

Even If the Past Is Not a Place You Can Visit

I sleep alone
if I sleep at all

climbing a rickety ladder
that claps against the rim

of the loft & hurts my feet
my bed just below the roof

where bamboo brushes
the metal snare of the corrugated

sheets where willows knock
at the cedar siding & owls

call out voles from mounds
of twigs & leaves

I can wave to my wife
through a narrow window

before she turns out
the light in the bedroom

we used to share
back when sleep was somehow

less precious back when
I still drank myself into

a heaviness & did not
roll restlessly through my past

waking with bruised
knees from my constant

kneeling & even still
I do not forgive myself

Begin Again

And for what? To say that we did our best? To say *I really am sorry* and believe it will translate into anything meaningful to our grown children,

as though they could pardon us, could gently guide us to take a knee,

lifting our chins as spines of sunlight poke around their faces, making it impossible to see anything specific about their features, so that they might be

anyone, really, a figure from a painting by someone long dead who never dreamed

of saying anything this important — and so the words hang in the air, indiscernible, like a conversation heard through a wall, all tone and inflection, more hum than hymn —

there we are on our knees looking up, as if we had forgotten all we had learned, that there is no going back, no erasing the past, only going forward, slightly stooped

with the weight of memory, somehow heavier with its impression, watching the slow replay of betrayal. Of course there is no going back. If we're to continue

living we must eventually walk through the fires we've built, unless we want to strand ourselves on the far side, where no one can save us. The thing about this going

forward is that you must bear the burning, your skin taken right off, so that the smallest wind

is a knife, even the breath of a lover or a child will tear at you, for a time at least. And maybe this is true, that to walk the world skinless and still

look everyone you meet in the eye as they wonder at you, at what you must have done to become so raw, you will eventually earn a new cloth to wear.

It took me almost forty years to face my father as an equal, to see him and the scars he bears, to see his eyes and understand

what lives quietly in them. My father, he wears these eyes and I must also have a realm

within me in which I weather the seasons, slowly paying back with interest my debts, working to mend the wounds I caused, offering myself to accountability,

revealing my whole self to my wife and my children as as I show them with my life

the painting of a figure walking through and beyond a field of flames — doing the work to own a portion of the pain, a serving to consume or be consumed by.

I mean to stand up now. Come at me, if you want. I'm more ready than I've ever been. Tell me what you long to say. I won't be angry. I'll listen. I'm listening now.