

Stew on the Summer Solstice

by John Cantey Knight

Where the stream had cut a bed, deposited sand
 washed away as water tumbled past boulders,
 I stumbled across ten pounds of ugliness. It hissed
 as I circled it in visions of turtle stew.
 Unafraid, angry, thinking about taking a hunk
 out of me, it pivoted, neck extending,
 to notch the stick I was using to distract it.
 I grabbed its tail and lifted it an arm's length
 from my body. Gingerly, I carried it a quarter mile
 to the corncrib, its jaws snapping at my crotch.

I'd never decapitated a chicken, never watched
 the feathered body magically, or mechanically,
 continue in motion. "Once one of them mud turtles
 gets a holt of you, it won't let go till it thunders,"
 she advised. Its jaws locked in a vise
 grip on the broomstick, its neck stretched over
 a chopping block, the axe fell. It's scary
 to see the bulk of a body clamor through space,
 headless. It took a screwdriver and hammer, maybe
 distant thunder to pry back the broom.

"There's seven kinds of meat in one of 'em."
 Idell vouched, as I disengaged carapace from plastron
 and opened it up to discover leathery eggs. Seven
 kinds of meat skinned, onion, potato, parsley,
 pepper and salt went in the pot to cook slowly.
 Periodically, I stirred the stew, pondering headless
 turtles walking while clinched jaws waited on lightning.
 But beyond all comprehension were the eggs,
 the whites never set no matter how long they'd boiled.
 She muttered to herself, "That ain't natural."