

The Second Day of Christmas

Longing, we say, because desire is full
of endless distances.

– Robert Hass

Our tree limbs were sapped enough to droop
under their weightless glimmer, the skirt
clear of everything but brown needles
and a few fallen ornaments, like detritus
left in a closet emptied after a relative passed.

This morning I pushed the tree into a green
dumpster. Its trunk poked out like a shoddy
attempt to conceal a crime. Is it only
the twenty-seventh? Already I want
to go back to the twenty-fifth.

There goes my wife taking her holiday CD
for another spin. All the anticipation spent,
the carols can't play off their lyric of dismay;
“So this is Christmas, and what have you done?”
I saw a sullen, displaced college girl

shopping with parents, hunched in the novelty
of her sweater gift. The fey elf applique
on her back seemed resigned to Good Will.
We watched national news websites
scintillate about IT advances while blithely

redirecting us to sideshow paraphilia and links
to videos of immemorial human atrocity.
We applauded the petit jeté our daughter
performed to show off her new 1970's outfit
which somehow looked like one of those kid's

costumes, a printed plastic apron that ties in back,
but still awoke in me something kaleidoscopic
and yearning that was woven into those years.
Here comes our two-year-old babbling
on sea legs. Where's his Christmas tree?

He peeks around and calls for it, the same way
he calls out and taps the front door that his
back-to-work mother walked through hours ago,
as if she's still standing just outside waiting
to be remembered and called back.

Sleepers Awake

When a thunder head arced to the telephone pole, the sonic crack jarred thirty feet of tar and splinters turning the transformer to a haywire cartoon robot coughing sparks.

The glimmer and hum of every neighbor's TV and A/C stopped. They all walked outside looking like volunteers who just snapped out of a hypnotist's trick. Strangers who share an easement met for the first time.

Thunder decayed. An ambulance passing brought dogs to grief.
The skid of opening windows.
Each sound carved into the viscous calm.

After twenty minutes, the landscape jolted back to life. The hum of alternating current drew everyone back inside their lighted box. They shuffled along, waving indifferently. Somnolent, but dead-set.
Maybe dangerous to disturb.

The Last Doll

quinceañera tradition

“It’s like you’re getting married,”
she whines, embarrassed by the blooms
of tissue paper, crinoline veil, puff sleeves.

Old people polka. Her friends sulk because
there are no high school guys to crush,
only little boys who run with sparklers,

flashing shoe polish and candy cigarettes.
Her fool brother flirts with some Sonoran
cousin *my God she don’t even speak English...*

When the DJ starts a club mix, girls pitch
their white chapel heels to the grass.
They dip and twist while grandmother sinks

into a lawn chair and hums to herself.
She gazes into the cyan sheet of sky,
holding the unwanted porcelain girl in her lap.

Augeries

Rum and coke, fried chicken
is the eucharist. An altar pile
of cinder blocks coated in candle wax,
two resin skulls and a statue
of Saint Sebastian plied with arrows.
Some girls, mostly boys in Misfit
shirts and hermit skin. They brought
a talking drum, talking stones,
Ouija the Talking Oracle.
Some see a tiny face in the smoke
of a crystal ball. Spray-painted
pseudonyms and paramours,
Baphomet sketched in charcoal.
They pass the night casting about
for traces of enchantment languishing
in hollow trees and starlit seclusion.

In daylight, Baptist campers
uncover evidence of *devil worship*.
Chicken bones: a heathen sacrifice.
Saint Sebastian mistaken
for a bristling voodoo Jesus.

From a Star

The cardboard telescope stays home, useless
for catching the unlikely inkling of light
they excitedly predict will shower.
Outside the city it's still light enough
to see my niece's face, shades of hope
and boredom as she fidgets for comfort
on the car's slippery hood.

She gripes about the lack of "meteors
or comets," as if they're the same thing,
a likely mistake considering our first modifiers
for a celestial behemoth are *diamond*
and *twinkling*. I start to expound on Castor
and Pollux but she's lured by the radio,
a thump and wail that casually winds
to a jaunty monologue they call breaking
news—people dismembered when a zealot
blows himself to martyrdom—

then a seamless segue to more indifferent pop.
At fifteen, my niece senses the media's crass
disregard and gives me a sidelong glance.
I start to mention the meaning of the word
*disaster – an influence on our life
that proceeds from a star.*
But instead, we talk about our country's
chief exports; entertainment and weapons.