

OLD HOME ABANDONED

It's still upright, but terminally gray,
claimed by cobwebs and bindweed.
The back fence has a falling sickness.
My bedroom window shutter protests
against pocked boards like Jay's fist
on the bathroom door. I wish I hadn't come.

It was easy to leave here
when movies and magazines showed us other ways,
made us grump about frigid linoleum,
squawking stairs and hot water enough
for only one bath a night. I never waited
for my turn every fifth night, instead lugged
buckets and dishpans of stove-heated water
softened with hoarded drops of Christmas scent.
I'd soak and sniff my upright knees
and slide my hands over my shiny shoulders,
thinking about silk dresses and diamond eardrops.
Until someone, usually brother Jay, pounded
indignance, deepened this bald dent in the paint.

And I'd yell, "You grew up with nothin'
but the two-holer, sport. Go re-live
the good ole days now the snakes're gone.
It'll keep you humble." But he'd thump away
just like that shutter clinging to its only hinge.

Dead leaves scudding across the porch
make me turn to look for Mama's shadow in the hall,
tiptoeing, coming to feel my flu-achy forehead.
I almost hear cows impatient for milking, and Papa
calling pigs. The old porch swing, quarreling with wind,
makes noises like Sara's asthma attacks. I break
into a run for my car, leave a tuft of mink on briars.

The shutter's rhythm changes, grows urgent.
Oh Jay, you can't come in!