
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 chew 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.