

My Grandmother Becomes A Young Widow

by John Riley

At the end of the day,
before the late summer's dust settles
and the new gravestone blues
(it's not a stone, but I'll call it one)
in the moon's glow,
she comes out of the time-trapped
farmhouse and hesitates—
a distant girl, balanced
on the edge of the porch steps
like a fragile-legged horse
at the rim of a quarry—
steps across the river stones
(each one hauled on a mule cart
up from the stream less than a mile away)
spaced around the dirt circle beneath
the limbs of the still-green maple tree.

I want her grief to glow before her, and charm.

But I am a foolish man.
She's merely slipping out for a smoke.
A dull widow, weary of the mourners,
newly aware, but unconcerned, that it's possible
to die without consequence.
In her hand the cigarette glows.

The dead never live up to expectations.
I want her life to pass in a world without meridian;
awake to the immensity of a hope to take wing—

to turn and catch a glimpse of me waiting here.
But she is not meant to be recalled.
Is now, and was then, gone.

The wind picks up. She yawns. Grinds
the cigarette's spark beneath her heel.

