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Larry Levis

TOAD, HOG, ASSASSIN, MIRROR

Toad, hog, assassin, mirror. Some of its favorite words, which are breath. Or handwriting: the long tail of the 'y ' disappearing into a bam like a rodent's, and suddenly it is winter after all. After all what? After the ponds dry up in mid-August and the children drop pins down each canyon and listen for an echo. Next question, please. What sex is it, if it has any? It's a male. It's a white male Caucasian. No distinguishing birthmarks, the usual mole above the chin. Last seen crossing against a light in Omaha. Looks intelligent. But haven't most Americans seen this poem at least once by now? At least once. Then, how is the disease being . . . communicated? As far as we can determine, it is communicated entirely by doubt. As soon as the poets reach their mid-twenties they begin living behind hedgerows. At the other end of the hedgerows someone attractive is laughing, either at them, or with a lover during sexual intercourse. So it is like prom night. Yes. But what is the end of prom night? The end of prom night is inside the rodent; it is the bam collapsing on a summer day. It is inside the guts of a rodent. Then, at least, you are permitted an unobstructed view of the plain? Yes. And what will be out there, then, on the plain? A rider approaching with a tense face, who can't see that this horse has white roses instead of eyes. You mean ... the whole thing all over again. Unfortunately, yes, at least as far as we are permitted to see.