

Light and Mercy

Joel Long

There's something in this light that leads to mercy,
something in the way it falls like wisps of cotton
over frozen grass, sparkling like nerves.

The air has opened to the stitching needles
of sunlight that carry in their sheen the coo of the dove
that sounds its mourning bell through hours like blue.
Morning erases detail, the mountains outlined in blue
vague as steam. Sometimes the heart needs the mercy
of abstraction. We cannot stand the pinions of every dove,
so precisely placed, a typewriter fashioned out of cotton
the apes writing a thousand pretty words a minute with needles
sewing colored ink into my optic nerve.

But the light this morning lays down my nerves
in the breathing comfort of white and blue.
I want the blurring sky to take out its needle
and mend these tears with something like mercy,
to fold the fabric under, so the seams in cotton
don't show, so the smallest thing, even a dove
in the air, could not pour its dolorous dove
song between the stitches. My nerves
are threatened by the future. How easy cotton
has it, inanimate, numb in silence like blue.

For stones that this light falls over, it must be mercy

to forget, allowing granite flecks shine like broken needles.

The dove feathers were sewn with such small needles
that I wonder how small the hands were that made the dove,
surely small enough to fit inside the air with mercy
and the other laudable emotions the nerves
are prone to in the body's daylight. When blue is blue
there seems nothing that can interrupt, but look—cotton
seeds float high up, unseen in blue, soft as cotton,
just this side of air, but look close. It is bright as needles
swimming in cotton scribbles through the blue.

This is not the supernatural flight of the dove,
but the flaying and dissection of ashen nerves
that, separate from the brain, will not plead for mercy.

And then the blue returns the missing dove
made out of cotton restitching with needles
cool roots of my nerves, every cell signed with mercy.