

The Pasture Gate

This empty house three miles from town
was where I lived. Here I was back,
and found most homes around were gone.
The folks who stayed here now were black,
like Johnny and A.D., my friends.

As boys we worked in Daddy's fields,
hunted rabbits, squirrels, and quail,
caught and cooked catfish and eels,
searched the land for arrowheads,
tried to fly the smallest kite,
steered barrel hoops with strands of wire,
and wrestled hard. At times we'd fight,
without a thought who might be boss,
who was smartest or the best,
the leader for a few brief hours
was who had won the last contest.

But then – we were fourteen or so –
as we approached the pasture gate,
they went to open it, and then
stood back. This made me hesitate,
sure it must have been a joke,
a tripwire, maybe, they had planned.
I reckon they had to obey
their parents' prompting. Or command.

We only saw it vaguely then,
but we were transformed at that place.
A silent line was drawn between
friend and friend, race and race.

- Jimmy Carter, from *Always a Reckoning and Other Poems*