

Red Cross Extra

The unpaved old-town alleys of Hailey, Idaho, are buggy-paths
Through lilac. Great lilacs househigh crowd
Roughwood shacks and sheds that stink dust and resin. Cats
Softwalk past goofy stalks of hollyhocks with blooms buzzed
Dusty by reciprocating businesses of bees. Ruts, sunflowers,
Sage, hot dust, plankgap peeps at gardens: tall sprays of berries,
Green groundburst bombs of squash.

Grannies live alongside, in old houses rich in curtains, doilies,
Thingful rooms. In the Grannies' sheds, the dusty
Sunlight rods in through cracked gumwebbed windows.
Behind the pasteboard boxes: old tools, button-packed jars,
Folds of old kids' clothes and ribbons, spider ruins.

And deep behind, old waferwood crates ooze nitroglycerine,
Brittle bills of sale from gone lumberyards tacked on top.
Dynamite. Du Pont Red Cross Extra: smooth cool cylinders
Hefty with juice, in immaculate rows dolled down
Beneath waxpaper sheets.

Now, from their back doors, at once emerge all of Hailey's Grannies:
Liverish knobknuckled hands and quizzical knob-lensed glasses
Moving furiously alleyward on rubberpod shaky-foot canes and walkers.
Pissed off, muttering, shuffling shedward past their raspberries.

*Fetch out that old powder in their somewhere, I've a mind
To blow up every darned one of those
Fool morphadites these days
With that loud so-called music they play,
The zoning, that AIDS they have, all those Japanese
Automobiles, and those Mountain Bikes and surfboards on there
And those tights they wear.*

*How they get those things on
I have no idea.
And those rubber string things on their glasses,
Those phone machines and such.
And all our Boys who didn't come home from the War, lost
For this.*

And so the Grannies of the alleys, who see clearly that nothing
Better is likely to result from all of this, pry back creaky doors and
Clop their grannyshoes left, then right up into their sheds,
Swat aside the button-jars to rattle out the little zinc-cornered fiberboard
Boxes of Century patent detonating caps, unhand the stiff, tarry skeins
Of good safety fuse, and fetch out the old Red Cross Extra.
Time to knit, to sew.

They all are defling lapwork now, lips shaping trim words,
Rocking in the light of the cracked shed windows,
Busying. They crimp blasting caps to lengths of fuse
With crisp nips of their neat dentures.
They count and pierce the Red Cross Extra sticks

With crochet hooks and knitting needles, poke and tuck and
Pat detonators, then plait the strands of fuse. Finally, done.
Squinting close, they jabscratch matches, redheads,
On Diamond matchboxes, cluck *Tsk!* at the spitpuff
Brimstone fizzing from the sputting fireheads and

Bust off such a righteous blast in this Godforsaken
Valley that it peels the tar off all the roads,
Shoots shredded lilacs clear to Boise
And sticks scorched doilies to the moon.

*Now, take up all this good dirt and sage from this old place.
Collect the dear green rain scent of sage, gather up the
Perfect smell of my every gone child and
Send it away, with the good violet air of lilacs off in a river of lovely wind
Out of the world, out past the vapor trails,
Way past whatever damned empty room in space
The fool world will hold tomorrow in.*

*Better now to gather all of us, old berries past our
Best, into our own aprons before we spoil all the way, before
We have to spade us in, bury us who alone remember how
We and all the world smelled and tasted when
It was right. When it was all right,
When we were fresh. ■*