

## Trying · *Albert Goldbarth*

That night, he had a vision. He was  
in Heaven. The ground was a field  
of flowers, unending in duration  
and beauty both; even the fleshy orchids,  
even the tulips' flambeaux: were sized  
to queen anne's lace and baby's breath,  
evenly as teeth. Everyone flew. The wings  
were simple, like hands of cards  
of down, but efficacious. No more  
preparation, huff or flex or long upgathering,  
than the casual shrugging  
off of Earth a wood dove shows: and  
whole congregations performed their  
alleluiahs by the easy dip and rise  
of the wren or the swallowtail. And,  
like birds, they'd marry  
in the air. The women moved their bodies  
in and out with the smoothness  
and music of concertinas. The men were  
hard-buttocked. Legs opened lazily  
overhead and made circles for hours  
like ceiling fans. Sometimes, at night, what  
seemed a kind of atmospheric  
energy gathered around somebody's skull, then  
crackled in great charged  
worms of light, and somebody  
else perhaps a mile off would lean  
like a typesetter's slant-mark in the sky  
and softly go, Ah. So this was  
thinking in Heaven. The only sign  
of what he supposed to be age was a kind of  
accumulated grace, a swan's  
or diamond cutter's, in certain  
turns of neck and wrist. The food was just  
there, on shelves of leaves, as were reed-plaited  
kits of pen nibs, bits of wire, yarn, penny nails.

But these went mostly untouched. There was  
no need; and no effort. Nobody tried,  
though he may have watched days. The weather,  
always, was blank-paper perfect. And he woke

weeping, with a shiver even  
December air couldn't cause, and paced  
the stained oak floor he'd laid himself,  
paced maybe an hour, until the morning  
fully filled its first thin skin  
of light, and his gristmill  
circling had ground the fear down.  
He'd need to get moving. He cracked  
the ice in the porcelain wash-basin,  
splashed the last of it off. The  
basin and matching pitcher, flower  
decorated: tiny intricate blooms a  
British ceramicist  
set regularly on the surfaces, beautiful, almost  
the small near-uniform dots  
of a tabloid photograph  
forming, for the proper distance, a  
well-snapped scene: some tinkerer  
straining a biplane together, some  
sleepless shlep over something just this  
side of a workable phonograph: news  
from the music world, from the flying.  
Trying.