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You Can't Be Serious

Poems by
Ronald Wallace



A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

You Can't Be Serious

Poems by
Ronald Wallace



PARALLEL PRESS 2015

Parallel Press

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Author’s Note: The last words of each line of each poem, read vertically top to bottom, form a haiku by a classic Japanese master. The haiku that are embedded in the poems listed in brackets below are drawn from the following sources:

Website: thegreenleaf.co.uk/Japanese_Masters.htm. [“The Boy Scout Laws”; “Bully for You, Mitt Romney”; “Dinosaurs”; “Scarecrows”; “The General on the Ground”; “One Word Alone”; “Being Charlton Heston”; “At the Singapore Zoo”; “Dispatching the Chicken”; “A History of Darkness”; “Bellwether”; “Tut-Tut”; “Bush Warblers”; “Stop Me if You’ve Heard This One”; “You Bet Your Life”; “Dadaist Sonnet”; “Singapore Fling”; “Parsley”; “Open Reading”; “Summer Olympics”; “Little God”; “More Cows!”]

Sam Hamill, *The Sound of Water: Haiku by Basho, Buson, Issa, and Other Poets* (Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1995). [“The Dark Knight Rises”; “Amid the Alien Corn”; “Honestly”; “Transformers: The Ride”]

Robert Hass, *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, & Issa, edited and with an Introduction by Robert Hass* (New Jersey: the Ecco Press, 1994): p. 13 “On the way to the outhouse”; p. 31 “A calm moon”; p. 44 “From all these trees.” Introduction and selection copyright, 1994 by Robert Hass. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers. [“Homo”; “Metaphor”; “Pilobolus”]

Jane Reichhold: *Basho: The Complete Haiku* (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, Ltd., 2008). Reprinted by permission of Kodansha USA, Inc. Excerpted from *Basho: The Complete Haiku* by Jane Reichhold, 2008, 2013. [“Duck Tales”; “War War War War”; “Yard Sale with Houyhnhnm”; “Casablanca”; “The Wisdom of the Old”; “You Can’t Be Serious”; “The House Always Wins”]

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for Margaret

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1. A History of Darkness

*The temple bell stops
but the sound keeps on coming
out of the flowers*

—*Matsuo Basho*

Duck Tales

after Basho

I wished my voice were stronger, more resonant. If it were, I could speak with more authority. I could win friends, influence people. If I only had a voice! I remember seeing Donald Duck in a Disney cartoon, lamenting his errant quack. A good rich, baritone would save him, he thought. A voice pill that he bought from a huckster actually worked! I wished I had that pill! If I did, I thought, I would sing like Dylan Thomas, I would chant like a real man chants. It worked for Donald, until it didn't and he reverted back to a duck. The trick was, you had to keep buying pills. So, no cherry sweet syllables lilted for us. No windfall blossoms. And yet, we'll natter. No matter the light die and scatter.

The Boy Scout Laws

after Issa

Friday nights my dying father dropped me off. Don't
be such a baby! he would say. Sing
a different tune! Make me proud of you!
And there I'd be, a tenderfoot among the rowdy
Eagle Scouts of Troop 432, that cloud of insects
swarming in the beastly St. Louis heat. For the
life of me I couldn't see a reason in the world
to be there. Did he think that it would teach me will
power? Make a man of me? Did he expect to get
a merit badge for sacrifice, think it was better
for healthier fathers to father me, to school me in
the Boy Scout Laws, as the hoodlum troop went about its
mayhem business? Fine. I'd learn to be on my own.
Though once he came back early. I remember that time.

Homo

after Basho

My friends all called them *homos*. So did I. A few of us tried *faggots*, *queers*. It was the calm and quiet 1950s. We thought it was hilarious to moon them with our taunts. After school, walking fast, we'd razz them: *fairy, fruit, go home!* we'd say. And *morphodite, pansy, perve!* The thought that we ourselves just might be gay was simply unthinkable. We knew *we* were all boy; beneath our tough exterior no frightened poof or pansy lurked, no swish or queen. By branding them we proved our certain manhood, the only way we knew. Now the memory comes howling down the years. What's become of the queers, of the boys I might have secretly thought of as foxes?

