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Japanese Beetles

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Japanese Beetles

In the garden, their skeletons eye me as I urge
the shrimp-pink shoots of new growth.
By the dozen I pinch and kill
beetles off the tea roses, their armor
of glazed oil, their eyes rusted shut. Seized
with early morning killing, the blood fever
of a sleepless night, I crush their exoskeletons. I leave them
with the pruned, faulted blossoms to dry sun-hard.

However hard you squeeze
I squeeze back till that becomes
a kind of contest I cannot win,
a plunge into you with all
the fervor manifested
between bodily sheaves. I swim
against hard flesh until it gives,
until it lessens, drinking you,
and even that is not enough.

I perfect my move:
a dig in the cunted heart of blossom,
flick for a moving target,
and then that quick satisfying pinch
between thumb and first finger.
The crunch of soft organs suctioning
shell, the crush as eye slides over, meets
other eye, disassembling. Our casualties.
They fall at my feet like petals, as delicate

as you, careful not to use teeth
because it is summer,
because we live in a town with four churches.
I think your touch has more
to do with the whole of my body,
no tattooed hip
roses of youth, no new flesh holes dark
with bitter metal, no, not even ears.

Frame

When you leave with my mark
on your flesh, I lie in bed with the sheets
off. I can hear them returning
through the dark of the garden
and the tar-slick patches in the screen,
widening the wire holes, tunneling
the tea roses, the Japanese beetles,
eating me whole.

—Alison Stine '00