

Hereafter: a Hymnal

Nearer, My God, to Thee

Exhaustion. Sighs. This house. These Hallmark goodbyes.
The dog is dreaming, black eyes half-revealed,
limbs all extension and intention. Whimper, twitch.
Between the ottoman and couch the Laminet
deluxe heavy-duty dust cover stiffens,
church to what cannot be contained:
the warmth in winter.

Granny H, tucked away,
survives the outpost nursing home,
her lotto dollars riding off from her
unfinished chest-of-drawers each night
with phantom nurses. Her last afghan droops
about her feet as Interstate 10 unravels
for silver Airstreams: pills the desert takes.

My rest a stone...
So by my woes to be...
Cleaving the sky...
And stars forgot...

Like the smoky grotto fresco,
her Last Supper leather carving persists
in the backgrounds of photos, backdrop
to wide ties, bifocals, permanent-press
snap shirts, ostrich belts, silver hair.
In her framed crochet Last supper,
yellow yarn hair. The ad will read:

This house has room to settle in,
heat your leftovers, never sleep
next to your husband's oxygen
tank again. Just stay awake, facing
another jigsaw puzzle, building in the frame
first, piecing off the obvious in time,
then bricking out the space the middle makes.

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

An auntie touches her husband's ball-cap
sweat stain, him curled behind her, quiet,
as she pulls the bobby-pins from her hair.
The careful click of them on the bedside veneer.
Her middle is already widow and ampersand,
but now is an onion skin between abuse and affection.
A shallowed mattress sinks and weary bones chatter.

Fellowship, what...
Have I to dread...

In concrete mid-day, ice strangles the Brazos River,
slow with sunset in mud and oil. An old Chevy and Corsair
park close though all the workday spaces are clear.

Repaving trucks idle on the right-angled streets
where men in orange worksuits wait on the poles
of their shovels. Children's notes float in chrome balloons.
A rented bandstand littered with lyric sheets groans, folds, goes.

Oh, how bright the path...
All alarms...

A wind's detour keeps time with her mind's change.
Inglorious, inky, unhurried, smoke insinuates
above a live oak's abandoned improvisation.
Soul bows, makes a clocklike about-face.
Damn mattress lumpiest lump under the sun.

An Old Account Settled

In Seymour, Fort Worth, and Archer City,
Cadillacs come out washed, lingering cigar.
The evangelist, another new mother, unfurls
blue plastic over the baptism pool, smooth

as a beehive hairdo. An eight-foot fluorescent
behind the stained glass twists into place; the silver
push bar on the side door drips oil.

Whistling off-key, the Red River wind gusts up
some rented tents, stacking chairs, broken dirt.
The cereal spoon tastes of the swinging screen door.

And many things below...
Never tried...
He cannot find a thing...
If you should live...

At the only florist around, everything is in
order: up-to-date catalogues, colors,
prices. Piles of stands, Styrofoam wreaths,
stem stiffeners, spools of ribbon,

whole tin alphabets crowd you. No time to sweep
clipped ends, the fellow carbons a quick invoice—
what a signature—and breaks the seal
of his sweating, overstocked cooler.

From parking lot to parlor,
popping the plastic lid from the still-cold
boutonniere, the pallbearer forges, foresees.

When his palm encircles the Sure-Grip handle,
pecan, cottonwood, and mesquite
let go all they know about spores and seeds.

The Unclouded Day

Where no storm-clouds rise...
In eternal bloom...
Mine eyes shall behold...
Tears ever come again...

Hot stations between static giving out,
a junior pipefitter stretches his toes in the loud
cab of his clunky truck, folding his mind into fours.

The clustered grid of chemical counties blinks
in bright sun, long as the soft vowels of its bachelors.
The smokestack flares are a monument

to every night before, to the cavernous
beer-halls where two-stepping couples smash
their words together, where the heart threatens

like some debt twirling and returning.
Fuel surges through the truck's glob of parts
with nothing much to add. He wears the face

of two coins bare to spark again that mess
of fine sawdust in which he would, this time, dance
with her. He hauls ass past slow, hungry

warehouses filled with homeless windows,
passes the haze hanging on every horizon,
and tries another station on the narrowing dial.

Come, Thou Fount

The pure patience of rust opens the low hinge
of the gate our wisteria tows down in its inward arms.

Entombed so long, the wood frame lives again
with the evidence of insects.

Praise the mount, I'm fixed upon it...

Weeds drink each others' water up
from under the cracked foundation slab, which opens

like both palms of a wrecked supplicant
beneath the over-opulent red and gold tongue

Danger, interposed...

of the living room rug. Clocks full of biting dust
retire their physics to acid-leaking

old capacitors. Quilts fold down into obscure
continents—subduction through mantle, mother, and core.

Some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues...

Shadow can't rest. Broadcast by the cathode-tube,
glow only goes. Family, we are inside

our things finally. If only we could
come out so.

Take it and seal it, seal it...