

Dean Rader

Frog Considers Slipping Toad Pop Rocks

It was when Frog realized he wanted to make
the one he loved more than any other
suffer, and then laugh at his misfortune,
that he decided to slip Toad some Pop Rocks.

The inside of Toad's mouth is exceedingly wet,
and Frog believes the rocks would have an unusually
explosive effect. Best if Snail and the Turtle Brothers
could be there, but why complicate the simple?

Nothing is more intimate than deliberate
cruelty. Nothing says *I know you* like knowing
weakness. What is affinity but the absence

of variance? Can the heart be so full it must
be emptied? Is there a better way to show
devotion than to help someone burst from within?

Self-Portrait Bop

—*For Langston Hughes*

If it hasn't killed you by now
Just wait. This doesn't mean you
Can fly. In the quarter, in the
Shadows. The supermarket sea,
A blue safari, a pot of collard greens,
A field of flower seeds. These are things

America never was. America to me

Is what it isn't, like a missing comma
Or the lost digit. A hat with no head.
It is neither the water nor the wine.
No ax, no hammer, no chain. No
Ribbon, no box. White sheets but no bed.
Life never was life, but then again,

America never was America. To me,

To you, to the darkness. To him,
To her, to the blackest. O treble clef,
O bass note. Who is not
Both the music and the breath?
Both the letters and the page? We might
become a country, but what I wrote about

America, never was America to me.

