

Elegy
by Joel Sams

I.

The unreasoned fullness of the sky
atones almost for that which I desire
fruitlessly in ripened cherries
and the sweet corn silver silken,
honey heaviest of all.
Almost, but still unspeakable
the longing lengthens barrenly
and curls in tendrils through the seasons.

I wish one long and blinding day
and fallow fields forever turning
furrowed into fruitfulness,
but seeds must have their wheeling seasons;
days must stretch and change.

I will grow and die here with the love
of changing shadows in the world,
the grasses, green or golden,
stones that sink through centuries,
waters washing ever young.

II.

Lives like waters wash between the chinks
of my remembering. Stone by stone
the shallows fill and chatter, weathered
with the torrent of too many days.

How many livings live within a life?
The one is inescapable.
Two, for better or for worse;
four for wisdom, if you're lucky,
eight for antique picture frames.

III.

Yellow ruled suspenders, Old Spice, gasoline,
a Gaither tune behind a stained-glass window,
soil broken bitterly beneath a broken sky.
Little things will conjure up the image of a soul.

IV.

Nineteen lifetimes I have lived
in plantings. Nineteen centuries of winter,
and the roots of me are groaning,
swollen with the heaviness of life and death.
Grown thin like garments, weather-bare,
the shapes of older things show through
the warp and woof of days.

V.

Dull dark, digging thorns and thistles,
husks of corn and rinds of withered pumpkin,
cold stone, moss, the must of death,
its smell and importunity—all these
uphold the roots of ripened cherries,
stalks of sweet corn, silver silken,
heaviness of honeycomb.

The breakings of our bodies and our souls,
before we dream of germination, or the crush
of springtime soil giving way, are sweet,
are sweet, for earth is dark with holiness,
inscrutable with rooted loves
and deepest dreadful joy.

