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"As Sure as Night Is Dark and Day Is Light," "Slight's"

Dick Allen

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Two Poems

DICK ALLEN

“As Sure as Night Is Dark and Day Is Light”

“I create strangers. I turn people into strangers,”
the man on the car radio was saying
and then we lost him. It was night on the Kansas prairie,
one of those nights when things flash off in the distance
but all that really comes at you are wind tugs
... and there he was again: “Always part of what we do
is to avoid doing something else,” and “I threw my cup away
when I saw a child drinking from his hands at the trough”
... words through the static. Who was this person,
some evangelist preaching from some prairie barn
or from one of those small town radio stations
with only one chair? Or just another disk jockey
ruminating in the dark? The highway
let us pick up speed and the man was soon gone into our past,
replaced by farm reports. *Kansas, Kansas,*
nothing more American than heading out across Kansas,
rainstorms ahead. We were five days from New England,
traveling by whim and song — cities and warcries
the pilloried right and left who battle always on,
tucked way behind us. “The problem of our time
is distraction, too much distraction,”
someone had said to me once, at some high-rise party
God knows where. “We need to be distracted from distraction
Or at least wear proper shoes.” Tonight,
I only wanted to find our way to a new chain motel
and whatever view that happened to be waiting
outside its windows, even if it was no more
than a parking lot with a few small vans and cars
pulled up to the curbs, a few potted plants, floodlights,
an old man walking out from under the awnings, smoking.

We needed to be made into strangers,
 where no one we knew could easily find us,
 traveling light, meeting ourselves at last. We needed simply
 plain food and a solid bed and hot running water,
 nondescript prints or lithographs of no feelings at all,
 a sunflower in a vase to look at clearly . . . *You did this, didn't you?*
You took this journey, you looked from these windows
for hours and hours, only absorbing,
planning to do nothing with the rain . . . And then the radio
 picked up some familiar Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson
 and we listened, heading west between song lyrics
 not good enough to care about, too familiar to resist,
 humming along with them as if we knew them well.

Slights

Little makes up for them. They fester
 in the small harbors of the brain
 under running lights tiny as moth's eyes,
 waiting for something, anything, to explain

why you were air-brushed, air-kissed,
 paid little heed, snubbed,
 sustained hurtful damage to your outer hull
 not drubbed

out of, but nudged from best places. Deliberate,
 always minor,
 over time, they can
 (like aches and pains or Chinese water torture)

nonetheless kill
 all your ambitions — until you're left with nothing that can stay afloat
 except your wit,
 given, at last, to cold comfort.