

Donald Hall

LEARNING TO READ

Sitting in the back seat
of a nineteen-thirty-five Packard
with running boards, I held
my great-uncle Luther's blotchy hand.
He was nine for Appomattox
and told about the soldier
boys coming home from the war.
When I pressed the skin of his hand
between thumb and forefinger,
the flesh turned white as Wonder Bread.
It remained indented
for a few seconds, and then rose up,
turning pink, flush to the surface
of his veined hairless mottled
hand. Then I pressed it again.
Luther would stay old forever.
I would remain six, just
beginning first grade, learning to read.