

**JAMES ELLENBERGER**  
**Of the King's Poison**

Hand-wrung from a field of burgeoning thorns,  
the belladonna opened up like musket wounds on the table.

Imagine: a whole hog cooked bright copper, an apple gag  
in its mouth, the king chewing a cigar. A few petals

skirt the tincture like pink schooners, liable to sail  
off the world's edge. It's surprisingly

intimate, the mortar and pestle: labored repetition,  
how oceans comprehend their shores, leaping

against stone until all's reduced to ocean.  
Try reckoning every next meal into a Bolognese

with a first sour bite, perhaps garlic or green onion,  
but different somehow, nipping like heat lighting

the palate's dark ledge, pleasant, then unnoticed until  
the meal's over and it's too late: trout-gleaming, the king's blood

darts in rivers from which to drink means  
a lineage of fogbanks with sycamores in the distance,

torch-lit stone hallways runged with the long  
shadows of clergymen. No grace in dying like that.

The wild sun dissolves those illusions  
yet wallowing in the moss-bearded

grotto of his loins. See his lips greased with pork fat  
purling nimbus foam. How easy it is.

Some flowers.