
Distant Music

John Palen

How quiet the farm must seem
with you grown up and gone away,
no longer 14 and practicing
cello in the machine shed
so your mother can sleep
after an all-night shift.

You've been at it three hours
Penny dozing at your feet
an old dog lulled by low
vibrations through her belly.

Today, listening to you
in the life we share, still practicing,
I hear them across 60 years,

those simple, graceful tunes
drifting out into Missouri heat:
Bach and Haydn, French folk airs
in a student work by Bazelaire.

They carry down your dusty lane
across the pasture,
even perhaps
as far as the shady creek,

where water
at its summer low
seems hardly to move
downstream at all.

Discussion questions for the poem *Distant Music*:

1. Does life in rural communities change? Explain.
 2. Do most people in rural communities want change? Explain.
 3. Does a desire for change vary from age group to age group? Explain.
 4. Do you think that many rural people would like to have life remain the same with few changes? Explain.
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