

1965

Sunset

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Recommended Citation

Goodwin, Michael C.S.B. (1965) "Sunset," *The Angle*: Vol. 1965: Iss. 2, Article 12.
Available at: <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol1965/iss2/12>

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"The green came silently with thunder of ants and soft suns at dusk. I could feel the old man's bones softening imperceptibly day by day. The distant brittleness that had somehow crystalized with each succeeding snow vanished from his eyes and rounded itself into a haziness that settled at the tobaccoed corners of his mouth and showed itself only here and there in a cragged upturned word. He was eighty-seven years old. He had seen his springs, he had beaten his winters."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 10, Number 2, Spring 1965.

SUNSET

By MIKE GOODWIN

The green came silently with thunder of ants and soft suns at dusk. I could feel the old man's bones softening imperceptibly day by day. The distant brittleness that had somehow crystalized with each succeeding snow vanished from his eyes and rounded itself into a haziness that settled at the tobaccoed corners of his mouth and showed itself only here and there in a cragged upturned word. He was eighty-seven years old. He had seen his springs, he had beaten his winters.

We often sat and talked together at dusk. He would rock and chew, spit an unerring arc or two over the rail, look at me and wink, look at the sun while he wiped the edge of his mouth with his knuckle, chuckle quietly at his accuracy.

There was a great humility in this small pride of tobacco arcs; a great wisdom in the quiet of his smile; a great peace in his eyes as the sun shattered itself to sleep in the red of the earth's edge.

I watched many of those dying suns chisel themselves silently into the fine etched webs of the old man's face before I learned of that special clarity which comes sharp and birdlike over old men sitting on porches at dusk in the spring. I was slow to see communion pregnant in the air like static, somehow akin to the taut cocked ears of a huntingdog tensed for the prey, waiting for death.

He would talk quietly of small yellow flowers growing between the stones of the footpath, of yulelogs cracking, of cinnamon sticks and the lamented loss of true penny candy and pickles by the barrel. In short, he spoke quietly, softly, with the surety of a man who has turned over stones in a field and planted seeds in their place, who has seen fox dens and treed 'coons firsthand not in dreams, who had lain with a woman he loved and buried her forty years later still loving. He would talk quietly and I would listen, and then together we would listen for katydid. Finally we would move on in.

I still marvel at the subtle strength of trembling petals moved by the shy yellow sun, at stones sprouting with rain. And at dusk I still sense the quiet of that old man, long gone now, once sitting on a porch in the spring at dusk: softness, the earth, and the old man breathing quietly together, a smile indenting the air, and seeds begetting saplings.