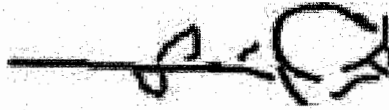


LETTER TO MY BROTHERS

*I. The Return*

I park the car under the ash trees
and look back at the road, the dust
silently detonating into the air behind me.
In childhood it was the same:
I didn't think of the dust
until we stopped and faltered
in that interval between journey's
end and arrival. Then,
surprised at the brown presence
following us, I would watch the hot
dust rising, writhing,
sure to become a twister
sure to head straight for me
on the strong beam of my fear.

Even now a brown presence shadows me.
I slam the car door, I open the gate
in the fence Dillard put up twelve years ago
when Uncle George died, after
waiting for Aunt Charlie
and two months more.

II. Aunt Charlie's House

The house endures. Fenced off.
Wires stretched across old Sundays.
Maps of creeper sending up road signs:
 this far to the hayloft
 this far to feather beds
 this far to squirrel for breakfast
When I walk by, the flies on cow dung
move aside. Among the brambles
my hands wince with the reprimands
of forgotten hens. Spider webs
drift to earth like voices falling
from the porch with the weight of
family stories. Ash saplings shade
the faces of unseen relatives.

In the breath of ancient boxwoods,
sassafras thrives, and a bobwhite!
His wings make the sound of the
New South
while
our tongues grow thick with words
unsaid. We are still family.
Wrapped in vines of air miles and
ambition. Fenced off.

Among the cattle, a deer looks up.

III. Freeman Cemetery

The tombstones rise, clustered
by family name like wild plants
springing up from roots
that lie like strong webbing
under the grass, sending
forth new shoots from time to time,
all related to that first tenacious
parent dropped here years ago
by accident.

My eyes glance off the granite
oblongs like pebbles cast against
a hopscotch: Felix and Aunt Temp;
the uncle killed at Brice's Crossroads,
Aunt Charlie's stillborn baby. . .
I know now but cannot tell you
why our father always brought us here.

Over the road
I see the brown dust coalescing
into a pale and lustrous moon:
the past rising in the summer sky.

—Anne Meek

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