

# Chickamauga

By Charles Wright

Dove-twirl in the tall grass.

End-of-summer glaze next door

On the gloves and split ends of the conked magnolia tree.

Work sounds: truck back-up beep, wood tin-hammer, cicada, fire horn.

History handles our past like spoiled fruit.

Mid-morning, late-century light

calicoed under the peach trees.

Fingers us here. Fingers us here and here.

The poem is a code with no message:

The point of the mask is not the mask but the face underneath,

Absolute, incommunicado,

unhoused and peregrine.

The gill net of history will pluck us soon enough

From the cold waters of self-contentment we drift in

One by one

into its suffocating light and air.

Structure becomes an element of belief, syntax

And grammar a catechist,

Their words what the beads say,

words thumbed to our discontent.

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Source: The Poetry Anthology, 1912-2002 (2002)