

IN THE STILL, SILENT SHADOW



In the still, silent shadow of night,
The porch swing waits
For light to ease its way across the field...
For him to come with a pillow for his old bones,
And his first cup of coffee.

He sits and fidgets into comfort.
Faint light reveals clouds squatting on the field.
The tree bank, magnified by suspended moisture, might be mountains.

Deeper than absence of motion,
Immobilized serenity stills his body.
Peace prevails, at last.

In the silence, a sweet flow of love for the land seeps through him.
Slowly, episodes from his long life rise into consciousness.
He smiles. Cows milked. Fields ploughed. Hay baled. Babies raised.
Good Life.

He wonders if he is part of the land,
Or if the land is part of him.
Or if there is any difference.

His feet push the swing of their own accord.
He moves inches forward, into the air,
Then backward, into the air.
A self-created breeze, an illusion of moving air
That's not of the air,
Slides back and forth across his skin.

He wonders if he's pushing a hole into the stable air,
And if the air even notices filling in behind,
As if he'd never been there.

He laughs at himself and cuts off his first plug of chewing tobacco.
"Nonsense. An old man's wanderings."

As he chews his familiar companion, he realizes
He kinda' likes the idea that when he's gone
The hole he leaves will fill in behind him,
As if he'd never been there.

He kinda' likes thinking that his life has been making holes in the earth,
And holes in the air, that filled in behind him,
Leaving nothing after, and everything ahead.

It seemed clean that way, pure—his life an episode for his soul alone.

Sunlight began in earnest, stirring the air,
Turning the cool into damp,
Soon to become oppressive heat.

That's when people, dressed in black, began to arrive.
Scowling, tough men, skin turned to hide by years of weather.
Ladies, sniffing into hankies,
hugging each other's sorrow to their breasts.

He let go a stream of tobacco juice with uncanny accuracy.
Time to go.
Time to let the air fill in the hole behind him.

Then he noticed big brown eyes and bright red dress.
A pregnant great-granddaughter,
Staring at him.

He had held her close and rocked her to sleep many times,
But that hole had been filled,
And now she was almost a mother.

He nodded.
She smiled and nodded in return.

The porch swing came to a gentle stop,
And the air filled in the holes.