Cole Hardman

The Asparagus of Wheatly Cemetery

Where I grew up down south of Indy, there below the overpass now, kids would eat asparagus from Wheatly Cemetery on a dare, or double-dog dare. We would sneak under the thundering overpass, past all those trollish hobos sleeping with their dogs in rotten trash-bags. Maybe someone had some whiskey—a flask or two of warm Jack they snatched from the top shelf of some old pantry. Cats meowed from under dumpsters while you climbed the rusted chain-link fence, and down across on the other side and grown knee-high over the lopsided graves—most you couldn’t even read the names of, they
were so worn to the bone—grown above
all those graves was green asparagus

most of us would never eat, even if
our holy mothers cooked it up! But when

your older brother said, “A triple-dog
dare then, you pussy,” you best believe you picked

the largest weed that you could find and stuffed
roots and all like a wad of chaw across

your teeth. You’re thinking all the time that all
the bodies must be old enough—I mean

they had to be there long enough it didn’t
matter anymore, as old as all

the graves looked. But just standing there in the dark
listening to cats meow and hiss

and hobos snoring in their boots, and cars
flying overhead—just standing there

chewing on the cud of old Wheatly
and sipping on the chilly end of someone’s

stolen flask, it’s all that you could do
to pinch your nose and cross your toes and pray

and tell yourself those salty roots didn’t taste
half as bad as your father said they would.