

THE SUMMER HE LOST HIS WORDS

The summer that he lost his words
His hands began to stutter,
Fluttering in the air like spastic birds
That could not find a perch.

He cowered in the bathroom,
Afraid of porcelain and commode.
We rescued him one block from home,
Weeping at the unsolvable conundrum of
Key and ignition;
He often pulled the shades and sought the safety of
Darkened rooms.

But still,
He plowed his plot,
Putting hands to spade.
And on a page of loam and humus
He calligraphed rows of corn and carrots.

Once, my grandmother handed me the secret volumes,
Bound in black,
And said,
"Here--your grandfather's poems."
In measured, metered copperplate.
I read his voice in invocation;
The certain quatrains;
And apostrophes of exultation.
I marveled to hold in my quivering hands
The harvest of his early years.

Then, one summer, he lost his words.
Behind the blinds,
I watched him,
Gilded by the sunshine of a setting sun,
Leaning on his hoe
At the edge of his garden,
Like a foreshortened portrait
In the margins of the Ellsmere.

I joined him.
He stooped and snapped a tomato from the vine,
Proudly handing me this warm and ripened poem
That I sank my teeth into
As the inevitable twilight encroached.

