

## **Tark Hill Killings**

There's a cave near Sinking Creek.  
It's sunk too – like a shipwreck –  
where three boys were killed.

Two of them were Steve's cousins.  
They were at a church picnic  
and they went out four-wheeling.  
Must have been feeling themselves.

There's lot of different ideas  
about what happened  
out in the woods that day.

The church party went looking  
and they found the bodies, all  
shot clean through the head.  
Execution style, they said.

Some said it was a drug deal busted;  
that old Judge Wood was  
somehow involved.

One time, Wood got arrested  
cause he carried a gun into court,  
sporting his disregard like a badge.  
Hard to take the man seriously.

Them boys got laid out  
like dead ducks  
after a good day's hunt.

I wonder if Judge Wood liked duck  
or if he ever went up Tark Hill.  
You know them politicians  
have seen so little of this place.

## **The Cigarette**

Middleton, July, 1997

The odd thing about Tark Hill –  
as if it wasn't all plain strange –  
was the cigarette.

I can only imagine the sunny day,  
sitting through a hot sermon.  
Standing so long your legs get sore.  
Storing it all up for that hard ride –

swinging mud like a sling shot  
at a Goliath world.

I bet they thought they were cool.  
Kings of the hill, four-wheeling  
until the deal went down.

The four-wheelers would have skidded  
when they came across some kids.  
Had to been someone they knew,  
shrewd at the shady mouth of the cave.

Maybe they waved them down;  
put them down on the ground.

*It's just a game, man, relax,*  
one might have said, but none did  
Doug would have barely held on

to his cigarette, dangling at the end  
of his bony fingers like he'd seen  
on his TV screen so many times.  
No point in dying without dignity.

No matter what they did, they're dead  
but Doug Middleton smoked a cigarette.

Ain't that the real mystery?

## **The Man Who Held the Gun**

### *Tark Hill Revisited*

Maybe they were brave,  
and spoke with that conviction,  
but who knows who  
they were talking to.

*You boys lost or something?*

*No sir, we're just out riding.*  
They were eyeing the stash.

*It's about time for church, ain't it?*

*It's just about wrapped up, now.*  
They could have made a dash for it

*This ain't your lucky day, boys.*

They knew they should have stayed  
and prayed over the chili dinner.

*You boys best get on your knees.*

One took to praying and another cried.  
Doug elbowed him in the side.  
Knocked the breath out of him.  
*Do what it is you got to*, he said.

*I wouldn't try to pull nothing, now*

*I just want one last cigarette*, said Doug,  
and the man who held the gun shrugged  
and maybe even gave him a light.

Or maybe, just maybe, that isn't right at all.  
Maybe it *was* some of their buddies they saw,  
and Doug put his Camel to a dying flame

and said *it's only a game, it's only a game*,

and yeah, *it's only a game*.

## **The Cigarette II**

*Middleton, July, 1998*

Did the cigarette Doug smoked  
rise above his head in plumes?  
Did it ever dissipate after he was dead  
or is it doomed to forever swirl in the cosmic soup  
and if so, aren't we all made of second-hand smoke?

Is that the galactic joke?  
That black holes were just the pock marked pits  
at the soul of an older smoker  
in a young man's body, toking  
as his confidence was broken seconds before  
his body hit the floor?

To smoke that cigarette took  
some determination – a living cremation.  
It makes sense the suspect committed suicide.  
He couldn't hide his haggard lungs  
deep in his body like the boy.  
He was on display  
like ashes in an ash-tray.

## **Local History**

Did the Easters burn their house for the insurance?  
Where do they think they're gonna live?  
I heard there was a warlock buried on the hill;  
reckon that's true?

How many hundreds of people do you know  
without knowing you know them?  
How many of them stem from the Underwood line?  
How many of them were strung up by it?

Is there some inherent value in local history  
and just how local is it?  
Where is the place where the colloquial meets the celestial  
and the terrestrial blends seamlessly into the extra?

Is there such a thing as local?  
Are we all living in the same heavenly zip?  
Where do these roots lead  
if not to some far-off star

playing chicken with a supernova?