

ROBERT FLANAGAN

Power

Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, 1870

Two men are here: a Welsh
nightwatchman assigned to patrol tool sheds;
a fired pitman, Irish.

This is their connection:
both are immigrants with families,
one bears a badge and truncheon,

the other, soot-black, stands stock-
still, his back pressed flat to a wall.
His hands sweat; heart knots.

These pits send heat and light
into crystaled homes
distanced by the bright

ambience of more than enough.
(From Mr. Gowan's Mt. Airy word goes to Coal
and Iron Police, "Get tough!",

and strikers' skulls are duly cracked,
men let go, and the Molly Maguires
organize to get theirs back.)

The watchman holds to check the time
beneath a gaslamp, pride
in punctuality his crime,

while queasy as a doubtful suitor
someone steps behind him
and offers the blue revolver.

The bent head flares —
blood a beacon lighting
workers to battle for a rightful share.

What remains?
A pool spreading the owners' assertion,
"The Irish are savages and must be tamed!",

one body in full extension,
the other, a runner
sensing muzzles turning on him

yet still willing himself convinced
by Black Jack Kehoe and that shanty world
he has performed an act of political significance.

The widow is given whiskey
as witnesses vie for attention.
Neighbors shout up a party,

hound to earth
the winded assassin, and contrive
his roped, kicking death.

Their part
completed, they turn home to bed, to sleep.
Their women lie unscreaming in the dark.

ROBERT R. FOX

Today

you do not know who you are
this is strange it has not happened
to you in 10 years
you knew who you were at breakfast
on your way to work
when your car skidded
again & again across the bridge
you arrived at work
safely though late
you did not realize it
until one & then another
asked after your wife
calling her by name
& then after your newborn son
whom they heard had not been well
you told them he was fully recovered
had gained 3 pounds
then you realized you had no son
you are a bachelor
many years
before the last time it happened
but you aren't a bachelor anymore
they asked after your wife
by another name
your car skidded again
& again across the bridge
you arrived at work
safely though late