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## Years I've Slept Right Through

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James: Years I've Slept Right Through

# YEARS I'VE SLEPT RIGHT THROUGH

**JOHN JAMES**

The field is steeped with the violence of horses.  
Night descends blue hills  
and I attempt to weigh distance,  
as a calf tests its footing to the water-hole.  
On the front porch, my cat devours a hummingbird.  
He beats the brilliant body with his tufted paws.  
He breaks its wings,  
swallows whole the intricate bone-house.

Inside, the pilot light is burning.  
My sister's friend with the coal-eyes is over.  
I crawl into bed, aching for more light.  
In the dooryard  
a boy saint stoops to pluck  
feather from feather until his hands are sore.  
So prone to sadness, this thief—  
I take my glasses off and lay them on the table.  
The shadow of a tree rests inside my palm.

This spring I commemorate my father's death  
by tacking deer-horns above the door.  
My hammer-strokes disperse  
an assembly of hens,  
waiting around for me to scatter their seed.

A mile away the river is abundant.

It breaks its sudden excess  
on a limestone bridge.

A big-axled wagon tips into the water,  
where white mud washes the coachman clean.

This is a custom he repeats every year,  
coming and going until his wheels give out,  
coming to wet his tongue.

Dawn chalks over the horizon,  
rendering the sky a storm-blotched red.  
The outline of a cow appears on the hill  
and then dissolves into the fog.

I follow her path with my ear,  
listening as a bell sounds out the trail—

It is mine, this world

of bread and skin and stone.

Lay me in the field with all the fallen horses.