



On Digging Out Old Lilacs

Maxine Kumin

I stand in a clump of dead athletes.
 They had been buried upright
 in Olympic poses. One
 a discobolus clutching a bird's nest.
 One a runner trailing laces of snakeskin.
 One a boxer exploding toads of cracked leather.

I call in the hatchet, the mattock, the crowbar
 the dog with his tines for
 the trick is to get at the taproot.
 Each one is as thick as a weightlifter's thigh.

First you must rupture those handholds but
 each has a stone in its fist.
 Each one encloses beetles that pinch
 like aroused crabs. Some
 will not relax even when
 bludgeoned about the neckbone.

Next you must chip up kneecaps and scapulas.
 Knuckles and hammertoes fly in the dustbin
 until on my hands and knees
 I ring something metal. An ox shoe
 hatched underground for a hundred years
 a gristle of earth in its mouth.

I see them at the pasture wall
 the great dumb pair
 imperfectly yoked and straining
 straining at the stone boat and
 meanwhile the shoe in my hand
 its three prongs up on the half-moon.

It is enough that the lilacs must go,
 a mess of broken bones in the gully.
 I give the shoe back to the earth
 for now I am a woman
 in a long-gone dooryard
 flinging saved dishwater onto
 these new slippers.

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