

## Making Hay and Funerals · *James Galvin*

Sun comes late to the sheltered places. Any August morning she could have looked from her kitchen window, across garden rows, to the meadow. She'd have seen her son brushing frost from the tractor seat. She'd have seen his cigarette smoke suspended in air and might have thought the tractor like a barge, low in water, laboring upstream.

In winter four feet of snow could fall in a night. Any morning she could have watched the wind raising plumes into the air the way we used to believe the soul rises. Once the biggest elk they'd ever seen stood by the garden fence, wind ruffling his wintercoat. The son took his rifle out to the porch. She saw the bullet hole snap open and stare.

All the neighbors came around for funerals and for haying. The women in the kitchen surrounded her like blankets. The men outside, standing or squatting in a circle, considered. After lunch, everyone seemed sleepy in the afternoon sun. Work was like a dream of work. The women wore bonnets, the men rolled cigarettes. Her husband, both her eldest sons, her only daughter: all their funerals were the same.

At night the men drank, traded songs or stories and slept. She might have lain awake on any of those nights, listening to her last son's breathing. She might have told herself it would never stop and pulled the elk robe up over her ears. She might have remembered that collapse, how it was like an afterthought.