

## Flies

Bill Ransom



for Tom Jay

*I heard a fly buzz when I died.* —Emily Dickinson

From our high ladders in spring we  
ripped boards off the old farmhouse wall  
and dreamed our plans for your new barn.  
Crowbars snapped a century of dust  
into hair, nose, lung. We tasted  
death, birth, celebration, sorrow.

Our third course of prying liberated the flies.  
Like sizzling, crawling dust they  
infested our noses and our mouths, clung  
by thousands to our hair and faces, they  
scrabbled down shirt collars, up our  
sleeves and pants legs, where we

slapped and scooped and cringed against the  
scratchings of a swarm of legs, the  
crisp tickle of those frantic wings.  
One-handed on ladder-tops, we fought  
this curse, tucked our shirts over our mouths,  
breathed deep and kept on working.

We wanted that wood. No one would salvage  
for us. Rich in friendship, wallets empty,  
we shuddered on into the filthy days ahead.

Ten years later I train guerrillas in rescue,  
and green meat stinks the roadside grass:  
somebody's son, brother, husband.

His penis rots in a slack, speechless mouth.  
Two men vomit; one swats at flies,  
coughs, contemplates the smoky horizon.  
How they love us, these maggots, these

sons and daughters of that ludicrous  
marriage of flies! His split, swollen belly



buzzes and simmers with egg-laying frenzy.  
He shimmers sunlight off a blanket of wings.  
His family wants him. We lift, and his legs  
slip out of his pants, these two purple clubs  
a last joke from the death squad.  
Empty pants legs flap the blistering breeze

and still ripple through my restless dreams.  
I despise some men, a few pernicious women,  
and always those persistent, ubiquitous flies.

