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**Hay**  
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## Mark Cunningham

### HAY

Every time, *almost* every time I put a biscuit of shredded wheat, the big ones that come in four or six to a package, into a bowl and pour milk on it, I watch the milk filter through the brittle chunk and think of a bale of hay. Lion's-mane-tan. In a stubble field. Whenever I see a bale of hay I feel the urge to bite into it, feel its dry scour, slightly sweet. I could eat the cows that eat the hay but I don't like meat so I think of big swirled cinnamon rolls, or remember that when I die my body might crumple into soil that feeds the grass that becomes hay: that's a difference between me and hay, I'll never know what becomes of my body after I'm dead, I'm always *before*, but hay is *after*, hay isn't hay until it's dead grass. Heraclitus was right, fire drives all things. No wonder Monet painted hay, stack after stack in fields of snow, in dry morning sun, in late afternoon slant, shine soaking into haystacks and cathedrals, over and over, before he moved to the pond, the clouds, all things moving, in flux. I like the haystacks best in late summer, noon glare already starting to cool, warmth shrinking from general to specific, I like the hay where a cricket calls, my hair in the sun. Po Chu-i was glad to go bald, it was a weight, literally, off his mind, he could see why Buddhist monks shaved their heads before starting on the path away from all the things that were burning, burning, but the only part of growing old I regret is that my hair is thinning, in a year or two I'll become one of those men who sweep a long swath over their bare scalp, fooling no one. Still, I'll be able to feel the sun in my hair a little longer, warm and close, the way it must linger in haystacks those mild afternoons after the first frost. That's why those men comb their hair that way. I'm sure of it.