

Keeping the Hours

By **Steven DeLaney**

The rain . . . fills the woods with an immense and confused sound. . . . And I listen, because it reminds me again and again that the whole world runs by rhythms I have not yet learned to recognize, rhythms that are not those of the engineer.

Thomas Merton: "Rain and the Rhinoceros"

Vigils

I go out in the dawn, the sun just under the horizon.
 The morning is cool, gentle. I dig three beds in the garden.
 As I work, the clouds thicken, bear down, open their mouths
 and envelop me with words of rain. I am surrounded by voices
 and I cannot hear my wife call from the house.
 My boots sink in the copper-colored mud, and the shuddering pools.

Lauds

The whole family tucks into the minivan,
 cozied next to ladders and buckets of paint.
 We roll across town to the townhome we own and rent out.
 It is vacant, and needs painting, so all of us –
 the kids, and Allison and me, and even the grandfather, Old Ja –
 grab rolls of blue tape, and choose rooms, and on our knees
 peel and press the tape along the baseboards.
 Everyone, through all the rooms, for hours, on our knees.



Steven DeLaney

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Midday Prayer

No one eats the same thing.
 McDonalds for the boys and Old Ja.
 Allison has a bowl of soup, her body draped across her stool,
 exhausted. I eat pizza from the night before,
 all five of us at the wooden table
 the boys and I built for Allison this Christmas.

Vespers

Still the rain is unrelenting, and the fields lay out
 in a saturated surrender. Water pours down,
 homeless, pooled, waiting for the sun or gravity to move it along.
 Allison and I take naps, and the boys play video games.
 Old Ja lines up his bets on the horses that evening.
 When I wake, I make coffee, and pay bills.
 Allison cooks fried rice, while the boys put away laundry.
 And Old Ja watches his horse race, and wins eighty bucks.
 Everyone at some small, necessary, or unnecessary, task.
 But the unity – this body we have become – glows, hums, murmurs with delight.

Compline

These bodies I love are asleep in the darkness.
 The house holds them in a silence that is easy to trust.
 The rain has given itself away in whispers, and now has no more words.
 Awake, alone in this night, I carve words into paper,
 making signs and sounds to the rain, to the darkness,
 saying “Amen” to this body, of which I am no greater or lesser part.
 Saying “Amen” to the silence, and to all of its words.