

Camera, Window, Mind

by Richard Hague

*In memory of Joe Enzweiler, 1950-2011,
author of "The Man Who Stood Still"*

I

Out on the tundra, mosquitoes
in yellow-brown clouds around us,
we walked far off the road
toward the glacier,
its foot bleeding gray-white
with icy run-off
in high summer's heat.
When you left Ohio
the first time
it was not to such a place—sun-blasted,
night-less day-long days,
yourself nervously high on a
rope and board bridge
over icewater,
having already built your own warmth,
published your first books,
made truce with dark and cold,
grown new bones and muscles with the
work—
but to a young man's idea of here that,
like a physics problem,
you had yet to solve.

II

In Paris,
over the Boulevard du Temple,
Daguerre composed
a photo, himself
motionless, nervous
at this experiment,
as if balanced on a frail bridge
of time and light.
Far below his mind
in its high window
with a camera,
a man stood still,
forever fixed on glass
for us, much later, to mull.
Here, too, was an idea
you had to solve,

the camera slung around your neck,
 another eye into the world,
 a small room
 from which to compose your
 judgments and conjectures.

III

You wrote a poem
 in which Daguerre's man,
 had he known
 what was happening, might
 have felt all
 the kosmos drop away,
 the sky empty
 like a negative of itself
 from him,
 for in the photo's long exposure
 all that moves is gone.
 He alone occupies a city as forlorn
 as the imagined village of Keats's urn.

IV

So too for us.
 All that moves is gone,
 or soon will be.
 This is the problem:
 the permanence of
 impermanence.
 What sense to make
 of stone or flesh, of words
 or time or light,
 when all is brushed aside,
 blown dark,
 struck dumb,
 when all cameras'
 and windows' shutters
 rust closed?

V

Ah, Joe,
 I imagine myself the last reader
 of your poem: long ago the
 power has gone off,
 the phones are all dead and broken,
 the dynamos all decayed,
 the Internet long unraveled by lightning's mischief,
 war's chaos, mortality's old bad luck.

At midnight, in some fire-ruined room,
I find, in moonlit rubble,
your torn book of poems.
Slowly, I read your lines,
and fall from my last sure thought
into that loneliness,
that abandonment
you fixed in words—
that loss in which, you, and the man
who stood still,
like every star, have gone out.