Bully for You, Mitt Romney

after Issa

We held the gay boy down and cut his hair. Hey, it was fifty years ago, and we didn't know, you know, that he was gay. It was just a prank. There is nothing more to it. He's dead by now, anyway. Do you think I'd do that today? Well, of course not! Look at this smile. You can see it wouldn't swat a flea. Let's have some other questions. Marriage? The union of one man, one woman. We don't want to fly in the face of sacred conventions. Abortion? It wrings my heart to see an innocent fetus murdered, his teenage mother bereft. Let's leave it in God's hands. The elderly, the indigent? Give them work! If they're on the dole, they'll never be useful. The gay boy? On bended knee he came on to us. We gave him a knee.

Dinosaurs

after Sogi (and Senator Todd Akin)

In cases of legitimate rape a woman, however, can always block a pregnancy. That's the low-down. We read it in a book. So give us one reason to support abortion. A woman may even enjoy a rape if it's consensual. Be honest, many women lie and claim it was rape to get themselves off the hook. That is simply a fact. Those of you who keep holding liberal beliefs, remember: thinking only of oneself is a mortal sin. Human life is sacred. In cases of legitimate rape you'll never sway us from the truth. From the dinosaurs that graced the Ark, through the six thousand years that is Earth's history, life has always been imperative!

Scarecrows

after Basho

Get the goddamn government out of our faces, I say! We all know the poor should fend for themselves. Would you have us subsidize them? That would be like throwing money away. We only expect them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps like we did. Use some common sense: put them on the dole and the lazy and shiftless will just stand around like scarecrows in a fallow field. If they want to wear their tattered clothes, I say let them. I believe in the good old American virtues: hard work and gumption is what clothes the needy. We need tax breaks for the wealthy in this economy. We need the job creators. In this economy, yes, we need the very rich. It's midnight in America. Why don't the homeless just come in from the cold.

The Dark Knight Rises

after Basho

In Aurora, Colorado, a lone gunman awakened the nation's attention by opening fire at the unsuspecting audience of the midnight showing of *Batman: The Dark Knight Rises*. By dying his hair red, and wearing black, he mimicked the Joker. When the theater-goers first heard the sound of the two Glock pistols, of the Remington 12-gauge, of the Smith and Wesson AR-15 assault rifle, before the blood began to flood the theater like water, they thought it was fun, not a nightmare that should jar the politicians into finally talking of cracking down on offenders, toughening gun laws to keep this from happening again. The President expressed condolences. The next day the nation moved on. We put it on ice.

The General on the Ground Answers with Metaphor

after Basho

You say you're tired of harvesting war after war? A
pox on war? You say wars are as plentiful as grass
and you want to plant no more wars to feed us or pillow
our weary heads? You say war's prolific fruit is
bitter? Better to let the land lie fallow? The
cash crop wither and die? Really? That's the best
you can do? I say we need to keep planting, to
clear cut the forests, mow down the prairies, use
every available acreage to meet our demand. When
push comes to shove, we need more refugees coming
to keep the business growing. Leave the work to
them so we can sit back and enjoy the awesome view.
It's only natural. War is like the cherry
orchard in April: spring-loaded, exploding in blossoms.

War War War War

after Basho

Repeated over and over a word grows meaningless. A word like *war*. Say it for each blade of grass in the glade. Lie down with it. Use it for a pillow: *war war war war war war war war war war war war*. Is that enough to do it? If not, repeat the word some more. *War war war war*. It's best to keep repeating it. *War war war war*. To bore it silly. *War war war war*. To use it to death and more and more *war war* and when you think you're done with *war*, no coming back to it any more, sing *war war war* to end the *war*, so even the few who view things differently won't harvest it in cherry season, this fruit that sets when peace blossoms.

One Word Alone

after Buson

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then just which picture would that be? How many Guernicas to equal the horror of war? How many Durers to say the same thing? How many Dadaists to make the same point again and again? I say that one word is worth a thousand pictures. Take the word “home” or “love” or “peace.” What inimitable images that word can call up. Or “neighbor,” “compadre,” “friend,” one word at a time in the museum of sorrows, one word on the canvas of regret, one word that comes alone, maimed, on its knees, begging for you to desist, is worth more than the picture imprisoned in its frame, so terribly, horribly beautiful, so wonderfully, pleasantly grave. Give me one word set on the windowsill to cool.

