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KEITH WILSON

DAY OF THE RABBIT

Jackrabbit: a shy, swift creature
with round, shiny eyes, fur
that ruffles in the wind

One Sunday, they rounded us kids up,
promising a picnic and loaded us into pickups;
chattering we rode through the dust, screaming
with joy at the bumps, any high fly through the air.

At the ranch all was nearly ready:
a huge beef turned and smoked on the spit,
pickles in barrels, beans in great clay pots,
red chilis crumpled into jagged flakes
and dropped into the bubbling brown sauce.
Dutch Oven biscuits, hot & steaming
being sampled by the cook.

The pickhandles were piled just beyond.
Each of us was given one, the details explained
by the potbellied rancher: we were to form
a huge circle, about two feet apart.
The men would join us, then we would close.

Later, moving slowly through the grass,
we scared up several rattlesnakes, various
small rats, a bird or two. The dust closed
on a tight pen in the center and there they
were —over a hundred rabbits, cottontails
& big Jacks milling, trying to break free.

Then the rancher took a pickhandle from one
of the boys and, laughing softly, walked to
the pen and hit one of the rabbits, breaking
his back. The rabbit screamed high & shrill,
went on screaming, he hit another and another,
soon all the boys were in there, hitting, blood
all over them, the big eyes of the rabbits
shining out of the dust, their screams cutting
the air, boys shouting & the older men sat
back, watching, smoked their brownpaper Durhams
& smiled, thinking of the rich feed to come.

—Cambray, New Mexico, 1936