

## 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. ■*