Being Charlton Heston

after Basho

A woman once mistook me for Charlton Heston. Never in a million years could that be, I thought. To think of myself as Michelangelo—maybe. To think of myself as Ben-Hur or Moses—okay. To see yourself as better than yourself—like Robert Redford as the Sundance Kid, Ron Howard as Richie Cunningham, someone you identify with—fine. But Charlton Heston? Someone who said, “Political correctness is tyranny with manners,” who did everything he could to take us back to the apes, is not my idea of a role model. “You don’t at all count if you’re white and God-fearing and straight,” he told a festival audience, and “from my cold dead hands” he said as President of the NRA. To be mistaken for Charlton Heston? The whole country, these days, it seems, is. God save our souls.

At the Singapore Zoo

after Issa

We're watching the elephants move in slow motion. Ah, how they lumber patiently at their work, rolling the great logs into the moat and back out again. The sad look in their ancient eyes seems the only expression they know as the white-clad trainers have them bow on their knees for our appreciation. Easily pleased, the crowd moves on to see, with our own eyes, the naked mole rats "roll in their own poop and pee,"(of course!) to keep us smiling. The Komodo dragon that looks like a Muppet but eats its own young! The caged cassowary, that great Papua New Guinea bird that can be traded for a woman! We stand there, envying our own evolution. How little we resemble the animals! How we flit through their zoo like a butterfly!

Dispatching the Chicken

after Issa

We tie her feet together, hang her from
the oak tree, upside down. We'd read that that
would be humane, would hypnotize her, the old
hen grow submissive, die a happy woman.
Just take an awl, the book said, place it on
the beak, thrust it quickly up into the
brain. A piece of cake. A walk on the beach.
She stares us in the eyes, unblinking. Dusk
is coming on. The awl. And terror pours
forth in a cascade of cries, ringing out
across the farmyard, through the woods, across
the lake. Chickens' brains are small! The
awl misses again and again. The evening
is upside down. It pierces us in waves.

Yard Sale with Houyhnhnm

after Basho

They parked the dumpster in the barnyard, loaded with years of detritus—rusted fence posts snarled with old barbed wire, scrap lumber, window frames, brushwood, torn shingles, paint cans, broken furniture, glass—the now useless leavings of a life. The neighbor's horse, grazing in the pasture across the road, returns again and again in his placid Swiftean nobility to watch the hapless human couple wading through the few yard sale remains like workers in a rice field harvesting what little they can from a paddy that's mostly well-picked over. They'll be transplanting themselves to some smaller, darker place, like casks of wine set aside to age in history's cellar, casks of wine that no one now will recognize as wine.

Metaphor

after Basho

I'm bound, costive, backed up, blocked. I'm sitting on the commode, or shall we just flat out call it the toilet, or can, or john, or crapper, or, if you go way back to my childhood, the "toity," the potty, the privy, or, to mince words, convenience, or closet, or throne, or perhaps the little boy's room or gents or latrine or even the outhouse which I built at my country retreat. O where is the poop, the stool, the manure, the feces, the excrement, the white noise of scat, of spoor, of road apple, of droppings, of dung, of the five varieties of night soil you can find on the Bristol stool chart: lumpy, sausagey, moonflower smooth, soft blob and liquidy, the good shit as seen by the experts? Of course, this is all a metaphor, and by now I've gone where the sun don't shine, by torchlight.

A History of Darkness

after Sogi

Katie Paterson's "History of Darkness," a photo exhibit that purports to depict images of the cosmos that question Man's attempts to represent the 13.8-billion-year life span of the universe, a photo exhibit that is comprised of ten all-black prints that look like nothing but pure darkness, draws me in. While others may want a more comfortable representation, I find this stark dream enticing. What if the universe we think we see is nothing? If, as we look back in time to the big bang, what we see is what we want to see, meaning just what we create with our art or technology, our version now no better than Ptolemy's earth-centered universe we've come to spurn. Should we turn to Copernicus and Hubble, or Sogi, to guide us through time and space to the only darkness we know?

Bellwether

after Basho

A neighbor we barely knew has died. The daffodils and crocuses ring their temple bells. A day too warm for March—a bellwether day. The redwings pull out all the stops, the grackles gang up, a cacophony in the plum tree, but the neighbor we barely knew has died. The minister talks about “blessing and mercy,” the sound of his voice, describing a “better place,” keeps the birdsong out. In what universe the Lamb of God? On what planet the Sins of the World? Lord, I’m coming to believe in the bluebird beatitudes, to tease out that eternal life has nothing to do with a heaven of harping angels, has nothing to do with us. The neighbor we barely knew has died. Life flowers.

