

The Funeral of Father Thomas

Under the pines, deep shade begins to blend
with the luminous secrets of twilight; the moon
emerges out of the eastern plain.
She sits, a graceful silhouette,
her gestures floating, released from gravity
while the moon, immense, breaks free and begins its flight.
Her conversation is slow and deliberate,
beginning over again. A black-veiled nun,
unseen until the nets of shade were shaken,
not more than a girl herself, unmoving, listens.

Words float between the worlds,
and her hands, like dandelion parachutes
that dream in the evening breath for a bed of soil -
or fireflies that wait in the grass, considering
their choreography when the cooling breeze
begins to glow in their wings. Words
settle between the eyelids of day and night
upon a meadow where words never fade,
like a poem incised in the headstone
on the plains where her father was buried today.

Three mountains were watching from the western horizon,
serene, white-haired elders of the ancient Pacific coastline
under a sky that seemed to go on forever
even while the sun in silence turned its dimming face
toward its roost in their inaccessible crags.
And the color of that sky, pure and calm
like what was in the eyes of this physician and priest
before he fell asleep on the last day of April.
Twenty priests carried the plain pine box,
too deep in thought to chant.
Deep in the heart of thought they took slow steps,
steps too slow to count.

Tell us, white-haired mountains, and pale aging moon,
how does a man step from the middle of an afternoon
into eternity? Sirens scream, but he does not wake,
living as he did a simple life,
kindling a wick of prayer at dawn, and again returning
under the slowly rising candles carried by the stars.
Is it possible even for you, earth and sky,
to enter into the knowledge
that the dignified revolutions of the sacred hours
seem endless, but are not?
Therefore he took his time with the words of writings
trusted by ages of holy fathers,
taking his turn in the divine services
and serving in the hospitals, dispensing
silence and the warmth of his sober glance
and raising his children in peace.

Instead of an eloquent funeral oration,
until the moment of the final kiss
it was the veil of the chalice that covered his face,
threads golden and purple, dipped in archangels' wings!