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Year I Stayed Around Home

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THE YEAR I STAYED AROUND HOME

By

Michael J. Poage

B.A., Westmont College, 1967

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

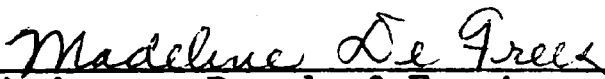
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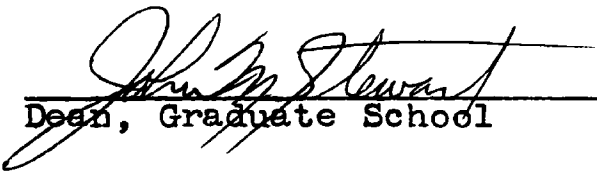
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The following poems have been published or accepted for publication: "Kansas", Intro 5; "The Year I Stayed Around Home", "It's Been A Dry June", Cutbank 1; "A Bend In The River", "Watching The Door", The Green Horse For Poetry; "The Sunrise Motel", Cafeteria.

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Do not hide thy face from me
in the day of my distress!
Incline thy ear to me;
Psalm 102:2

I. THE DARK WALL

It's Been A Dry June

I was wrong.

Dark blood of dogs

hunted your skin.

Winter bones, given up

for dead,

circled the night.

My old-woman anger

could kill the quiet.

Now there is nothing

to hide my face,

my dark wall.

My Street

The earth was brown
and the ground was given to me.
The new moon was a shadow,
the dark face
of another round world.

I was alone in all that light,
that southern snow,
where girls cut their hair
in some room
down my street.

Lame Deer Man Gets Ten Years

The last word will stop you.
I am going the other way,
driving north into snow,
through country made for sheep
or dying dogs. That's all she knew.
Even in the dark, the heat of day,
ten years are gone. Heads down.
A prayer to heal the lame
or bring down the wall.

Ten years or death. Blood
flowing like a river in the skin.
No rain. Only heat and fire started
by the sky. I know a girl
can talk to any cripple along the street.
That is not brave. In this weather
anything can happen. The winter
took our time, ran it in the ground.
God knows the children dream
a yellow moon. They shout from their rooms,
their lives have all gone hungry.

Coming Apart

Something else hit my mind.

A dream

on the edge of my tongue

sweating words.

I am not alone out here.

There are many of us

and tomorrow

we are moving up the road.

We have a war on our hands.

That's all I know.

At Home In The South

One summer I found some friends
down the street. They were older
and lived near that woods
across the highway.

There was a girl:
You liked going with us
sometimes leading the way
into the trees. Never left out.

My new friends
wanted me to learn
to like you.
In our home deep in the woods
you hid our eyes.
It was darker then.

The Room

Each wall is closed
and I am left alone
with that white door,
the color of your face.

It is hot along any river
here in the east. So hot our skin
rubs off like dirt
and the air
carries its own warning
and I must stay here
and watch you.

Looking Back

It had rained for days
and damp
cold air
damn near swallowed
our yellow house,
that small
yellow house,
before we got out.

Watching The Door

It is worth it
just to have a place to sleep
and a door to close
behind me.

In this room
the only face I'll see
will fall into the river
at the end of the street.

II. THE WINDOW

The Sunrise Motel

When you're an old woman
you can tell your own story
but now this small room is mine
and I came here to rest,
to get away.

On the other side
of that green door
ice is broken into tiny windows
and men, younger than I am,
watch for girls going in and out.

In The Midwest

I left that town
where you lived
with your father.

It was summer
and I drove
through your state

like steady rain.
Going east, I settled
my only town.

I covered the ground
like a map.
I folded my legs

on the grass
and the air
above the park

drove the dust
to storm.

Storm Window

The sun is gone.

Snow has come.

It is cold.

Cold.

April

There is snow again
and I look back
to the time

when ice was a river
you were warm
and the night died away.

A Rhyme

The heat that night was a lie,
we knew the fall would turn.
And each child wants me to tell
how I knew trees would burn.

You looked for the warm night eye,
a face for our black bed.
I turned like a leaf for you,
word of one dead.

The house gave up to winter.
A storm above this land
left this dark snow
water in your hand.

The Trumpet

Your horn
was the search. The music
to your ear
the new world. Fingers
walked the air. Black
fingers, certain to the nail,
fought the distance.

She heard your walk. Each
step rang
through her hair
like a shot. She was touched
by your gold eye, embraced
by your plated
touch.

Once out
you should have stayed,
tramped home.

No. You retraced your
steps, followed that metal
craze,
gave her too much air.

Minding The Store

Your long hair
crossed my mind.

The store was crowded
and you needed help.

One woman demanded a bargain.
I saw how you moved.
I placed a special order
and rushed it through.

You were new to this country,
did not take to the cold.
I managed the floor
and the heat was mine.

I saw how you moved.
I could have followed your license,
your number. We phoned on bad checks
but you were good.

