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.


Source: Year of the Snake (Southern Illinois University Press, 2004)