

# mnemonic haiku

*by strannikov*

he plucked his banjo,  
played Woody Guthrie, sang hymns,  
wept for his dead wife.

Papa carved a five-  
notched bridge for his banjo's strings  
in his last five years.

to become human  
I had to burn, crack, and bleed  
until I felt pain.

I bruised without cries,  
bled amazed at all the blood,  
broke bones without moans.

even lit one hand  
lighting a hot dog to make  
it a lit cigar.

the well I was pushed  
into was shallow enough,  
home to sharp dry rust.

talk about my luck!  
never once kicked by a horse,  
though bit by a dog.

the goose was not nice,  
clamped its bill hard and left marks,  
its mettle to prove.

my siblings turned, fled,  
left me sprawled to gape upon  
a rattler's slither.

unknown skeleton—  
rat, squirrel, cat—propped atop  
dusty dry wicker.

savaged by a car,  
an opossum still ugly,  
more than a killed dog.

the tenant shacks dark  
under their oak canopies  
with tractor-tire swings.

fresh-fallen pears, sweet,  
had only to be picked up,  
rinsed, bitten, and chewed.

my eyes, mine, saw mules  
pull sledges out of fields filled  
with green tobacco.

irrigation pipes  
stacked up could be talked into,  
listened through, heard from.

suspicious sick dog  
our father shot one Sunday  
before burying.

skies electric blue,  
limpid dewy air, the world  
framed by a small farm.