2. You Can't Be Serious

*Not even a hat
and cold rain falling on me
tut-tut think of that*

—*Matsuo Basho*

Casablanca

after Basho

My passion and happiness seem to have left me. O where are those two old friends when I really need them? Is this the end of a beautiful relationship? The two of them might as well be on the moon, I'm so alone. When Humphrey Bogart left the scene, it wasn't to retreat into a monkish temple where no Ingrid Bergman could ever ring his bell. He still had Louie, and they hadn't sunk to silence and self-pity. Oh, it was sad to watch them walk away arm in arm on the tarmac and out of our lives, as if the bottom had fallen out. But couldn't we keep something of their stoic self-denial? O romantic moon! The night is dark and long. Help me! I'm at sea.

The Wisdom of the Old

after Basho

I thought when I got old that I'd be wise. Wearing my vast learning lightly I'd find myself a source of wisdom for others. If you looked in the paper, you'd find me quoted on most any subject, the robe of knowledge trailing from my shoulders. Even my enemies would marvel at my sagacity. If you had an insoluble problem, I'd solve it. It would be a no-brainer. I'd be the sage who gets to explain everything. Turns out, I was all wet. The older I get the less I know. Here I am picking through the alleyways of my memory looking for flowers and finding only trash, a panhandler who, in better days, had what passed for a brain, but now is the wacky preacher who won't come in out of the rain.

Amid the Alien Corn

after Basho

Half in love with easeful death like Keats, I
am thinking of ways to die, expire, terminate. I am
ready to check out, cash in my chips, buy the farm, take a
potion, keel over, croak, give up the ghost, be a wanderer
in the sphere of celestial rewards, depart, fix it so
I can pass on, pass over, pass away, perish, let
the Lord have his way with me. I'll lay down the life that
I've loved, bite the dust, kick the bucket, cease to be,
shuffle off this mortal coil, be snuffed out, take my
last breath, meet my Maker. But what in the name
of God am I saying? No matter how bad the
world seems to be treating me, shouldn't I first
try to live, exist, endure, survive, *be*? In the winter
of my life, if my name be writ in water, I'll be rain.

Tut-Tut

after Basho

And when you find yourself thinking of all you're not—
happy, successful, able to enjoy even
the simplest pleasure—thinking you'd better take a
powder, give it all up, toss your hat
in the ring of disappointment where it belongs, and
regale yourself with your sorry song—how cold
the world and its expectations, how troubles rain
down daily, how rising is always followed by falling—
Basho comes along with something to think on:
Why does it always have to be about me me me!
You think you're special in your misery? Tut-tut,
you've got another think coming. Don't you think
the moon has been there before you? And the cricket of
darkness, too? Come on! You can do better than that!

Bush Warblers

after Basho

Stymied, stumped, stopped, blocked, bamboozled. O
I'm baffled, perplexed, puzzled, bedeviled, bush-
ed. I'm confounded, confused, mystified, muddled. The warblers
of thwart and obstruction, of obstacle, impediment, and snag, now
have the upper hand. Admit it. I'm sure that you've
all been there. Trying your best to get your shit
together, regrouping, giving it your all, once and for all,
mobilizing your forces, going over and over and over
your options, and coming up short. Try again, my
ass! Collapsed, defeated, flattened, shrunk to a grain of rice.
A nice kettle of fish you find yourself in. It takes the cake.
But hey, who needs cake, anyway? Screw kettles and rice. On
balance, all the winners have is their winning. The
losers have their losing! Come, let's party on the porch!

Stop Me If You've Heard This One

after Issa

When I wake up this morning I have breasts, as floppy as any old woman's. When did I get so old? My clothes hide them. But what of the wrinkles and age spots that pave my old face when my old face arrives at the bathroom mirror? Am I really considering construction work to patch up my infrastructure? Just a bit of pothole repair, perhaps, to lift up the eyelids, tack back the wattle, buy me a few day's reprieve? And would I go to any length to sod my bald head, lose my beer gut? Can testosterone bring back my libido, Viagra move my get up and go which has got up and went? Ah, me, am I, after all, just an old joke? If so, I intend to keep laughing. So hard it will bring me to tears.

