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. 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 somewhere, anywhere else, but here.


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