

*Susan Wood***Witness**

It would be summer, Saturday—the only day  
a man can relax, my father said—  
and in less than ten minutes  
everybody's shirt would be stuck to the upholstery.  
Wedge between grown-ups in the Buick, bored,  
I tested my father's temper or watched  
for Burma Shave signs. They never changed.  
It seemed to me then that nothing would.  
Not the bleached-blond haze of summer nor the car  
turning off the highway, dust spun from its wheels  
slurring everything behind us. Not slaps,  
nor looks exchanged between parents,  
nor an only child, too fat, who talked too much  
and wanted too soon to be grown.

Freed from the backseat, I followed the men  
down to the green pond, brim-stocked and scummed  
with growth, and begged to go in the boat.  
They teased they would pay me a penny  
each minute I was quiet and could I keep my word?  
My father threw out his line, waited  
for its tug and pull. A snake sunned itself  
at the pond's edge. Water moccasin, he said,  
soft and quiet as an Indian's shoe.  
He looked at us, each one, and smiled  
as if surprised to be there and who he was.  
This is some life, he said. Some life.  
We caught fish after fish while the light lasted,  
until it seeped into the pond like ink  
spilled on a rug and the women called,  
Time to come in, come in now.

Supper over, summer dark, they sat at the table  
laughing at somebody's joke,  
the women hoarse with cigarettes, Doc's giggle.  
Brad, handsome as Ernest Hemingway, bellowed  
when he laughed. My father wiped his eyes.  
Half my life, or more, has disappeared like theirs.

I think I know now that everything changes  
and nothing does, that someone is left  
who remembers and then there is no one.

I know as little as the hot breath of a summer night  
without a breeze when it is late and a child hopes  
no one will notice and send her off to bed.  
Ours were the only lights for miles.  
We are here, *this place*, I thought, and no one  
can see us. This is a question asked in a book:  
If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears . . .  
And if someone had happened by that night,  
what would they have seen?  
A child lifted in her father's arms,  
slowly giving in to sleep.