July 2014

Reincarnation, Goodbye: 1992

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Reincarnation

It takes a long time
For the kindling to catch in the cold fireplace;
Those poor twisted sticks
Suffering an eruption of lichen
Like the symptom of an infectious disease,
Had to come a long way across the desert
Tied in a rough bundle on the back
Of a poor animal greedy for even a mouthful
Of grass from the householder's lawn.

In another life I might have been the wood-wife
Plodding dumbly in broken shoes,
Or I might come back as a burro,
Or even one of these sticks
Waiting to burst into an apotheosis of flame.
Goodbye, 1992

—for A.M.F.

What a sad song the hangers are singing
In the empty closet;
I had not thought one more goodbye
Could leave such a hollow place,
Echoing like a cave visited only
By lizards and bats.

The silence blunders from wall to wall
Like a huge trapped bird,
And somewhere a faucet is dripping.
What a trite story! Outside the window
The same street that was there yesterday
Lies waiting, doglike, for a familiar footstep.

Across the vast concave bowl of the sky
A tiny plane is inscribing a farewell message
In letters already garbled by the wind,
And I remember standing in the room,
Comfortless and small, where Keats died,
Believing himself already forgotten.