

*Josiah Walbarger, Pecan Springs,  
Texas, August 1883*

he said

it felt  
like thunder

ripping up  
over

the curve  
of his skull

then down  
across

his forehead

as that Comanche  
knife peeled

his scalp  
from

his bone

*Cirrus Clouds*

fibrous and feathered  
they whisk

their ice  
crystals into  
sunset

like tufts  
of raw  
silk

twirled  
together

*Dallas Farmer's Market*

bulges with mangos  
and papaya

and yellow-meated watermelon

surrounded by the florescent  
froth of  
pink

azaleas

bumble bees  
blitz into  
the

purple  
perfume

of wisteria

draped  
around

Rush Hour

*Houston Street Bag Lady*

like a  
hummingbird

feeding

hollyhock to  
hollyhock

she bobs  
and darts

garbage can to  
garbage can

down  
the street

sifting  
sorting

looking for aluminum

## *The Bag Lady's Ode*

think of me  
whenever you

empty a can  
of Diet Coke

read Newsweek

or wipe  
with toilet paper

think of me  
pawing the dank depths  
of Safeway's dumpster

for wilted lettuce  
stale rolls  
and molded cheese

I am the  
grey bundle

trundling it all

along the Miracle Mile  
in a Kroger cart  
looking for a

safe place  
to curl

the night

while you  
in your creamy satin

negligee are  
home

fluffing  
your

down pillows

*Rosetta*

she was gutsy  
and built like a brick outhouse  
and so blonde  
and she'd just had another baby  
her fourth  
and we were having a revival  
at First Baptist  
where daddy was preacher  
with a visiting evangelist  
a real hellfire and brimstone man  
and he was preaching that night, hammer down  
when she started  
undoing  
now I was up in the choir loft  
and I could see what she was fixing to do  
and I thought  
Oh Lord!  
but she just kept unbuttoning  
and pretty soon she  
sorta popped out  
all over  
and that old preacher was going ninety miles per  
when he looked down at her  
nursing that baby

on the front  
row

and he had false teeth  
and those teeth come  
plum out of his mouth

well, he caught them  
in his hand  
and shoved them back in

I thought sure he was going to choke  
but he just went right on  
preaching



## *Stripping Cotton Blues*

Now you listen to me real good  
hear what I'm a saying

Well it was back in 1941  
right after we first come out here  
and I was the Crew Boss  
only black boss they had

and I had me about a hundred and fifty men, good  
men  
brought most of them all the way from Alabama  
clean to Stamford, Texas  
with me

and I was buying sacks  
stacks and stacks of new sacks  
five hundred sacks a day  
every day

hauling them out to the fields

and I worked them men  
blacks and whites  
Mexicans and Indians  
they was all the same to me

sunup to sundown

but I was fair  
done right by them men

and they done right by me  
five hundred sacks a day  
full of cotton

now that's a lot  
of cotton

all done by hand  
not nothing easy about that

but that's how we done it  
back then

just a stripping cotton

*Alzheimer's: What Year?*

like the scarlet  
flash of

cardinal

that flits  
telephone line to  
oak limb

the thought  
paused in

my brain

but flew on  
before it  
reached

my lips

*Cirrostratus Clouds*

fluff white  
across the  
west Texas horizon  
like a goose down  
comforter  
coming  
unstuffed

*The Buzzard Roost*

every day  
it looms

silver above  
the west Texas plains

a crimson strobed  
cell phone  
tower

feathered with  
the black

of turkey  
vulture

settled in  
at sun

down

## *The Fort Worth Queen of Cans*

Her 1976 red  
Chevy Impala  
stacked roof  
high  
with  
crumpled cans of  
Coke  
Dr. Pepper  
Pepsi  
Big Red  
green beans  
hominy  
spinach  
potatoes  
tomatoes  
rutabagas  
sauerkraut  
peas and beets  
leaves precisely  
enough room  
behind the steering wheel  
for her  
stocking  
capped  
self  
to squeeze  
in

## *Blackstrap Molasses*

juice squeezed  
from fat sorghum

stalks

boiled  
and condensed

becomes a  
shimmered

sweetness  
rippling

over blueberry  
pancakes

and butter

*Sunset in the West Texas  
Wild Mountains*

five dragonflies  
do a square  
dance

over the garden

full of tomatoes  
cucumbers  
zucchini  
and okra  
pods

in the distance  
a deer  
steps

from the grove  
of live  
oaks

lifts her head

then jumps  
the fence

into the black-eyed peas



*Crescent Moon in Texas*

the sliver  
of warm gold

rocks over  
Lake Brownwood

slips into  
the cedar brakes

leaving glittered  
water washing

up onto limestone slabs

*Rusted Red Ford Pick-Up Truck Full  
of Turkeys on Farm to Market 1178*

caged in  
the bed

feathers  
ruffed

by the parched wind

toe  
nails

claw

for a  
hold

that never  
happens

## *Texas Grasshoppers*

mile  
after mile after  
mile of west Texas  
swarms with  
orange  
and black  
and brown  
and blue  
heads  
bobbing  
nodding  
up and  
down  
as each silvered  
proboscis  
sticks into  
sandy soil  
sips  
oiled molasses  
up through  
cap rock  
to separate  
from salted water  
to store  
in empty tank batteries

## *The Roughneck Woes*

“It’s at night  
always at night  
if you’re gonna  
have  
trouble  
that’s when it’s  
gonna happen  
usually about three in the morning  
you’re seldom disappointed  
especially if  
you’re  
pullin’  
pipe.”