

THE PASSING FEAR

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Beneath the scattered flight of birds, buckshot
against the blackened sky, we both began
the fourth-a-mile that weeds up past a grove
at either side, crouching comes at end to stand,
its full shadow now lengthened toward the house,
and scuff, as if it never knows itself to be
a country road where now and then a city man
would come whose weight had bent the windbreak trees

more toward the wind than back. The left-hand road
leaned left today, favored the front, but fell;
orange leaves lengthened each border line to where
a side door swung unhinged. Could never tell
which door to rap or where to scrape your feet
from how that road had kicked the toothless grass.
Our walk had whittled us the long way down
that green to where the mailbox strangers pass,

along the gravel roads, says, Here's the place,
or that, The farm youse wants in further north.
A dung-brown road, old barking Skip, and cats.
Was it the calico who called you forth
or one of her newborn your Grampa held
within the cradle of his rocking arm
as if he were an old magician who knew
the catalytic power of a charm?

You shed the frontsteps redder than were
and struck out for the backyard like the screen
door's slam. That old magician cast a spell
around his golden charm and spirit queen
who touched was touched by silken symmetry,
and then the trance unwound itself that wound
as though it were an endless dream of cats
that always land feet first upon the ground.

It ran its line and we drew ours the same,
but in the dark before the barn, angled
into the sulking road as though it were
a pitchfork flung with little force ankle
deep into the earth, we turned (as workers
with darkness coming on) away from that
which we pursued. There stood a steaming herd
of cows who held within their eyes the cat;

the white farmhouse, now gripped within a fist
of shadow, orange leaves folding fire inside
their wizened mouths, like tongues forgetting words;
Grandpa in overalls, one shirt sleeve tied
in a bandanna's knot; and you and me
with some unopened letters in my hand.
Grouped, we watched the distant storm clouds seed
until their lightning branched over the land.

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Chet Corey is a contributor to *College Composition and Communication* and to
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