

# The Armadillo By Elizabeth Bishop

This is the time of year  
when almost every night  
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear.  
Climbing the mountain height,

rising toward a saint  
still honored in these parts,  
the paper chambers flush and fill with light  
that comes and goes, like hearts.

Once up against the sky it's hard  
to tell them from the stars—  
planets, that is—the tinted ones:  
Venus going down, or Mars,

or the pale green one. With a wind,  
they flare and falter, wobble and toss;  
but if it's still they steer between  
the kite sticks of the Southern Cross,

receding, dwindling, solemnly  
and steadily forsaking us,  
or, in the downdraft from a peak,  
suddenly turning dangerous.

Last night another big one fell.  
It splattered like an egg of fire  
against the cliff behind the house.  
The flame ran down. We saw the pair

of owls who nest there flying up  
and up, their whirling black-and-white  
stained bright pink underneath, until  
they shrieked up out of sight.

The ancient owls' nest must have burned.  
Hastily, all alone,  
a glistening armadillo left the scene,  
rose-flecked, head down, tail down,

and then a baby rabbit jumped out,  
short-eared, to our surprise.  
So soft!—a handful of intangible ash  
with fixed, ignited eyes.

Too pretty, dreamlike mimicry!  
O falling fire and piercing cry  
and panic, and a weak mailed fist  
clenched ignorant against the sky!