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Radio Waves

Peter, I see you on the lawn today,
your nerdy glasses perched on the edge of your nose,
and I see that you are a poor damn veteran,
all the leaves from your unkempt lawn blowing
onto mine.

Every time someone new comes to our house across
the street,
they see your radio antennas,
tall sturdy creatures rising high above your home,
long spindly chords anchoring them to the earth.
Every time they ask about it, I simply say, "Crazy
Pete."

Do you blame me? Guy who spends hours in the
basement
fiddling with radio currents, tapping into conversa-
tions in China.
I often wonder what your code name is. Red Dog?
Blue Snake?
What do other radio junkies call you when
they hear your crumbling voice?

Is it camaraderie? Satisfaction? To hear the voices
of men
continents away and still with the same loneliness
you have.

Peter, what about your wife? I see her less and less.
Yesterday, halted at the stop sign on Maple Street,
she drove by me with a scowl on her face.

I worry about the two of you, even though I know
she always called you a poor husband
and made you go out to dinner alone.
Peter, do you sometimes let her listen?
Let her chat with one of your radio voices?
Does she have a code name?

Merlyn's Pen

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As I am a poet I express what I believe, and I fight against
whatever I oppose, in poetry.

-June Jordan

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MERLYN'S PEN

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Looking at you now, Pete, takes me back to that
night
when the neighborhood kids lit your pine tree on
fire.
I saw it outside my window, flames high and licking
the porch railing,
and I yelled to you in that cold night, embers in
the air,
but got no answer.

When the fire trucks came you walked out the
front door in amazement.
Damn clueless look on your round face,
flames reflecting off your speckled lenses.
I should have told you right then and there that
it doesn't have to be like this.

No man needs to hear the crackling of his pine tree
as it burns inches from his home.
No old veteran has to live with his feet on a
cold cement floor, turning knobs, listening to radio
waves,
his wife in the kitchen making dates with strange
men.

You think I'm a dumb kid and can't understand,
but I do, Pete, and I wish I had said to you
in that piss poor moment, tree on fire:
Stay with us.

Come over and have a cup of redemption coffee,
talk of the weather, and the neighborhood, and
everything you tell the little microphone in your
basement.

What I'm saying is, take down your antennas
and come outside;
there's no current running in the ground
that we don't have up here in this brisk air,
because your leaves don't blow onto radio lawns,
they blow onto mine.

—Alex Ortolani,
Twelfth grade, Cape Elizabeth High School,
Cape Elizabeth, Maine

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