

PROLOGUE

And then he came to the place  
the child in him goes

nights when neither of them  
can find sleep,

and there  
among leaf and stone uncovered

the nightcrawlers' hushed  
abandonments—

thin graves  
our days fall into,

dreams the body gives back  
to the earth

## MENDING FENCE

Each year  
a few of the old  
fence rails fail,  
slump under their own  
weight and finally give,  
abetted by time's  
faithful henchmen,  
friction and gravity.

As always  
there are the usual suspects—  
carpenter ants and fungi  
making their home in the wood.  
Frost-heave and ice-melt  
add their two cents,  
maple roots swell and skew  
the fence line anew each spring.

The rail fence itself  
is an anachronism these days,  
a dying landmark amusing  
in its quaint crookedness,  
a kind of inside joke that confirms  
as the Buddhists say,  
that nobody owns.

SIXFOLD POETRY SUBMISSION: MENDING FENCE AND OTHER POEMS

And yet each spring  
we mend it,  
fight the every day tyranny of rot and sag,  
mindful all our half-hearted efforts  
are just token repairs,  
a nod to persistence  
in the face of decay,

affirmation we can  
restart the clock  
of weathering once again,  
see our new fresh-patched rails  
shining like bones  
in the late winter sun.

## CURLEY HAYES

When I was still seven  
and safe in the suburbs,  
tossing papers from my modified Schwinn,

my grandfather was running beer  
in Bridgeport, a gun tucked under his seat.  
His route took him through  
the toughest parts of town,  
places with names like Father Panik Village,  
streets no white would dare walk at night.

Maybe this is what made him  
twitch in his sleep,  
and in his last days lean grey and angry  
from his bed of slow cancer  
to scare sister with some strange harsh speech.  
Father never let us see him after that,  
and we never asked.

Grandpa, I'd rather remember you  
come visiting on Sundays,  
in your slick shoes and sweet Irish tie,  
bearing boxes of three-fingered mitts.

Your voice had a boom and a cackle then—  
I know now why they called a bald man "Curley"—  
and in the backyard we'd toss names  
like Musial and Gibson.

SIXFOLD POETRY SUBMISSION: MENDING FENCE AND OTHER POEMS

The day I lost the autographed ball  
you were the only one who said it wasn't everything.

In '64 you brought me down to the Series—  
your loved ones, the Cardinals,  
had come to New York.  
No place to park I remember  
the box you hid the hydrant in,  
some haggling and the scalper's raw grin.

We got stuck so far back in the bleachers  
the players looked like mad capped ants.  
I amused myself with binoculars  
and the smell of fresh beer  
when suddenly above us  
an old wizard appeared,  
leading children,  
a white beard to his knees.

From a distance they curled  
through the crowd like a snake,  
then I saw what the old man was using for bait—  
fistfuls of silver tossed blind and winking  
from an apron tied round his waist.  
Each time he flung his silver into the sun  
the children scattered like mice.

Lost the rest of the day in this flash  
of a dream, I missed Mantle  
slam one into the sky.  
And later I was too sleep to care

SIXFOLD POETRY SUBMISSION: MENDING FENCE AND OTHER POEMS

about the ticket you tore  
with a grunt and a grin, muttering  
“No one pays a fine in New York City.”

I can't quite recall the rest of it...  
Most likely I slept at your side  
on the interstates, dozed in and out  
of your voice as you hummed  
and we spun out of the city  
and into the onrushing night.

SIMON RISING

--for Simon Felice

1

You had one foot twitching  
into the other world

as your mother dampened the fire  
scorching your skull,

refused to let you go  
any further.

From fifteen feet  
she stiff-armed the priest

as he pushed open  
the heavy hospital door.

Tomb-raider she thought  
when she saw in his hands

the black Bible  
with the blood-red tassels

bookmarked  
to your final rites.

"No you can't have him!"  
she screamed,

saw the priest's scuffed  
soles as he fled.

2

The nurses said to keep chanting  
your name,

said to climb into your bed  
and hold you tighter.

Above you there then came a hovering,  
the doctor's face gone suddenly pale,

the needle on the charts etching  
that first dead-flat line,

beat gone, you there still  
in that split-second of eternity

just before your mother's heart  
pushed every amp from her body

into yours, jump-started  
your own pulse back to life,

back to beating  
again,



SIXFOLD POETRY SUBMISSION: MENDING FENCE AND OTHER POEMS

blood coursing like spring sap  
through rock maple,

Lazarus returned  
from the other side,

that monstrous stone  
finally rolled back

on the shoulders  
of the ash-covered

angels who played you  
your songs

as you stirred and woke  
to the nurses' cries

that broke the taut silence  
like seagulls banking

over some far north water.

