

A Little Sugar in the Tank by Lou Terlikowski

If you were to take the second left turn
on Bear Fork Road, past the parked
hearse, but before the crowd of little dogs,

you would find my Papa John, hands
crossed over his rounded belly, watching
squirrels or whittling willow branches.

He has done this for the last forty years,
save the time he spent in the war,
with increasing frequency.

Eyes tracing the tree line, his prejudice
slips, no, *strides*, into speech between
hummed hymns. God is clear

on how He likes things and tradition,
Papa John says, is important. The spot
on his porch is ten minutes from the church

and three hours from the place I first kissed
a girl whose hair smelled like honey
suckles in spring. Sometimes, I think

of passing the turn and driving into
the rolling asphalt, but I always end on
the porch, learning the right names for plants
and myself.