

AS REQUESTED

for Betty

*The city now doth like a garment wear
the beauty of the morning . . .*

Three years now since I took the rough shards,
the broken handfuls of my aunt
and threw them from Westminster Bridge.
With her usual grace she descended.
She spread in the currents and disappeared.
I was afraid someone would turn me in
for throwing her ashes into the Thames,
so close to the Houses of Parliament
and old poets sleeping in the Abbey.
But no one saw her enter the water,
taking her love of Keats and Shakespeare,
and miserably cold English winters,
and Wordsworth's *Upon Westminster Bridge*,
into the dark river, out to the sea.

SCORCHER

In the summer twilight,
a couple of hours after dinner,
we like to take a walk.
The birds have turned in.
The air has finally cooled,
but the crickets and katydids
are getting so worked up
that the lightning bugs catch fire
a few feet above the lawn,
just where we left them
when we were kids.

Now and then
we pass another couple
from one of the green, old,
more or less identical
streets of our neighborhood
as they move through the atmosphere,
mystical and obscure,
their voices softly registering
the news of the summer.

Good evening,
we say to each other.
Lovely night, isn't it?
What a scorcher, we say
with gratitude and affection
for this shared mystery
of being human
on this dark little planet,
on one of the slender,
gracefully swirling arms
of one of the smaller galaxies.

MUSIAL

My father once sold a Chevy
to Stan Musial, the story goes,
back in the fifties,
when the most coveted object
in the universe of third grade
was a Stan the Man baseball card.

No St. Louis honkytonk
or riverfront jazz club
could be more musical
than those three syllables
rising from the tongue of Jack Buck
in the dark mouths
of garages on our street,

where men like my father
stood in their shirt-sleeved exile,
cigarette in one hand, scotch
in the other, radio rising
and ebbing with the Cards.

If Jack Buck were to call
my father's drinking that summer,
he would have said
he was swinging for the bleachers.
He was on a torrid pace.
In any case, the dealership was failing,
the marriage a heap of ash.

And knowing my father, I doubt
if the story is true,
although I love to imagine
that big, hayseed smile

flashing in the showroom, the salesmen
and mechanics looking on
from their nosebleed seats at the edge
of history, as my dark-suited dad
handed the keys to the Man,
and for an instant each man there
knew himself a part of something
suddenly immense,

as when,
in the old myths, a bored god
dresses up like one of us, and falls
through a summer thunderhead
to shock us from our daydream drabness
with heaven's dazzle and razzmatazz.