

SERMON ON MOUNT JOHNSTON

Wadda you know about their life?

A birth is a fierce violence—
screaming, tearing through their mother.
No telling the grudges she'll hold—
with every right to hold 'em.

The father: an absence at best,
at worst, a blow that turns every step
into another beating.

Childhood: a series of mistakes.
Trial by error.
Error after error—
each one learned with permanent shame,
carried all the way into so-called maturity.

Adolescence, that vast culture of dejection—
confusion laughing at its own confusion,
the pimpled face one wears
to meet faces for lunchtime.
A miracle anyone survives.

Then nascent adulthood,
latching onto a dream:
Oh, what I'll be. Oh, what I'll see!
Not knowing how it fades with age.

And now—
working and working,
trying to keep up with the fads,
the tech, the bad TV,
the hilarious wages,
the bowl of soup that slaps you in the face,
a relationship warm or cold depending
on tomorrow's forecast,
a future desperate,
a past fading gray—
if it ever was.

Fires burn in the distance,
filling the house with smoke.
The kitchen's a trash pile

with nicely separated recyclables
prepared for their Odyssey
to a Dump in the South Pacific.

Attempts at friendship
in a fractured land of Babel.
Imaginary companions
become a quiet ritual
in one's private culture.

Work. Work. And more work.
A procession of bodies
into offices lined with gray soot—
again and again,
in a national handful of dust.

Broken dreamless sleep
in a king-sized bed
under a pile of dirty laundry,
hopeful with childlike glee
that today'll be a snow day,
that we'll stay home
all day in our pajamas
and build a snowman,
tall and smiling,
before we go sledding
with Marie.

Say whatever you want about humanity—
about the human being?
Wadda you know?