

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.

