

THREE POEMS BY DENTON LOVING

COPPERHEAD

Dead: the copperhead
that slipped down the ridge
in summer's elongated dusk
to forage small prey
and taste cool creek. And me,
racing against the sun
on its path beyond the mountains
to end my task mowing tall grass
between apples, pears and peaches.

Before the snake, I had been looking
without resentment at the day
well spent, a day devoted
to necessary labor. Later, memory
of cold blood spilled on steel blades
lingered in the night air
like honeysuckle and regret.

FOUNDATION

Unable to stand in our hillside orchard,
too weak to swing a mattock or to wrestle

with dirt, my dad wants to plant peach trees.
For him, I tear the earth open.

Rocks bleed out from the poor mountain soil,
and I unwrap swaddled peach roots.

Before I scrape the dirt back and tamp it down,
I return the largest rock under the young roots,

a surrogate for what I fear. I bury it back,
imagine the roots encircling the rock,

enclosing it, building from its foundation.
Like the hard stone buried in the sweetest fruit.

HURLING

I'm five again, and it's so dark I can't see
the road. *Are we going through a tunnel?*

My dead father says, *No. Go back to sleep.*
He reaches across the bench seat. The weight

of his hand quiets the starlings in my belly.
I know I'm safe as long as he's close.

Within the darkness, stars pinprick the horizon.
The small blue egg inside my breastbone

cracks with understanding: we're not sweeping
through a tunnel under the crushing burden

of a mountain. We're hurtling across the heavens
on the wings of an ancient, magical bird.

"Copperhead," "Foundation," and "Hurling" are from Denton Loving's book *Tamp*. They appear here with permission from the author.