

TO GO TO LENA

To go to Lena, you must leave
The highway and take
The way of wheat. You must go
Across country, follow deer
Paths and cattle trails, climb
Over barbwire fences, cross
Nameless creeks swollen
With ag runoff and rain and sleep
Wherever the dark finds you.
At dawn, when redwing blackbirds
Accost you, show them the visa of blood
You were issued in the brambles
And they'll permit you to pass,
But don't bother asking them
The way to Lena. Better to save
Your breath for the journey.
Know that anything claiming
To know the way to Lena is lying.
Don't trust the bullet-riddled signs.
The map you carry is obsolete.
Better to burn it. See no one
Wants you to visit Lena, the town
Of Lena least of all. All it wants
Is to die in peace. But walk
Far enough and you can't help
But reach Lena one day.
Approaching porches, you'll find
Rocking chairs still rocking,

Swings swaying, geraniums
In clay pots, but no one
Will answer your knocking.
In the park the carousel is spinning,
The painted horses galloping,
Impaled by bright brass rods,
But there's no one selling tickets.
Downtown, where Main Street
Stretches out like an arm gone
White from the tourniquet,
The theater plays the same film
Over and over. You sit in the back
Row and watch the matinee.
You should know that if you
Go to Lena you may
Never leave. You may
Find yourself one day
Behind the counter of the pawn shop,
Appraising freshwater pearls, or holding
A pair of scissors, having become
The town's only barber. Come
Evening, you don't know whose
Hair it is you're sweeping up.
Now, deep in the stacks
Of the library, shelving a novel
Thirty years overdue,
You thumb through it, remembering
The day you checked it out.
Tending bar that night for no one,
You don't even bother
Swatting the flies that crawl
Through your arm hair,
Feeling an intimacy
You haven't felt in years.
You've forgotten exactly

When it was you came to Lena,
What time of year, spring or fall,
Nor can you remember why.
One morning, working at the post office,
A letter comes bearing your name.
You slip it into your mail pouch
And deliver it to yourself.
When you get home that evening,
You open it. A young man
Has written you, wanting to know
How to get to Lena. You sit
In the porch swing at twilight,
Considering how to
Answer him. Finally, you go
Up to your room and by
The last light begin to write:
*To go to Lena, you must leave
The highway and take
The way of wheat . . .*