

“X” · *Scott Ruescher*

In colonial Virginia, it wasn't uncommon  
for someone like X to believe  
that W's life was not quite as rich,  
or, all things considered, that Z's was a total loss.  
The Blue Ridge Mountains west of town  
echoed his gossip till everyone knew  
better than to try to befriend such a man.  
X even noticed that Y's life was led  
by social forces beyond Y's control,  
that Y was therefore not worth talking about.  
But V had a talent for going unnoticed.  
X's unlucky neighbor, he lived in a cellar  
with fellow hermits Q, R, S and T.  
And they made damn sure that X didn't hear  
whatever it was they were doing down there.

So centuries went by without much change,  
except, perhaps, that the mountains lost hair.  
X's beliefs remained much the same,  
held the same water for crazy men later,  
handed down from year to year.  
As long as they were at all reinforced,  
by a weakness shown in this face  
or by a problem shown in that,  
the Xes were eager to wave their gavels.  
By then, there was power in numbers.  
It wasn't likely that they'd disappear.

But lately I have attended a church near there,  
a white frame church at the foot of the Ridge.  
The preacher goes by the name of U  
and carries on about the sins of the Xes.  
From what I gather, the preacher believes  
that all of our neighbors' lives  
are lived, after all, without our permission.

Deeper, he says, than little ditches,  
we are each of us wells connected  
by an elaborate system of underground streams.  
All one has to do to realize this  
is to lower a bucket into one's neighbor  
and pulley up from the well-bottom there  
a water that tastes much like one's own.  
And next year the national forestry service  
plans to plant seedlings at 4000 feet.