

## A Working Man

A working man, my father, a man's man  
who had an eye for skirts and a way with women.  
At the plant, one of the guys, a union man  
who more than once had come home bloodied up  
after being out on the picket line,  
the shop steward before, in his fifties, he quit  
in disgust at all the corruption but went back  
a couple of years later after both his marriage  
and effort at self employment fell apart.

Then he moved in with his new wife-to-be  
and went back to work at the factory  
this time as part of management with his  
sixteen years seniority in the contract.

In retirement, after the death of his second  
and marriage to his third and last wife  
(a Pentacostal country woman like his mother),  
until his own death in his mid-eighties  
(prolonged and painful, bone cancer, from the prostate,  
after his lifelong refusal to see doctors  
except for obvious things like broken bones)  
he lived the middle class life he had, as he said,  
worked his ass off for since FDR  
gave working stiffs a decent chance:

Social Security and a good pension,  
reliable cars and plenty of food on the table,  
a lakeside home in a rural community  
where he could go fishing whenever he wanted  
to get up out of the Laz-E-Boy  
in front of the TV where he spent most of his time  
with eyes turned inward to past events and people.  
In 1968 for the first time in his life  
he voted against the Democratic ticket.  
Toward the end, long distance on the hospital phone  
he asked, *Why is everything so sad?*

Some years later my mother told me  
he lost the only house they'd ever had  
shooting craps with the guys on payday,  
the same way eighteen years later he lost  
the low-income tuition to Carnegie Tech

I'd won to study astrophysics there.  
Years later she told me *He was a brute*  
and later yet, that on the night I was born  
he was somewhere in the bed of another woman.