

Ritual

After the fires to go out, and the house
grows cold and still, open a window,
open a few doors. Let night in.
Let the soft flood of darkness rise at your feet,
merging with the shadows now pooling
in the hallways and under your bed.

Outside, in the fields, the stars have grown
fiercely silent, their voices long gone,
only the afterimage of everything
they cannot take back—their words,
their breath. Each waning burst of light a sigh.
A final exhale. And within that exhale, another story.

Somewhere a father lulls a child to sleep.
Is it song? Is it the moon's unspooling thread?
Some spell fashioned from the long shadows
in the heart's caverns? And when the last light
is gone, what then? What do we make of the wind,
or the tattered red kite, or the man who stands

at an open window considering the invisible snow
falling in the dark? How he closes his eyes now
and extends his hand, or perhaps only the idea
of his hand. How he leaves it there in the cold,
waiting patiently for something, anything to land
and make itself known.

How we wait too, uncertain if it is an owl
or a sparrow that hovers there in the space
of all that is possible and never said.

Crossing Over

Even the stars were dull and tiny,
their immensity lost to us across

the great ocean of darkness.

To stare up into the night was to feel

each towering wave of silence suspended
in time. To know that we were nothing more

than an old car careening across lanes
on an empty highway, headlights dim

and almost out. Trusting that somewhere,
out there in the nothingness, people slept

in farmhouses or were waking at this hour,
dressing in the dark, preparing to step out

into lives invisible to us, while we blustered
forward, half-asleep, half-awake, and the few

highway lights flared and faded into our past.

Farewell

after Li Bai

This is where we part, a stone gate
on the end of ancient pasture,
or at the edge of city nobody remembers,
the walls older than you or me.

Older than a goodbye,
this awkward lull before
the wind rises between us.

Windblown leaves and seeds
carried across a barren world
too vast to comprehend.

Who knows if you will return?
Or if I will return?

Or what the land will remember
of the words we say here,
already swallowed up by the wind,
already erased, forgotten?

It's just your hand. The car moving.
My hand empty, but filled
with the last light of the sun,

a lone tree swaying in the breeze.