

UNCLE ELMER

When I imagine him,
50 years ago, sitting there
at my dad's—his brother's—
funeral in those beautiful
mountains in Tennessee,
looking down at his hands
in his lap, I wonder,
as I wondered then, what
he was thinking about.
Some scene in their boyhood?
Playing catch in a vacant lot?
A book my dad gave him, or
one he gave my dad; a line
they liked from a favorite poem?
Or maybe thinking about
what he'd said to my sister
and me in the car on the way
down to the funeral from Iowa:
how you can hate a person
for dying (though he himself
would be dead in another
two years, also in his early 50s).

Maybe that was it:
How he hated my dad for dying.
And also, maybe how he
too would one day be hated
for dying, by loved ones, sitting
there at his funeral, looking
down at their sad hands.