

Three a.m.

18 lines

That day you said I had to leave
You helped me pack as though it were a kindness.
Three a.m. is when I remember this,
When my faults gather 'round me and recite their litany.

Sitting on the bed, I called—my face a mess—
As you emptied the armoire.
Somewhere in the night, my anchorless night,
Far from the bayous and the jetties and the gators calling,
An airline woman asked, “Are you alright?”
And I said, “No,” and wept again.

Lying here with the box fan blowing,
This memory burns like a brand upon my flank.
In this hour when all certainty begins to waver,
When even the sun could fail to rise,
I fear
I fear that when the saints march through those gates swung wide
And hasten down avenues both broad and lovely,
I shall not be welcome there.

Route 40 Tanka

5 lines

Phalanxed forests sigh
As pine trees feel the wind rise
On and on we roll
Dry snow slips across the hood
And slides into the blackness

There is no silence in the country.
If you found it there,
You are deaf to the frequencies of bugs.
As children, we rode our three-speeds to the pool and back
All summer
Through lands conquered by corn,
Pedaling and coasting, pedaling and coasting,
Past the Burchichters' old house, past the barn and the pastures,
And on up Eden Road.
We rode through a green, humid province of the sun.
The Dutch Oven, my mother called it.
Sweat poured off us as we rode, and being born there,
We knew no better.
On we sped.
The cornfields sang.
Our bike chains tick-tick-tick-ticked,
And all around us
The cricket nation built its great consensus.

In the woods,
The thaw at full riot,
Rivers run beneath the snow,
And my boots crunch, slosh, crunch.
In the stream,
A scrap of someone's life
Swirls in the torrent
Then catches on the old beaver dam.
All around,
The trees demand change –
Sick of their stark calligraphy.
The future is coming.
I have heard that voice before
In the call of the goose
And the groaning of ice.

A sky cerulean, pale, rococo, fades to flaxen,
Slivered moon at two o'clock.
The sonar of an unseen flyer, soaring, dipping,
Finds the curve of a tilted head and travels on.
The artist, seeing a light so soft, so golden,
Remembers now the cherubim and strains to hear
A high, clear-noted "Ave" beyond the range of human ears.
Clouds, baroque and deepening purple,
Sit enthroned upon the mountain
Flushing scarlet one last time.
Payne's gray washes or thick impasto?
First the mind and then the brush.
Ten thousand skies, ten thousand sunsets, as many kings,
Aurochs, madonnas, or odalisques reclined on beds—
How to paint them is the question
Asked and answered yet again.