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Sorting, In Evening Light

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Sorting, In Evening Light

I attach a place and season
to the magazine photo of a man with gray,
stubbled face, saved with clippings of others:
old milk cans and barns in contrast
with the space-age classic of earth
that day man stepped on the moon
and looked back.

For a time I leave off lamps,
let dusk settle over the whiskered face
like a faint texture of suede
in old family albums.
His hat has been battered
by sun and rainy weather.
Great-grandfather had the same skin—
once browned, later soft,
almost transparent. He often hummed
when I was in the room, almost never spoke.

I've made assumptions
about the man in the photo.
He was always poor, but
has no debt. He's not traveled
many miles from home . . . has no home
any longer. If he notices this,
his eyes don't tell.
They are amber and like a dance
caught on film as they look out
over harvested fields bright as the moon.

No such scenery is in the photograph . . .
only the hat, the face with faint beard,
and at a lower corner the long-fingered hands
where they rest on a plain wood cane
and do not tremble.

—Dixie Partridge