

Wonders of the Morning
Five Poems for Six Fold

Miss Sophie

In that dilapidated schoolroom where the Santa Claus we crayoned last year is peeling off the door, where the first day of spring it's hard to do anything but think of sneaking off to the river first chance we get, be quiet please! Miss Sophie is talking up there at the front of the room about the dreaded subject we will never master: Cursive Writing. The thing that separates winners from losers. "Oh, foolish ones," she is saying as she walks the desk rows, ruler in her hand, a round woman with a bad temper and a faith in disappointment: "Don't think to get by in this life with just printing out the letters. People will soon decide you're just some ignorant hillbilly and they will be right, that's all you'll be." And she says this with, I think, way too much gusto, daring us to break from the rural generations of failure, taunting us with the prospect of a future of field work, welfare, moonshine, 10 dirty kids and a Ford on blocks in the front yard. And cursed forever by a lifetime spell of ignorant sentences. There is a row of apples on her desk; they gleam like no other apples, shined ruby-red on the dresses of the teacher's pets. The boy at the desk in front of me, who gets beaten by Miss Sophie every day, is asleep on his arm. Beside me, a girl with pony-tail hair, writes in flowing script even as Miss Sophie lectures about it. The letters curve and loop together, hooks and beaks joined in a dance of blue ink--and she sighs as she inspects each word and looks up for the teacher's smile. My own script book is splashed with stick letters stumbling into each other like passengers in a train wreck. But it's a breezy day in early spring; blackbirds race past the schoolroom door and thunderheads the size of mountains sail along the river bluff. Even Miss Sophie stops her lecture to stare at the clouds, making the beauty official and allowing this moment of escape to linger. It's a long time until three o'clock, forever until the clouds move away, eternity until the report cards come with grades that will show we will all be hillbillies one day, to Miss Sophie's lasting sorrow.

A Glimpse of the Game

Driving home from Tennessee one night a few years ago
Maybe it was several years, I was flooring it past
Those little towns with one red light
Until I came to a baseball game lit up on the edge
Of one of those towns but maybe it wasn't
A small town really. Might have been Akron, might have been.
It was late, maybe it was midnight, the game gone
Into extra innings, But I don't know that –
I was speeding by and I'm surprised
Any of the memory is left. Only a few spectators
Were left in the stands, parents probably, seen from the road,
Twin vases side by side on a shelf - that's how I see them now.
The radio said the stock market was depressed,
And there was war. It must have said something
like that. The news reader mumbled
Like an elf hiding under a bed, well they all
Sound that way to me and there's always war.
The infielders were likely crouched, hands and gloves on knees.
The players were all kids, older kids, maybe high schoolers.
A blue halo surrounded the light stanchions
And the early dew shimmered on the outfield grass,
But if don't recollect that for sure, it's still safe
To say it did. The pitcher nodded to the catcher –
Well, they do that, don't they - and wheeled into motion,
Leg kick, arm-whirl, a white blur from the slingshot
Of a right hand, coulda been left. I never knew what
Happened next since I had to keep going,
To reach Michigan by morning or some other place.
But in my daydreams I've often stopped and parked
To watch the game go on and on into the morning,
What I remember of it and what I don't.

Wonders of the Morning

The morning goes too fast to be clearly seen.
Something breaks in the kitchen,
a cat slinks up the stairs.

There will be evidence everywhere, spoons
and spent cereal bowls on the floor
licked bright – no one will confess.

A daughter will giggle as she scampers
down the street to the bus, book bag bouncing
on her back. I will tie my shoes

as the snow begins. I'll look for my wallet
as the minutes go by, I will not remember where
I left my keys, only that this is another morning

lived too fast. The daughter's radio
will be playing a light song in a distant room
left on for the day.

“Am I the only one dizzy from the events
of the last three minutes,” I will ask
the duplicitous cat and she will blink

her slow yellow eyes as the bathroom door
opens, as a naked woman
with a towel on her head runs past.

Snow on the Nursing Home

Snow, cover the nursing home,
fall with mercy, blanket my father
as he stares out the window.

Come down and scatter
the names of his life along the side walks.
Let Chloe, my mother's name,

melt on the window, Aunt Ginnie's
disappear as it touches
the hood of a car,

turn his dogs' names to ice,
Brownie, Hurc, and Stack,
Cows names to slush

Bossie, Chipper, Holly B,
send the names of Big Mama Ada
and her nine children

cascading though cedars, cop's names,
trashmen, housewives and tellers
the people who made who made

his old town go, strew them
all into other snow
fall with mercy on the nursing home.

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Quintet

Five commuters snoring on the New Haven train
is one of those accidents as rare,
as musical instruments beginning to play
after the musicians quit for the day.

An old stock broker, liver-spotted hands
and hairy ears, snored a melodious bass
a nun clutching a shopping bag, head resting
against the cool window sighed a restful violin,
a teenager's earphones sang

like a choir in a barrel,
a redhead whose magazine slept on her chest
contributed a sweet woodwind wheeze
and the bum, smelling faintly of piss
tromboned with all his might, head thrown back.

Darien and Stamford, Southport and Fairfield,
on and on the snorers played
with the guttural pleasure of the deeply tired
all the way to New Haven.