

When Eddie Died

Old Tom went by to tell Amanda
If she needed anything she could call on him.

Before that, Old Tom was visited by Eddie
Sometimes on Saturday mornings after a rain, quietly,
The great skin bags of Eddie's affliction bouncing gently,
Hiding his neck as he slowly walked the barn lot,
Erasing strangely the face-shape,
Drawing the startled and covert stares
Of those determined to keep their distance
On the township roads: just about everyone
But Old Tom, watching the world with his deep eyes,
Blunt in words and thoughts, the Cherokee in him
Showing in straight tallness, skin-redness,
Gentleness toward helpless kinds of life,
Stubborn loneliness, and narrowing of eyes
At every sign of authority.

Tom often talked to Eddie, sometimes helped out,
And Eddie returned each time to Amanda's affection,
Brother and sister in the great square clapboard house
Of their parents and their childhood, and before that
The community dance hall at Freedom Lake, all of
The grand upstairs still a single room. Leaning
On my gate, his somber eyes on a distant field,
Tom spoke grimly of some he said he'd heard, had whispered
That the thirty years could have been as man and wife.
More, he claimed bitterly, than Eddie's neck growths,
That empty rumor "may have kept the Christians away."

Gentle Amanda, left alone,
Old kind face collapsed,
Eyes sweeping aimlessly,
Told the house and barn and sky
And Tom, that she was hurting so
She couldn't know

of any other need.