Sunday Morning Raspberry Picking

The rusty Chevy pickup brakes, nestling.  
Before the engine cuts, "You better believe—"  
Drawls in hillbilly from the radio  
And hangs a severed edge on the silence.  
Clouds of road-dust settle. They are raised  
Again when the next wheels mutter along the grooves.

This is no Lovers' Lane: the cars and trucks  
Queue up bumper to bumper, funeral-style,  
Thick sheers of mist lining the rear windows  
In privacy the sun will soon dissolve.  
Though friends and neighbours, all sit contained  
Like focused athletes hunkered on a track.

At seven sharp, the owner's son unbolts  
And swivels the chain-link gate. A dozen engines  
Kick in, and the procession lumbers over  
Hummocky ground, prints ancient mud in potholes,  
And congregates at the first long bramble row  
Where another son waits with baskets and directions.

True hand-me-downs of battered lime-green cardboard,  
The baskets keep the stains of last year's harvest  
Like frescoes cast by floods. Only slowly  
The deeper red of fresh pickings rises  
Over the fringe: small, edible briar roses,  
The raspberries hide their blush with screens of thorns.

It is a sacrifice. Farmers owl-eyed from haying  
Could hug their beds like cut grass; wives don't need  
A rouge of stings and scrapes; nobody ever  
Needs raspberries. Yet, a hunger burrows  
Beneath their needs to sound an urge that will not  
Be stilled until it surfeits on their pains.

Light sharpens and begins to trim their shadows  
As mists of chatter rise from little circles  
Throughout the patch. Now, from the shadowed grooves  
Of heavy faces, a holiday laughter flashes  
Too quick to lighten them, and focuses  
Clutches of sweet, perishable rubies.

John Reibetanz