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## After Getting the Mail

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## After Getting the Mail

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*Howard Schaap*

We approach the house at the elbow-bend of the one-way,  
the boys in the steel-spoked stroller and me pushing.  
The house lies vacant now at noon on a fall weekday,  
the half-closed blinds are a skeptic's eyes, their  
glasses reflecting what one son dubs "the burning trees";  
one door is shut halfway, the cement drive is pocked  
and vacant, the last puddles from last night's rain  
empty into atmosphere's thirsty throat. We turn, pass  
a pile of leaves, raked but left for dead, and an inert  
trampoline, black mat sprung tightly to its metal frame.

"That's Jay's house," one son says. "He's my friend. He's at school."

Simple sentences all. I'm stuck on "He's my friend":  
the shortest distance between two points, a declaration  
of place in the cosmos, the universe turned from mighty stranger  
into neighborhood where doors are left half open at midday  
and life is paused unafraid while folks are away. I know they  
know this older boy only by name, only by the simplest of run-ins  
and yells-out as we pass: "Hi, Jay." Yet he's named: They know it,  
they call it, and he responds to it. And were he trouncing  
the leaves now or launching spaceward on the black tramp  
they would call his name, "Jay, friend," and continue on their way,

happy to be a part of this universe home.