

Nels Hanson

New London

Any child with half a heart
could see cruel place it was,
why the name I never knew,
a Valley country small Dust
Bowl slum the last remaining
citizens long gave up trying
to leave. My grandfather and
I drove its gravel street as he
murmured “Grapes of Wrath,”
the lone book on the cupboard
corner shelf except the battles
of his World War I Pine Tree
Division. Cold December day
I saw the teenage boy’s white
face whiter than any freezing
soldier’s dream of white, red
reddest hair a leaping sudden
orange flame, in a shack’s dirt
yard with twisted willow poles
and a chicken wire torn fence.

He tossed half a slice of bread
to quick green-scarlet rooster,
small kind they call a "banty,"
and to the lame cream-colored
hen tilting as it tried to follow.

Enough

“Yes, it’s a long row to hoe,”
lost farmers admitted once,
world of things not the way
you wish, April frost, plums’

falling price, horse sick with
harness gall, gas three-stroke
John Deere’s piston flaming
before your precious turn at

ditch water, vineyard’s 100
furrows unplowed. It’s true,
someday carve dusty credo
on polished rock, sketch in

red looping contrails pilots
scrawl across a blue forever
innocent of clouds. A warm
rain blowing overnight from

Coast to San Joaquin’s wide
sky spoiled the drying raisins
again. Tired Spirit, drop long-
handled hoe, let quick white

ghosts of weeder geese crop
evil Johnson Grass, up a row,
down next, another, in single
perfect file. Breathe patiently

while Sierra snowmelt runs
own good pace for coaxing
purple cotton petals to green
currency all cabbage leaves.

Accustomed now, trust bank
loans are never due, pump's
diesel low. No Jack in a Box
springs grim surprise, wife's

burst appendix, barn ablaze,
each birthday child's crutch
grown taller, polio's century,
1930s' long March of Dimes.