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

rippling and sleek
as a black satin ribbon. Sometimes 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)