

Somewhere Between

Grandmother in mail-order paisley,
poured tightly in a rocking chair,
what do you watch in the starched-lace window
passing above geranium leaves?

Johnny, your cousin's half-brother
in his high box borne, black soil
heavy for pale city sons,
down back roads to a Lutheran plot?

Or Lizzy, a Mennonite's daughter,
lent white by the Ladies' Aid
to wed the town's wan student-preacher,
spring's most parlour-prattled event?

Or children on church stairs playing robbers,
impiety that begs a few stiff switchings
to keep Our Lord's afternoon
tranquil for hymns you strain to hear?

Grandmother, what does it mean to your old heart
beating fainter than cedars' whispers down on the farm
where your hands never ached from five minutes crocheting
and you could read egg prices by candlelight?

Grandmother, what does it come to:
eighty-nine years labour, family of ten,
life struggling on sausage, potatoes,
hand-stitched clothes and three to a bed?

Old woman, forgotten in helplessness,
leaning on a lame man, gossip's housekeeper,
and once a season written by grandchildren
far away, at mothers' strict requests,

What do you see, set silent by the window:
present, past, or do they both diffuse
somewhere between the paisley, plants and church
into a lonely, patient dream of death?

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