You Bet Your Life

after Basho

My back is bent. I walk like Groucho Marx. This is no joke. Pain is my companion in the autumn of my life. Where is Harpo when I need him? Why is Chico gone on to his rest? Margaret Dumont is ridiculously missing. This is no night at the opera, it is no day at the races, no monkey business. *Hello, I must be going.* Arthritis beeps his horn. I am stuffed into the stateroom of my body. Aging is a wisecrack I can't master. Room Service? So send up a larger room! Who are you going to believe? Me, or your own eyes? I refuse to join the club that will have me for a member. Clouds darken my day. Hey, maybe this *is*, after all, a joke! Say the secret word and get the bird.

You Can't Be Serious

after Basho

A writer who can deal with murder, barbarity, horror—with “tragic elements”—is the greater artist, said the young Anthony Trollope, than the writer of the mundane. This leaves me out. “The mild walks of everyday life” are what I gravitate to. The neighbor’s sudden dementia—would that count as horror? Could barbarity be something like mistakenly digging up my wife’s favorite lemon verbena? To poison the pesky chipmunks, to do my best to wipe them out—would that be considered murder? I far and away prefer the milder walks of the lesser art—the stroll in the happy diurnal, the observable day-to-day. Tears are plentiful enough in this life without me putting in my own two cents. Tragically unambitious, I’m your chronicler of the commonplace, a rambler in Trollope’s eyes.

Dadaist Sonnet

after Buson

I'm going to try to write a Dadaist sonnet. It won't be easy. The possibility of meaning pierces through any meaningless surface. Meaning attracts me. Even Marcel Duchamp's infamous nude keeps stepping down that staircase; Magritte's man with an apple on his face is still a man with a green apple; the sonnet form itself would seem to prevent it. Comb as I may through the archives of irrationality, of the nude green apples of war, I keep coming back to my old methods. Collage, photomontage, assemblage, are gone *so gone*. No matter I try to take unreason to wife, to father one "ready made" more, I seem to be stuck in bachelorhood. O Tristan, please come back to redeem us! The world needs you! There's a tea party in our bedroom!

The House Always Wins

after Basho

Scientists say neutrinos may exceed the speed of light. If so, could it mean the moon's really made of green cheese? That Einstein's name will be a footnote in physics books, or perhaps it will just cease to exist? Could it be that God is playing dice with the universe, after all? It's difficult now not to see relativity as, well, *relative*, to question the whole time-space continuum, to cover all our certainties with doubt. Everything's now up in the air. Consider the Big Bang and inflation. Will the thought experiment now be how fast a yam, traveling past light speed, can give us a glimpse of the ridiculous? Are we doomed? Is the world a cartoon? A casino? What are our odds in the house of God?

Singapore Fling

after Issa

My imagination runs away with me. In
no time we're on the lam. Could it be this
is the excuse I've been waiting for to get high
on some adventure? Maybe scale a mountain
or travel to some hidden valley village?
Destinations call! And all the shining
stars lead the way. I find myself in
Singapore! What will I do now? Will my
imagination save me? We get some soup.
It's strange. What's in the bottom of the bowl?
Something there distresses me. It seems the
more I look, the more it looks back. A bright
object lodges among the noodles. Is it the moon?
Uh oh, look out! The policeman of logic arrives.

Parsley

after Basho

They are discussing underwear. The Mother says she does not wear anything but Hanes. The Father says he wears Jockey's. You'd think the Great-Grandma would grieve at such conversation, but no, as it turns out, she's the fan of Fruit of the Loom. And what about the Poet? He's taking notes for tomorrow morning when he'll write his daily poem. He's thinking about how he will expose their underwear. The Daughter sees what he is doing, but doesn't care. She says the trouble is underwear sticks up her butt like parsley in your teeth, so she wears nothing. It's beginning to grow ridiculous, the Grandkids giggling as the day grows dark, but the topic goes on and on with wedgies and thongs, with incontinence and fart jokes. And now they're really cooking.

Honestly

after Buson

His wife decides to buy a smart phone. By now her friends all have one. *What a flowering of technology!* they say. He's staring at a pear tree out the window all in blossom and blowing in the wind (*Bob Dylan!* she'll say—by checking her smart phone). No matter the question, the smart phone has an answer. Who needs a lamp to read by (*Diogenes!*) with a smart phone? He's one of the Luddites (*Ned Ludd!*) with no smart phone. Give him the ancient technologies (*Guttenberg!*). He'll read by moonlight, if you please. Now she knows everything. She has a smart phone and is on Facebook. She reads the news feed daily. It's clear to him to talk to her he'll need a smart phone. Maybe she'll text him a letter!

