

# Big Ideas on a Small Farm

Gary Soto

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The steam off my pee  
Could turn a small turbine,  
Light up a house for at least three brilliant seconds.  
I'm chuckling at this thought at the end  
Of a tractor path. I'm drinking with other Mexicans,  
Some with gold grilles for smiles.  
It's an easy life. Our wives are gone,  
The chickens smart enough to hide  
Behind the barn and its tombstones  
Of Lucky Lager empties.

The sun also could turn turbines  
And solve this global warming. I zip up  
Turn, and size up my amigos under a Japanese pine.  
Some uncle with heatstroke planted  
That tree in a vineyard,  
And the tree gorged itself on polluted farm water.  
Thus, the crooked limbs  
And a knot that weeps amber from a perpetual wound.  
Thus, the finches babble in three languages,  
Then four just before daybreak.

My shadow, I see, hurries ahead—  
I chuckle at this, too, and kick the dust.  
Back at our counsel under the pine,  
I lift a cold one from our treasure of beers  
In a plastic tub. For us,  
It's Cinco de Mayo every day.  
These *carnales* can drink more than the tree.  
I laugh at this—it just seems funny.  
If our wives showed up in dusty trucks,  
We would hide with the chickens.  
If our yakkity-yak were wind in a turbine,  
We could light up subdivisions,  
Every appliance gone wild with electricity  
On a productive summer day.

# The Gritty House

*Gary Soto*

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Wind whipped sand  
And sent a spray onto the just-painted wood siding.  
My father, an angry man, dipped his brush  
Into the ground, stirred it, and howled, "Why not more!"

The paint dried on this plain-faced house.  
The kitchen light was turned on, then off,  
A desperate signal for help.  
There was anger in every banged pot,  
In the slap of the screen door, in the squeak of an oven door,  
In the nails rising like tombstones from our ancient floor.  
Smoke unraveled from a lopsided chimney.

None of us was happy, none of us knew love.  
Scared of the inside, I ate mostly on the back porch.  
After playing with the paint bucket's lid,  
Like my angry father I cursed wind and sand—  
Flecks of paint remained on my knuckles.  
I raked them across the gritty wood siding,  
A sort of sandpaper, to smooth things out.

# Getting Where I Was Going

*Gary Soto*

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My second car,  
An American Rambler,  
Was a gas saver—  
I pushed it mostly  
Through my second semester  
At State. Nobody much cared . . .

The rain that early  
Spring sped in gutters  
And wind shook  
The crepe myrtle blossoms,  
My little petal of  
Love among them.  
Where was I going?  
To her place,  
Soup on the stove,  
A curtain of steam  
On the window,  
The radio turned up  
When we rolled  
Into bed, early  
In the afternoon.