

The Art of Poetry

Julia wants to plant asparagus.
Her plan for terraced beds
is Incan in origin and I,
failing to write this day, start
to shovel shit. Who knew

there was this much manure
in all of Rhode Island? Its fine
grain and deep blackiness
promise a haul of pointy greens
next year, when I'll be gone.

Still, stones must be moved
from the glacial soil. With gloved
fists, we heft them into piles.
I feel strong, for a poet. Gardens

are a monstrous work of subtraction.
This far into swampy loam
there are half-digested leaves
that tumble to the void where
rocks had been. Black legs bolt—
Julia strikes, handing me the

salamander. A rush for the camera.
Photos show a spotted, glistening
beast the length of my palm, punk
eyes unperturbed by lift.
It removes itself from us.

Wikipedia reveals
a creature to stop the heart:
Ambystoma opacum, the Mottled
Salamander, secretes wicked
cardiopulmonary toxins.

But for a moment I held it,
Poison close to the skin.

—Anthony Lioi

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