

## Alice's House

Above the rolling land, now fallow,  
Bounded by rotting fence  
The house on the knoll  
Stands alone, weathered and gray  
Balanced between sagging porches  
Its cupola cracking in the wind.

Inside damp-stained walls  
Hold the chill where no heat has been  
In the rooms where the family slept  
Closed as the children left,  
Abandoned at last when the farmer died  
In the antique birthing bed.

In the years of the first aloneness  
The parlor was still the place  
To sit with the neighbor lady  
Bearing local news and Christian charity.  
In time the neighbor lady died.  
The widow closed the parlor door.

Gentle wind and summer sun  
Could not erase the hollow look  
Nor warm chilled bones of her meager body.  
She had set her mind to dying  
With the house where her life began.

The stray cat appeared, thin and ill  
Begging in a dignified way  
Lingering to be let indoors.  
She shared the little food she had  
Keeping him out of the house  
Out of death's way.

The dining room where she slept  
Seemed cold and far too wide  
Making her feel small, the little girl  
She was when the house was young.  
It too, was closed, letting the cold  
Claim more of the aging house.

The resident cat in the shambled barn  
Stretched in the cold rising sun  
Listened for sounds of waking  
In the lighted room that was warm.  
He waited to greet the hand  
Of the widow bearing food.

The house sat silent,  
The light in the room glowed at the waiting cat.  
Impatient, he jumped to the rotted sill  
To see the widow sleeping,  
The widow stilly sleeping.  
Behind the last closed door.