkraut Dance.  
Somebody'd block off a street in town,  
put up beer tents and a tilt-a-whirl.

Our first jobs were picking berries.  
We'd ride out early in the back of a pickup—  
kids my age, and migrants, and old men  
we called bums in sour flannel shirts  
smash-stained with blueberries, blackberries,  
raspberries. Every fall we'd see them  
stumbling along the tracks, leaving town.

*Vacationland*, the signs said, from here to Lake Erie.  
When relatives drove up we took them to see  
The Blue Hole, a fenced-in bottomless pit  
of water we paid to toss pennies into—  
or Prehistoric Forest, where, issued machine guns,

we rode a toy train among life-size replicas  
of brontosaurus and triceratops.

In winter the bean field behind our house  
would freeze over, and I'd skate across it  
alone late evenings, sometimes tripping  
over stubble frozen above the ice.

In spring the fields turned up arrowheads, bones.  
Those slow-plowing glaciers left it clean and flat here,  
scraping away or pushing underground what was before them.

### NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS

Grant Street was one long Sunday afternoon  
in February or March, a few yards of brown grass  
thinning and matted or rubbed away hard.  
Our house stayed dark with my mother's pleurisy,  
and it made me angry, the way she kept trying  
to raise herself up to clean rooms or fix supper.  
Then she'd lie down again on the couch, covering  
herself tight with two blankets, chilling.  
It was Sunday afternoon, foggy, and my father  
was playing his Hank Williams record.  
He's dozing at the end of the couch, his hand  
on my mother's feet, and I go outside to sit  
on the porch. Mr. Carter from across the street  
pulls up grinning on his Harley and asks me  
if I want to take a ride, and I do, but I don't  
like his eyes, and besides I'm not allowed to,  
and shake my head no. I'm ten or eleven  
with a younger brother and sister somewhere,  
but my seeing is short-ranged and telescoped—  
cardboard taped into the Carters' front window,  
the busted taillight on our old white Comet,  
yesterday's *Register*, "The World At Your Doorstep."