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Try To Understand Papa

Papa's not too hard to understand, he was just a man With a hawkish face and long steps Ending in feet that emptied puddles. Kept his manhood locked inside His fists so tight, they turned Ashen black.

Papa's easy to understand, if you're a man Who stands high watching white folks Slide by the brewery stable where He kept the horses fine. Standing His ground as they pranced on the end Of the lead; standing so tall He needed a spear.

Papa was an easy man to understand; even then --

When he was so gentle they called him boy, And couldn't see the thin bolt of vein Corded from shoulder to forearm. I pluck The wet scent of frying meat and the scent Of his hands from those mornings When he helped me wake.

Grandpa was a man who posed in a Ford With his jaw at right angles to the sun; And even cousins called him Papa 'Cause they could understand How he held out through a card game That lost the house. Then won it back Playing woman against man.

Gossip tells that he paced before the doorway Of a fourposter and counted eight times Before he got a son, then spent His manhood away from home. But I smell the scent of his hands And purse the lips he gave me. Papa's not too hard to understand; He was a man.

-- Colleen J. McElroy

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