Kansas

Thirty-thousand feet
over Salina the
man dressed in

black, sitting beside
me, asked for the
Mongolian Gentleman's

Quarterly. The stewardess
smiled, suggested
another, smiled

and moved on
like a ward
nurse before

bedtime. No word
from the girl
on my left:

The only noise the
creeping conspiracy
between nylons

and blue skirt

crushed. We
circled Peoria

for fifteen minutes
and then over
Rockford for

twenty. Waiting
our turn. Waiting
for our slice of

air, of time,
some assurance
of our position.

Hyacinth

No flower
for the table.
I knew your face
but you did not belong
to me.

The Hired Hand

Your daughter
was the hired man's
union dues. No joke
to that horse-eye,
your way of thinking,
your wife. It was May
and raining dogs.

You grieved your anger
with friends, drank
to the treasure, the state.
The drunk with the badge
rushed to the movie-house,
told the hired hand to keep going
past the Idaho line, find his own bunk
and sweat it out.

The Light From Your Room

Women flashed their yellow skin.
They ran their lives with the tide
and the water covered the ground
like cold sleep. It might have been the dead
in my dream. Your door never shut
all the way and the light from your room
warmed my face to the bone and blood.
I waited until you were quiet
and the white hills of our valley
found you near the window.
The earth was cold to our feet.
A black tide and a woman on your back.
The others had gone to their rooms
and I was the only one
left to lock the door,
listen through the wall.

Backbone Park

Every state has its natural wonder.
That one, an accident of nature,
came quick that night.

You believed
your eyes and found our road
ended on bone.
Bad luck and good
drove your white spine
hard down through Iowa, Kansas,
dead center.

The Window

In my chair on this side
of the window I am warm.
I can see in this room
from one wall to the door.
On the other side
snow dull as earth.
In her blue robe my wife
passed through that pane.
On the other side
snow dull as earth.

III. SUN RIVER

Obeying God

It was a dry summer.

I tried to follow the creek
running near our town.

Your light
was the only house I saw.

I was found in a southern county
miles from home.

Family prayed for my belief.

Snakes proved I was lost.

Sun River

Even women will burn.

They will show the others
how to speak their tongue
and when to have it cut.

The children will be the last
to tell their story and their father's love
will be a song
lost to old men and drums.

Take all we can.

Even in the dark
we will have to stay low
to save our home.

If we are taken alive
we are traitors. Dead. The enemy
is at the edge of the river.

They guard each other like dogs,
burn the town blind.

We've held out

as long as we could.

Most of us are lost and we must run
with all we have.

The Boneyard

Bones feed near water,
touch the skin of black cows
and keep the coyotes full
for winter. The creek I followed
ends here. A cow,
a blackbird, the red wing.

I came here looking for fire.
In this warm wind
a snag could go tonight
and burn this home
for the white and dead.

A Bend In The River

I gained on the world.

In shallow water

I saw her shadow and I ran,

like a bird, across a bend in the river.

I returned coming in above the trees

keeping an eye for my life.

She was desperate.

She had the appetite

of a bird dying on the ground.

Go out and get it back.

Go away.

The Rain On The Grass

A dark street,
a murder.
I walk in the shadow
near the wall.

The street shines in the rain.
The rain comes to me
across the grass
and clouds
fall to the ground.

Waiting For Spring

Our house stood back
away from the road, dark
in the dying grass. The paint
on the outside
was colored the age of the wood
and curled away down the wall
to the red ground.

Now there is only ice
but when the sun comes again
it will warm the air and the water
and I will walk down to the river.
Grass will green during the night
and grow tall across the moon
and the river will fall.

Road Country

Even now, one northern tribe
builds men of rock
as far as they can see.
In our country, roads come and go,
and any image in stone
is easy enough to count on.
You might make it
across that long white land.

Dark in our own dream
the river covered our only road
and the bear were dead for winter.

A Year Of Rain

The sound of that rain
is the rattle
of my dying day.

Christ, stand up.
I've worked in blood
all my life. Follow me
to my own door:
Come and drink the bride.
Follow me
to my own dying day
and the sound of that storm
closing down for the night.

An Open Winter

One dark morning
we walked the county road
and the round valley below
was brown as straw
and ice ran
the white river alone.

We walked our road.
A cloud hung the valley.
Coyotes,
brave with their winter kill,
stood against the cold. Old men
called that winter open
and that first hard snow
never came.

Fall

I am early.

It is the last
dark hour
and leaves fall
through my window.

Two squirrels
race along a branch.
They are grey and large,
fat for the winter
that will come
tonight.

Snow will cover the trees
and the dead will have a home
to bury their cold,
dark fur.

The Year I Stayed Around Home

When I was alone
with the heat of that old house
the valley turned against me.
I tried to find you along the river.
Maybe you were playing a game,
hiding from your father
in the tall grass growing on the bank.

Then it got dark
and the moon watched this earth
like a rescue worker on water.
Grass turned the color of the brown road.
The river was going down
and I could see the rocks
buried by the hard run of spring.