An Obit

They had a small in-ground pool where they'd quietly tread water
most summer afternoons. Their farmhouse was one of the first
built in the area, and it badly needed paint and repair.
There was moss growing on the roof.
Its slats were rough outer bark and etched with scars
that in the right light looked like a multitude
of golden cat's eyes. Owls loved their barn before it came down.
Once, when I was as a scout, and they were not quite so old,
I went there in attempt to sell popcorn for our fundraiser,
and Mr. Hess said it would be better if I just went on home
because that night the moon would rise in full,
which was a dangerous time, he said, to be a little boy.

His father had been a big player in the rock business
over at the quarry near Bear Cave—he'd left his son
with lots of money, and one would learn from periodic submissions
to the local newspaper's editorial column, some questionable
ideas about the collapsing of the universe. There was always
something about how only women could watch over the planet,
as the world herself was female. Mr. Hess did not appear to abide
by this theory in daily life, as he and his wife sat on their porch
in longsuffering contemplation. If loneliness occasionally
provoked her to shout and weep, we never knew of it.
They just languished there as one imagines folk do,
deep in some recess of existence, where the reality of every
hour mixes with something common, benign, even forgiving.
I never believed he was sitting on a fortune in sapphires
dug out of some rock face by some other Hess, generations ago,
but some did. Finally, one April, they were gone.

No one ever found them. Not a word left, just the windows open
and some rusted-out paint cans in the front room. No furniture.
No pictures. No odd belonging. I walked about the place,
looking for footprints, listening for sounds of distress,
and finally radioed to the station that it was just
how it had been reported: no trace. Outside, I looked up
at the gigantic sky, heard the bird song coming
from the creek below, and wondered if these really were
the last days. I went over to the pool, and I thought you
would want to know—it was late in the evening and there were
no whispers, and there were no obituaries for the morning paper.

If He Knows

It's been such a long time since he left,
which is good, because this way, at least for you,
he can never get fat, and you don't have to worry
about his falling in love with anybody else.
You don't have to ponder over whether
he ever learned to tie a tie,
or has grown out his beard again,
or has gotten back into horseback riding.
He's at least a thousand miles away,
so if he's sitting at a bus stop without money
or undressing in front of an art class
(something he told you he was never going to do again),
or lost the vinyl of *Tristan and Isolde*
that you gave to him— it doesn't matter to you.
But you keep thinking about when you stumbled
on that picture of the thirtieth U.S. president
in *Merriam-Webster*'s and said, "Oh, my—
I wonder if he knows?" If you ever do see him again,
you hope he'll be more the earnest Republican
lawyer, clean-cut, quiet, plucking out a few words
without dimension, lacking conviviality,
the way only Coolidge allegedly lacked conviviality.
On that last day before he went away,
he was telling dirty jokes, including one about a vampire
and a tampon (the punchline was *Brett Easton Ellis*).
You sat incredibly still, trying not to interject, hoping
that he'd keep going and going, but knowing
that this would likely be the last time
you would ever hear him and his fervent freestyling.
Yet, you couldn't save what didn't want to be saved.
You didn't abandon him that one time upon the mountain,
during a thunderstorm even though you were scared.
You didn't turn him in when you discovered he'd been
sleeping each night in the writing center instead of finding
a real place to live. You didn't have anything to do
with what happened when he nearly drowned
in the hot springs, or the time he showed up
stumbling drunk to the undergraduate poetry reading.

But you'd gladly hear him again, reciting Mallarmé,
so assuredly, so sincerely. One night, after a few beers,
he told you that dreams have as much influence as actions.
So, you keep wondering what dreams he dreams.
And if he knows, if he knows.