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288 Sutton Road

April 6, 1996

Margaret Anne Goldsmith Hanaw

**I knew
the house was dying
a skeleton
rafter bones stripped
exposed to elements
it was prepared to go
having lived its time**



**I burned the house
on Sutton Road
it was hard to destroy
the growth of trees
that were the house
where Jim Nunn lived
who built the house
dogtrot style
like his father's
where he grew up
on this hill
years ago**

**Jim Nunn
reared his family
in this house
then lost it
in the depression
to pay the note
covered by my ancestors
who took the house
and farmed the land
with tenant help
for thirty years**

**That was before
cotton pickers
and big machines
worked the land;
displacing people
who moved to town
for Arsenal pay**



**There were renters
with welfare checks
they left at night
without paying rent
then vagrants came
to assume the lease**

**Insurance canceled;
the corpse house
I offered
to movers
to preservationists
to the farmer
who rents the land**



**After vandals
took the mantles
I gave away
the roof
the doors
I gave away
porch columns
and cornerstones**

**Before the burning
by Big Cove
Fire Department Volunteers
early morning
April six
on the porch
a baby carriage lay
overturned**



**In the attic
clothes and mattress
lay memory of naked lovers
beneath bare rafters
open to sky
where mountains stretched
through broken windows
above red fields
plowed for
spring seed sowing**



**Firemen came
executioners
to do my work
to break ceiling holes
to spread gasoline
to light the fire**



**Then smoke began
rising slowlg
thin at first
then thick and black
with leaping flames
bright yellow and orange
hot so hot
they singed my face**



**Out the chimney
smoke billowed
one last time**



**Flames leapt
through doors
through rooms
engulfing all
rafters and doors
walls and floors
the growth of trees
that were the house
and memories past
of many years**



**I drew back
away from heat
burning my face
scorching my hair
watching the inferno
deuour remains**



**Left behind
a root cellar
two chimneys
silent markers
and foundation stones
about smouldering ash
and lone stairs
leading nowhere**

**The house
could have sheltered
or its remains
built warming fires**



**Those thoughts
haunt me -
but
I had
no choice
but to burn it,

or did I?**

A resident of New Orleans, Huntsville native Margaret Ann Goldsmith Hanaw spends as much time as possible in Huntsville where she can often be found at her desk on the first floor of the I. Schiffman Building.