

## Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape

by John Ashbery

The first of the undecoded messages read: "Popeye sits  
in thunder,  
Unthought of. From that shoebox of an apartment,  
From livid curtain's hue, a tangram emerges: a country."  
Meanwhile the Sea Hag was relaxing on a green couch: "How  
pleasant  
To spend one's vacation *en la casa de Popeye*," she  
scratched  
Her cleft chin's solitary hair. She remembered spinach

And was going to ask Wimpy if he had bought any spinach.  
"M'love," he intercepted, "the plains are decked out  
in thunder  
Today, and it shall be as you wish." He scratched  
The part of his head under his hat. The apartment  
Seemed to grow smaller. "But what if no pleasant  
Inspiration plunge us now to the stars? *For this is my  
country.*"

Suddenly they remembered how it was cheaper in the country.  
Wimpy was thoughtfully cutting open a number 2 can of spinach  
When the door opened and Swee'pea crept in. "How pleasant!"  
But Swee'pea looked morose. A note was pinned to his bib.  
"Thunder  
And tears are unavailing," it read. "Henceforth shall  
Popeye's apartment  
Be but remembered space, toxic or salubrious, whole or  
scratched."

Olive came hurtling through the window; its geraniums scratched  
Her long thigh. "I have news!" she gasped. "Popeye, forced as  
you know to flee the country  
One musty gusty evening, by the schemes of his wizened,  
duplicate father, jealous of the apartment  
And all that it contains, myself and spinach  
In particular, heaves bolts of loving thunder  
At his own astonished becoming, rupturing the pleasant

Arpeggio of our years. No more shall pleasant  
Rays of the sun refresh your sense of growing old, nor the  
scratched  
Tree-trunks and mossy foliage, only immaculate darkness and  
thunder."  
She grabbed Swee'pea. "I'm taking the brat to the country."  
"But you can't do that--he hasn't even finished his spinach,"  
Urged the Sea Hag, looking fearfully around at the apartment.

But Olive was already out of earshot. Now the apartment  
Succumbed to a strange new hush. "Actually it's quite pleasant  
Here," thought the Sea Hag. "If this is all we need fear from  
spinach  
Then I don't mind so much. Perhaps we could invite Alice the Goon  
over"--she scratched  
One dug pensively--"but Wimpy is such a country  
Bumpkin, always burping like that." Minute at first, the thunder

Soon filled the apartment. It was domestic thunder,  
The color of spinach. Popeye chuckled and scratched  
His balls: it sure was pleasant to spend a day in the country.

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