

Elizabeth McLagan

In the Garden

weeding out quack grass, digging the soil
to lift long white meanders, growth tips,

arrows, travelers, careful because pulling roots,
irritably yanking them, does no good.

Break me and I come back stronger,
its rhizomatous soul warns me, and there's satisfaction

in following back to the branched clump of its source,
like my family, the old generations in Scotland,

then Rhode Island, upstate New York, Oregon:
Alpine, Fife, Tangent, Corvallis, Portland,

which gets me thinking immigrant. Thinking
invasive. Overhead, a California hummingbird,

the now year-round Anna's, does his J-dance
for another mate, polyamorous one, tricking

light into gorgeous feathers. In almost all
my beds, purple potatoes have sprouted, and I'm

letting them be. Praise the Peruvian potato,
transplanted to Europe, which fed many, causing

humankind to wildly thrive, expand, and then,
with bad harvests, fall into starvation, die or leave.

The Irish, my other kin, hating and hated, clawing
their way into something possibly better. I uncover

a plump cutworm, spill its green guts with a cluck
of happiness. In another life, in another place,

I might have for company tortoise, hedgehog,
duck, but this is not that life. I sing slugs into oblivion

and cheap beer. And finally, *finally*, the neighbor
has blown enough grass and leaves to maybe satisfy

his soul, and we have an end to that metallic whine.
I am grateful. This is my grumpy place. Troubles

sighed over, mulched, worked into the soil, and forgotten.
Some reseed themselves, like spring's artillery weed.

Another invasive. Possibly edible. And before
my people, what remains? Here, still here:

an older life: Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas,
Chinook, Kalapuya. Among Douglas fir, black cottonwood,

red-flowering currant: thoughts in the shape of this land,
deep in this soil: *Break me, and I come back stronger.*