

Scott K. Ruescher

The Call

When I go back for a late autumn visit, and a cold breeze is blowing
The red and yellow leaves from the lawns on the south
To the fields on the north side of town, in my imported car
I want to go with it, on the Old 3C, five miles beyond
The small-town limit, all the way to the farmhouse at Africa and Plum
Along the Underground Railroad where, thirty years after
The runaways had gone, my grandfather was born—

To that quaint white clapboard affair with the limestone foundation,
The red barn in back, and the black Dodge at the side,
Up a gravel driveway in a grove of stately maples granted
Clemency for their shade, fringed by a pruned hedge
Of rose bushes and blackberry vines, on land holding its own
In the sprawl of Delaware County, north of Columbus,
Till developers decide how to divide it like the farms on every side;

To the pump at the well by the door at the side, to the outhouse
And the chicken coop entangled in stray grape vine,
Near the root cellar where, in sterilized jars, his mother stored pickles
And berries she'd jammed, and beyond it all, past the barnyard
Where hens and roosters, Rhode Island Reds, pecked at scattered corn,
To a break of box elders and an Osage orange hedge,
And to the higher field they planted in winter wheat in fall—

All of it waiting for me here in the car on the shoulder of the lane
Putting it in neutral to wait for the call, idling out front,
For five or ten minutes, in hopes that he might step, his school books
In hand, from the shut front door out across the stubbled yard,
To the wagon he hitched to the workhorse at dawn,
Already a capable young man, good with figures and languages,
Already thinking of moving with my grandmother to the city,

As if it were a chilly Tuesday October morning in 1911,
And he was going to let the mare find the way while he studied
His Latin; as if the furrows of the fallow fields on both sides
Have not been planted in new houses and are still vanishing
In one-point-perspective toward the horizon, draining in a glance
My glimpse of his past with a plough-perfect power
That could drain half my heritage straight down a groundhog's hole.

