

# PORTABLE PLANET

POEMS

ERIC PAUL SHAFFER



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## Far from the House, I Climb

Alone in the snow,  
among pines, far from the house,  
I climb.

Up a thin bole, snapping limbs, flaking  
trunks, higher than the hilltop  
our old house settles in.

I see winter blue through brown  
cones and thick green needles,  
and struggle up quick, then stuck.

What is solid, sways.  
I'm a white monkey wondering in air.  
How did I climb into cloudless blue?

Look around. The house, the hill.  
The tree trembles, tilts,  
shaking snow onto snow.

Gazing down the bole  
at branches and bark  
darkening drifts, I trace

my blank-soled footprints  
backward through snow  
I crossed from high, heated,

knotted, wooden rooms, leaving.  
From one tree among lines of pines  
in Michigan woods,

a forest is a history, a family  
treed by rising too far —  
a trunk too thin,

branches too thick to mount further.  
I almost hear the hounds. The house is lost  
in branches, and I freeze to the tree.

I can ascend no higher.  
Deer browse the limbs below.  
I cling to the trunk

as did ancestors of ancient descent,  
lithic little climbers with wide eyes and brains  
too big to bear,

waiting while the tree, the world, grows  
large enough, or dark enough,  
to deliver me.