

Happy Hour

By Lee Ann Roripaugh

I always forget the name,
delphinium,
even though it was the flower

the hummingbirds
loved best. They came in pairs—sleek,
emerald-bright

heads, the clockwork machinery
of their blurred wings
thrumming swift, menacing engines.

They slipped their beaks.
as if they were swizzle sticks, deep
into the blue

throat of delphinium and sucked
dry the nectar-
chilled hearts like goblets full of sweet,

frozen daiquiri.
I liked to sit on the back porch
in the evenings,

watching them and eating Spanish
peanuts, rolling
each nut between thumb and forefinger

to rub away
the red salty skin like brittle
tissue paper,

until the meat emerged gleaming,
yellow like old
ivory, smooth as polished bone.

And late August,
after exclamations of gold
flowers, tiny

and bitter, the caragana
trees let down their
beans to ripen, dry, and rupture—

at first there was
the soft drum of popcorn, slick with oil,
puttering some-

where in between seed, heat, and cloud.
Then sharp cracks like cap
gun or diminutive fireworks,

caragana
peas catapulting skyward like
pellet missiles.

Sometimes a meadowlark would lace
the night air with
its elaborate melody,

rippling and sleek
as a black satin ribbon. Some-
times there would be

a falling star. And because
this happened in
Wyoming, and because this was

my parents' house,
and because I'm never happy
with anything,

at any time, I always wished
that I was some-
where, anywhere else, but here.

Lee Ann Roripaugh, "Happy Hour" from *Year of the Snake*. Copyright © 2004 by Lee Ann Roripaugh. Reprinted by permission of Southern Illinois University Press.
Source: *Year of the Snake* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004)