

# 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

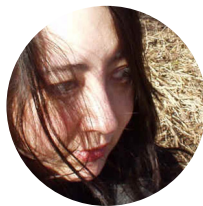
a falling star. And because  
this happened in  
Wyoming, and because this was

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.  
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A Wyoming native and second-generation Japanese American, Roripaugh studied music, earning a BM in piano performance and an MM in music history before earning an MFA in creative writing from Indiana University, Bloomington. In 2015 she was appointed poet laureate of South Dakota.