Open Reading

after Issa

The evening's poets prance into the room, giddy with enthusiasm. I'm twitchy as a grasshopper under a feckless pedestrian's boot, if you take my drift. Enthusiasm sits beside me, not a care in the world, as the first eager reader begins. Do I want to be here? No. This is certainly not my idea of fun. I find myself wanting to leap to my feet and retreat as a second reader rises and Jesus shows up, and Gertrude Stein, to crush the living daylights out of the language. These are followed by a songstress whose tweets are so tiny I can't see them. Beside me, enthusiasm smiles: *Pearls of wisdom*, she whispers to me. *We're in for a night of pleasure. Happy as two grasshoppers on a dewdrop!*

Summer Olympics

after Buson

Watching the world's greatest athletes I'm inspired to
exercise. So it's one hundred degrees! I'll strike
out into the heat. I'll run a marathon, sprint the
hundred meters. The body is a temple,
I think. I'll swim. I'll box. I'll wait for the bell
and then I'm off! Watch me on the hurdles! I
will take on all comers. I will go
for gold. I may be old, but don't count me out.
Here I go. Any moment now I'll jump from
here to there. I'll dive. I'll ace. I'll take my
place on the podium. As soon as I'm out of bed
I'll lift and toss and put. I'll throw off my quilts,
show the world my stuff. Just as soon as the
story's told. And I get over this nagging cold.

Pilobolus

after Basho

Be warned: This poem features partial nudity. From the waist down—flesh-colored tights; from the waist up—all naked. But first, the theme of birth and continuity, these silver rings that we wheel around on stage as the trees of our bodies bend and blow and flow so seamlessly in the wind of our communal choreography. And then the kaleidoscopic illusion in which we become salads of bodies tossed through water, floating in air, the camera beneath us rearranging our horizontal into a soup of vertical flesh until we're a centipede of, everywhere, buttocks and pecs. Get ready now, here comes the nudity! Watch as we grace the stage like a cherry tree in blossom, as the whole audience blossoms in the fleshy fruit of new bodies that will never fall.

Transformers: The Ride

after Issa

How can they even call this a ride? Ernie says. We're in line for the "Transformers Experience"—me and my five-year-old grandson. The line winds around hidden rooms and corridors—futuristic, dark—that house T.V. monitors, glowing gizmos and dials. This is no place for a child, I'm thinking; we're in the teeth of a nightmare. But, stuck now in line, there's nothing left to do but keep moving forward. I explain that we're just in line, waiting, that the ride is yet to come. The monitors show a Transformer—"Bumblebee"—whose mouth, Ernie tells me, turns into the grid of a truck. *But don't worry*, he says, *it will turn back again.* It's a good thing he doesn't know what's coming. With any luck, we'll master the future together, whatever abounds.

Little God

after Basho

I'll hide under the table, Ernie says. All you have to do is find me! I look in the closet, under the bed, behind the door, more places than there are to look. *Ernie!* I say. *Where are you?* He's four. Sometimes I wish we could stay this way forever, me looking in every nook and cranny, happily even those where he could not possibly be. His voice blossoms from the floor. *I'm here! Come find me!* The joy of hiding in plain sight. When will it dawn on him that he can't tell the seeker where the hider is? For now, there's nothing sweeter than the face under the table, eyes shut tight in the excitement of discovery. *Come find me!* he calls, with the voice of God.

More Cows!

after Issa

More cows! our two-year-old granddaughter calls in the car on the way home from our hobby farm. It's cool in the car after a one-hundred-degree day with no breeze. We're exhausted, but, for her, all it takes to revive is the prospect of cows coming up over a hill, around a bend, perhaps a calf with its mother. A red barn, a field, just their abode is enough to keep her happy, content, even a tree, or a shadow that *looks* like a cow in the distance can keep her babbling on, just a word of encouragement, a nod of the head, a single syllable will do. Outside, the day is still hot. No blade of grass moves. The heat has depleted us. But she's full of gab. *More cows!* she cries. *Look! In the grass!*



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