

The School Teacher

Lighting the white candle
before the portrait
of my just passed great aunt,
my aunt that passed
after cataracts took her sight,
after the fall took her hips,
after both of these losses took
her interest for all the earth's suss.

When I was young it was she who made sure
that my mom, siblings & me
made it to church, the early mass,
scrubbed & pressed, but half awake.
Voices, handshakes, right up front
by the pastors——

"Hello there Elsie. How are things?"
A body of business, it seems she
knew everyone, gossip: concern,
her gregarious interest whirring
in pantsuits & always a matching
pocketbook.

Hats 'n gloves became outdated,
though her hairstyle, its rinse,
never changed, nor, until the end,
her fascination for others——

"Didn't I teach you? Now, let me
see. What year were you in?"

Grand Dame of the old one-room,
then a sub when districts expanded,
though still an apple in each class,
immaculate as her house, rapt as her function
in introducing neighbors,
getting the knitting group rolling,
visiting the infirm.

How could age catch up with her,
she who charmed handymen,
kept her lawn like a temple & held a firm grasp on those who

moved away?

Touching bases when there were less
to touch, then an erratic driving incident,
her license revoked, next glaucoma
canceling vision, next the complex
for (of all things) senior citizens.

Finally came nature's thievery:
those strokes, a sudden series.

Oh Elsie, perhaps you broke like water
as a symptom for deliverance,
the teacher becoming the learner
in some lesson called swimming.