

THE SPOON RIVER Poetry Review

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Largest Tract of Hardwood in America

On the flanks of mountains too
hang the houses of the poor,
hunched single-wides spiked to soil
that spawns only another crop
of eastern shale and ferns

that fan the great greenness of it all,
scalloped pyramids of green, topless,
levitating into a stretch of vague atmosphere
like the baptized ninety-nine percent
of ice that does the damage

and we swim below into a morning sun
bending its light into something
beautiful, something you call a fogbow
although I think you made it up just now.
On the flanks of green mountains

hang the houses of the poor
who are always with us, but here
almost invisible unless one strains
to catch a spot of countercolor cast into
the thousand trees along this defensive

span of Interstate One 0 Nine.
They are not homeless, just poor.
They measure prosperity by secondhand
bass boats and black lung benefits.
They marvel at self-service live

bait machines, the music of C.W. McCall.
And as we turn onto rutted back roads,
tunnel into smoky ridges like the miners
who drill the coal that fills these filthy
waddling trucks we squeak by or follow

for miles in a grating second gear,
we pass dilapidated shacks, shells
of junked cars, dirt yards filled with
chickens, children, dogs.
On the flanks of mined mountains

hang the houses of the poor
who, if they recognize their poverty,
are supposed to believe it is all enough.
We wind our way to a campground
where the brochure promises presences

of Nature in the sky and on earth,
where we will soon pull in beside the sleeknesses
of prolonged Airstreams and Winnebagos.
We will feel comfortable among the galvanized.
We will buy our small bundle of firewood,

bring out the hot dogs, slices of crisp salted potato,
a chilled bottle of Chateau Lafite, 1992.