

## Sugar Candy

Edward Hamlin

Little Randy has a name for storms  
that dog you through the day  
clearing their throats now and then  
in the manner of phlegmy old men  
who hint at criticism but  
will not speak their minds:  
Grumblerstorms he calls them,  
and a better name I cannot imagine.  
This one's dogged us since dawn,  
cluttering the mauve and iron South  
with a drowsy rain.

We spread the road out mile by mile,  
smoothing the bland macadam  
like a hand over a mare's coat,  
the stroke of an old familiar,  
the glow of a friend.  
We know this place, these highways  
from many years of passage,  
many journeys to and from  
our shifting home.

In weather like this we cover ground.  
You sit with your Tolstoy as the old battlefields reel by,  
I steer by a finger and dream of Antietam,  
Bull Run, all the old killing grounds,  
knowing just enough history to be horrified.  
Between these towns the fields give solace as generously as any English fen  
but the soil is rich in gore.  
The red clay of Carolina, loosed in rivulets by the rain,  
bears more than one sort of iron.  
Tolstoy's Napoleon would have known it at a glance.

Then  
White Corn doz. ears/\$ snaps past  
yanking me to the present  
and something presses my foot to the brake

homely as hunger

and you and I are skidding out  
of control across  
    two  
        lanes of light  
    traffic  
toward the drenched farmstand and its rows upon rows  
upon rows of White Corn doz. ears/\$

a frantic scattering of women children gravel

and we wheel right into them  
splintering the wooden stand  
before tumbling  
    once  
        through a sea  
of unshucked corn  
somehow, milagro de Jesus!, injuring  
no one.

Two hours later, after police and paramedics  
and settling with the farmer (a true gentleman),  
we add our detritus of near-death to the fields:

Mingled with calcified bullets and splinters of bone, with powder pouches  
and bits of grey and blue cloth,  
is the sugar candy of our windshield glass,  
the wreckage of our own pointless campaign.

Without a slap to rouse  
*cruelly!*  
one might have died long ago.