

Siren

A siren in the summer distance
wails poignantly up and down,
growing nearer and louder
before fading away beyond hearing.

Was it a policeman chasing a speeder?
An old man rushing in an ambulance
toward his last broken breath?
A fire brigade hurtling toward heat?

Sitting in a lawn chair by my driveway,
I offer a moment of silence to the siren
and to whom it has singled out
for justice or help or death.

"Who was it?" I ask the evening sky.
No reply--no sound now
but a breeze rising in the maple trees
and a low howling from the neighbor's dog.

Who, indeed, was it? Someone I know?
My best friend? My relative? My neighbor?
Will I find the answer
in tomorrow's newspaper?

The mystery of anonymous tragedy
grips my soul like a magnet.
A siren seems to drill a hole in my heart
to let love flow out to the victim.

In the wailing of a siren I hear
an anthropomorphic moan of failure,
a human weakness confronting a greater law
in tooth-gnashing agony.

Sirens will wail on for humanity of the future.
Speeders may give up or escape,
old gasping men may live or die,
fires may burn or be quenched--

but when a siren splits the air, I turn within
to nurse a pang within my own heart.
As with the tolling of John Donne's bell,
the siren wails for me.