

In The Valley

by Scott Bailey

The grass frost a sermon of moon glow,
the ditch an enchantment of crickets,
the hermit thrush a dreamboat in the oak,
peace visits this valley of healers
& sawdust millionaires. An heir to trees
on death row, I'm taking the stillness
in before transport trucks downshift hills,
stack exhaust like a smoke tornado
from burning tires, when Dad, an evangelist,

driver of Lord's forklift, swaggers out
to chase a skunk from behind the house,
spooked by cats or rat snakes he suggests,
a fear that creeps, stirs him from sleep
to chastise a skunk trapped in a clogged
culvert. *Nowhere to go*, he yells, blocking
the entrance with bricks, promising he'll
shoot it come noon, come here no more,
this valley baptized by a moonlit, ashy fog
through which church bells echo four strokes.

"No need to brew coffee on a morning
like this," I say, his hearing on deaf's door: *Hornets?*
Where? he asks. "It's like I'm mourning,"
I say, thinking of my vision on death row
as a car, with a broken headlight, speeds by,
my right eye wandering among a milky light.
*The Lord taketh, the Lord leadeth you back
home, been too long*, he says. Loss brought me back,
I think, back to Mississippi where I began:

I invite you in, — where my desire pawned the straight
& narrow. Had you parked in our foggy driveway
as he takes off his boots, leveraging his hand
on my shoulder, you may have thought you saw a man
soaping an inner tube for signs of despair escaping
like air, or perhaps as my soul understood, a father
at the stern of a son's ship, rebuking the squall
as that skunk growls & fluffs its tail, under the truck after all.