



Death of a Naturalist

BY SEAMUS HEANEY

SHARE

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
 Of the townland; green and heavy headed
 Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.
 Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.
 Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles
 Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell.
 There were dragonflies, spotted butterflies,
 But best of all was the warm thick slobber
 Of frogspawn that grew like clotted water
 In the shade of the banks. Here, every spring
 I would fill jampotfuls of the jellied
 Specks to range on window sills at home,
 On shelves at school, and wait and watch until
 The fattening dots burst, into nimble
 Swimming tadpoles. Miss Walls would tell us how
 The daddy frog was called a bullfrog
 And how he croaked and how the mammy frog
 Laid hundreds of little eggs and this was
 Frogspawn. You could tell the weather by frogs too
 For they were yellow in the sun and brown
 In rain.

Then one hot day when fields were rank
 With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
 Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
 To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
 Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.
 Right down the dam gross bellied frogs were cocked
 On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
 The slap and plop were obscene threats. Some sat
 Poised like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting.
 I sickened, turned, and ran. The great slime kings
 Were gathered there for vengeance and I knew
 That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

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