Spring Hike

In cool April air and peek-a-boo
sunlight we walk the brown trail,
yellow trail, red trail, looking
under tulip poplars for morels,
and along stream edges for wild ramps.

Too early in the season,
so we settle for anything green
against the winter's refuse.
The spotted leaves and tiny orchid flower
of the trout lily. Burly skunk cabbage,
that bully of the low muddy spots.

The may apple prefers a higher drier place,
with its self-satisfied community
of perfect little cloven-leafed
beach umbrellas. Here and there
a jack-in-the-pulpit stands its ground
among them.

New growth is pushing the sweet gum's
spiky seed balls off the branches.
Overhead, a Carolina wren calls hopefully
for a mate. We listen to that, and to
our aching knees, telling us when
to turn back for home.

—Brian T. Duncan

Hugo Darnaut, *Landscape in Spring with Farming Couple at the Field*, before 1937.

image info