

Fallow Field

For my father-in-law John Engle

So I decided to just sit with him,
not start the conversation.
Such a quiet man and calm
and me so garrulous and not,
he nourished the soil, his soul so old
inconsolable infants found comfort in his lap.

Our rocking chairs on the deck faced west
and the landscape unfolded —
freshly planted fields, the Perkiomen Valley,
steaming stacks of Limerick's nuclear plant
and the soon descending sun.

He rocked and puffed, rocked and puffed,
the pungency of pipe tobacco and manure,
incense for my vigil. I waited with
the perfect circular holes
of carpenter bees in railing slats,
the chipped and faded deck stain
and lengthening shadows, colors brightened
then faded when clouds obscured the sun.

Birdsong, the breeze, the rasp and hiss
of pipe draw and the metronomic creek
of our rockers soon synced to each other.

I can't tell you when I stopped waiting,
just that I did. The way you don't know
when you fell asleep.
Nor how long it was before his voice
like the voice of the field itself said
If we get a little rain,
the corn should come in good this year.