

Bread: A Returning

Dixie Partridge

In the hayfields are loaves
to be lined along barns.
Like monuments to a lost art
they have browned in the summer heat,

something warmed against winter.
The scent of the air is yeasty after showers.
My grandmother's dozen loaves a day
fed haying crews raking the fields

with draft teams. The old log stackers
finally split and gave way to steel,
then to the compression of bales,
rolled or rectangular.

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We see the tall willows first,
the two-story farmhouse—cool
downstairs even at the peak of harvest,
then my father's bales

squared high in the stackyard.
He runs his place however he can,
for as long as he can. In his sleep
he re-does it all with horses.

When I was a child, my mother
took on the heat of the fields
after her morning kneading and baking,
the tall black stove consuming

all our arms could carry
to the woodbox, the axe quick
in her hands, her arms muscular
from the pull of reins.

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Even before we enter,
I can smell the slices
she will hand us, butter melting
in the soft center of her bread.