

Tractors

by John Riley

Ora listened to the well-digger explain
the question wasn't how far he'd have to dig to find water
it's what he'd go through to get there.
Beneath their feet bedrock stretched a hundred miles
in every direction. Today, I'm working,
sitting at the same table as yesterday
and the day before that. The woman across
the street is watering her vegetable plot.
She's offered to share her tomatoes
and spinach and squash when they come in.
Ora died over seventy years ago
and is buried between the top soil and the rock.
His vision of heaven was mechanical.
Sturdy ladders and shiny pulleys and winches,
gates with heavy-duty hinges,
good roads graded to never wash away.
He knew what slabbed beneath his holdings that day
but let the well-digger talk on about
the granite, the slate, the gneiss. I'll
do what it takes to dig you a good well
the well-digger promised. The trick will be
to find the best angle. Most people think
wells are always vertical, but they're not. When
you draw your water it'll travel at a slant.

