

MARKS OF LIGHT

1.

Unlike a photograph
which can be destroyed,
a man carries in his head
the father he would have
no part of. At a railroad
crossing, he stops his car
to watch the train
cast its light this way
and that, each tree
a momentary comfort,
lit like a forest home.

2.

Once I asked my father
for a picture of his father,
and he looked through me
like cold air
while the night bugs went on
thrilling with late summer.
I did not know that even then
his father, posed in a black vest,
was hiding somewhere in a corner.

3.

The next day will arrive
and leave like a blank
patch of sunlight
on the cement floor
for the one who refuses family:
leather scrapbook tossed out,
unfilled. The father
moves across doorsills
into the daylit chores of memory
as behind the garage

a mole pushes the dark
around all day.

4.
Hillside kudzu thickens
and smells like hard grape
candy: office pockets
of returning fathers.
The little son dances
on the car's backseat
waiting to pick his father's
pockets. He can pick
this man out from all
those evening sidewalk marchers.
Same corner, the day after
shining like the day before.

5.
Monday returns
to how hard men work,
a history of each day
passing surely into a flurry
of machinery, ledgers.
Fathers and sons
sum each other up,
pacing two strides,
then three apart.
Parting.

6.
In the corner of this old desk
drawer, I find a photo
of my father's forgotten
father, two men with the same eyes.
One harmless now,
colorless as leafmold:
the man he would not speak of

stares out with familiar austerity.
Cold—a fathering weather.

7.

A man stops in the field,
reluctant to go farther
than what he knows.
In the starlight
he senses something
he never quite got
enough of. Looking down
at his boy, he murmurs
another September,
just what we all need.
His son stares at him,
then out at the cold distance
to the stars,
marks this as memory.