
Pro Rege

Volume 32
Number 2 *Fine Arts Issue 2003*

Article 4

December 2003

Like Grass

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Recommended Citation

Van Rys, John (2003) "Like Grass," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 32: No. 2, 10 - 11.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol32/iss2/4

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Like Grass

John Van Rys

*Life on the farm, the radio twangs,
is kinda laid back. It's Martha Stewart living
at Green Acres eating plump sweet peas,
the rich ripening from weedless soil. It's HeeHaw's
canned laughter.*

Truth is, pigweed and thistles
scratch skyward from the baked earth. Sparrows and
robins mistake windows for sky, sometimes
crack their necks on mirroring glass,
a hard blue vault. A jerking rabbit, dropped by a cat
from the carport roof, must be drowned,
thrashing in a bucket. Another in the green grass,
mauled by cats, surrounded, leaps five feet up
(fearful trick) again and again, before you can, loving it,
bash away its misery. After, a skunk
scavenges its fill, gorging on
what you've killed.

Death comes, a ladder tipped
in the wind. A December Sunday evening, gracious,
your truck-pummeled dog turns home
before his last breath parts. Later, you burn
the blood-stained toboggan
on which you bore his body back.
Or a cool April night, a wet-gray foal rises teetering,
newborn. Six hours after birth, morning
illumines his mother's carcass, pinning him
thirsty against the stall wall. The vet's blade tears
the mare's flesh, spilling gray-green intestines still
stretched tight with hay. A dark pool
stains the yellow straw—the foal-feeding blood
that killed her, having flowed too freely into the womb,
a broken vessel. And the rendering truck's chain
clangs its toll, hoisting her body as we twist her locked legs
through the barn door. Nothing left, nothing
but tufts of white hair on cedar and parallel trails of
bright red and dull green fluid.

And yet
in the green pasture, grass belly deep,
in an August evening's orange-red glow,
my daughter gallops her horse east
along the shining filaments of electric fence,
fluid lunging toward the darkening sky.
A moth lands on my still knee, brings
a ciphered greeting on brown wings.
A barn cat perched on my shoulder
massages my scalp with his claws, licks it
with his raspy, bone-cleaning tongue.
And behind the empty corn crib, high-piled manure
patiently rots, waiting for seed.

Waiting

John Van Rys

Plaster and lath, pipes and eaves—an ancient ark,
this house contains those unborn children waiting still.

Upstairs, the bed remains unmade, comforter cast aside;
pillows and sheets, askew, hold waiting the bodies' print.

Outside, dense clouds oppress the sunless soil;
two pills wait, white against M&M's in a black bowl.

After the storm, laneway puddles mirror wind-fallen ash branches,
waiting, leaves' edges already curled, fire fringed.