

A PLACE FOR SAM

He was Lorrie's Grandfather, not mine,
but I fished all afternoon in Salt Creek with him once,
and together we brush-painted two great old Hinsdale houses
in five days.

He mixed the paint and told me stories,
like one about how, as a kid, he got a job painting
after the boss called down a challenge
from the top of the ladder, "Bring me up a brushful!"
Sam said he did it without spilling a drop.

I marveled at how he could squat all day on those skinny legs,
peering steadily at his bobber from under a long-brimmed cap.

I laughed at his clowning, and the way he exclaimed to his son,
"By Gawd, Chollie!" in his strong New England accent.

Lorrie described how in the morning he might suddenly
do an exuberant little tap dance on the kitchen linoleum,
singing, "Combed my hair with the arm of a chair!"

I knew about him playing a shin-kicking game
under the kitchen table with his granddaughter,
how once he kicked her mother's leg hard instead.
I heard described the redness of his face at her scream.

I wondered about the time he wakened in the Seventh Day
Adventist Hospital to the singing of the church choir
and told Lorrie's mother he thought he had died
and gone to Heaven.

After he was gone I saw the old monster cypress
near its own death in a dried-up swamp in Arkansas,
no water around it anywhere.

I put the water back and added a flat-bottomed boat.

I thought the tree might feel better too,

if I made it into a place for Sam.

