## Wendell Hawken, Millwood

## **Wheat Straw for Bedding Horse Stalls**

The best comes from the Taylor place near Lincoln, the field at Thunder Run.

Each bale unfolds open-minded when I slice the twine, shake each flake.

Particles like embers fly from my hands. I shake fire at the beams of light,

make the *whoosh* of borrowed taffeta, white slip taffeta I wore pubescent proud.

Imagine, shaking wheat straw and my mother's walking

sounding the same, and how I sing "Rainy Day in Rio" as she did waking into rain.

The Blue Ridge especially dark.
Old snow knowing its shadows, sky
lightens into willowware.
The mockingbird's sudden white-flare flight—

grief's like that.

Yesterday, outside Walgreens a white-haired woman leaning on

who had to be her daughter, both peering in a prescription bag.

My mother's ERA stickpin, her World War II Red Cross Nurse's badge,

now mine—yes, that old!
In dreams the steering wheel might wobble. I might miss the turn. Get lost.

But no more babushkas at the ribbon factory who bar the door

to where I need to be to take the test. Here, the old dogs learn and 'moon' means full whether blood or wolf or snow or hunger,

where tomato-eating squirrels dodge old men's pellet guns

and health is not the measure of how ill the others are, where a steady, head-first answer comes to every praying mantis prayer

wandering unmown fields in human-less surround with two dogs (plus a last-legs cat

lifted to her food), hands idling on seed-heads, nudging kernels from pods to fall into their futures.

Do flies know they once were maggots because their tastes remain the same?