

Then off again,
careful not to back and lift
into the wires overhead.
Twenty-five minutes

till the whistle, Dell quits,
shows me where he sorts for salvage
copper and brass from
a heap of junk wire.
I help and listen, too pooped
to talk; he tells me
how his truck ran away
once sloping into Omaha --
I watch his thick stubby hands
yanking at the reddish wire,
throwing it into one barrel,
in the other,
scraps of yellow brass.

UP IN MAINE

Saw a payroll list
for the construction co.
Almost all the names were
French:

Beaulieu
Bouchard
De Vois
Gagnon
Gendron

Is that why we're working
for this lousy outfit?
Only Frenchmen take so little?

DOUG, SITTING IN
MAMA'S TRUCKSTOP

put a ten-dollar bill
in my boot
looked at it a coupla days
later--
all the ink worn off
just like a piece of paper
was I pissed! never
do that again

TOMMY

Tommy wore a scorpion
set inside clear plastic
on his belt buckle which
glowed in the dark
and cowboy boots tooled with oak leaves.
On the grounds crew,
he mowed lawns, trimmed,
examined the honeysuckle,
looked for rabbits, ate loquats

from one woman's tree.
The foreman, Dave, told him:
"You spray the dandelions today.
Fill this tank with weed-killer.
It's powerful. They
used it in Vietman.
Don't get it on your hands."
Tommy filled the tank, adjusted the nozzle
and disappeared to the lower tracts.
Emptied his tank into a trash bin,
rinsed and filled it with water.
Sprayed dandelions all day.
Two weeks later, Dave whistled:
"Can't understand why those dandelions won't die.
Cleared off half of Nam with it.
Better get those weeds a second time,
Tommy. Get em good."
Sure, Tommy sprayed those weeds!

THE FALL

Going up the ladder behind him,
I knew Kit would fall, sometime.
You could tell.
We calked leaks in the roof,
re-tarred around the vents
and came down.
It was only a two-twelve pitch.
When he did fall,
it was on another job and
the roof was four-twelve.
It wasn't all his fault:
the bastard had him working
before the roof had dried
and no safety rope --
so he was sliding and already looking
like a cat for a place to land,
but it was all hard.
He lay there crouched on his side,
foot broken.
Tears were running out the sides of his eyes
into his red beard.

-- Ben Jacques

Yarmouth ME