

Seabrook Farms (1949)

by Kaja Weeks

I retrace your shell-shocked footsteps into the New World,
but neither prints nor scents endure.

Pungent winds wrinkle vast fields—
spinach, peas and corn—
Jersey farmland that absorbed you
into their united essence.

Like crops squatting in neat, long rows
wooden barracks form Hoover Village,
where I see you caught in the alley
by brutal winds—

a pale blue uniform
flailing from your waist.
A deep tritone whistle blows,
harbinger of a ten-hour night-shift ahead.

You trudge with others,
those who fled with you
from a landscape riven by flames
into the stormy Baltic Sea—

the world gone mad with war once more:
forced German labor in exchange
for cheating certain Russian death,
five years in displaced persons camp limbo,

until the blustery voyage on a U.S. Navy ship;
then, hauled on the back of Charles F. Seabrook's
open farm truck to this rural company town—
You mumble, *home*, until it rises like a question.

I plant my future-self in your path
but can't feel you pass through.
Please—I can't even be a shadow
if I have no object.

Not yet born to cruelty or compassion,
I don't care that you stand twelve hours
at the conveyor belt, falling from exhaustion.
I don't care how senselessly

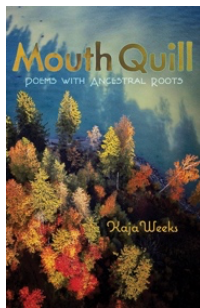
daze shimmers in your eyes.
I will stay and cavort
inside your stunned mind
until you can wake to yourself,

but do not fear, Mother—
we are not alone:
your starched white hat bobs along
with resettled Nisei ladies',

sorting peas for freezing,
field-raked by Tennessee migrants,
Estonian boys, West Indies laborers,
former German prisoners of war —

a motley crew of the dispossessed,
stitched into a patchwork of America.

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*Seabrook Farms (1949) is from
Mouth Quill – Poems with Ancestral Roots by Kaja Weeks*

*Published by The Poetry Box, 2020, Portland, Oregon
ISBN: 978-1-948461-62-7*

Cover Photo (Estonian Forest and Sea) by Michael Huang