**Frog Eggs in the Laundry**

Conrad Shumaker

Frog. You may not know what the word means. Begin with heat. You may need a number—say 105. Only you have to feel it for weeks, holding the friction-slicked handle of a long hoe in hardening hands, walking in sand between rows of cotton, lifting and dropping the heavy end of that hot hoe, breathing heated dust, feeling through soles of twelve-year-old feet and the back of your neck not one zero five but heat like a scaled body, dry licking dinosaur heat.

Then one late July morning at nine you see a few puffs of white above the mountains, like ghosts of dead springs rising from the smell of fir needles in damp granite sand. But keep lifting and dropping that hoe at the roots of Johnson grass and pigweed, because it may not be so. Then by noon the clouds are swelling, moving beings, clustering, dividing, drifting together silent as monks, and in the mountains you see there is rain, slanting shafts of gray storm moving toward you. But don’t look, because they can miss, sliding sideways along the mountains to Mexico, leaving you to watch in bright dust and the sound of lizards shuddering under leaves.

This time it comes. Wind first, hot wind pushing dust, then cool air and the smell of water hitting dirt, like you imagine the prettiest girl would smell or something even better you can’t name. The first drops spot hard like quarters and by now the horses are running, circling the pasture with necks flat and heads stretched out, then twisting and kicking sideways and farting and running again. You want to yell. Yell—it’s okay now. The rain is already exploding in puffs of dust and spray on the dark green of cotton leaves, the lighter green of Johnson grass, and you’re running toward home because that gives the look of reason, but really running like the horses run because your body is wild.

At sundown the frogs start. They’re toads really, buried for months under rocks and rotting boards, hoarding in dry skin a spoonful of brown water, but in the rain they shoulder out of the ground and bounce like live clods to the puddles, the flooded ends of fields to sing rain and climb each other. You wake at night on cool sheets and hear them in the rain smell—the trill of the spadefoots and long hollow moans of the Colorado River toads—and your mind can see their molten gold eyes with slit pupils, narrowed in the strain of male grip and female spawn.

In the morning at five I woke my brother and we went to catch frogs. We put sixty-four in my mother’s washing machine, two bucketfulls at a time, and pounds of eggs, shining black spots in clear strings of jelly. “Why?” she asked. For her this was serious. I couldn’t say. The only answer was frog.