

LAST CALL

Ricky Ray

God coughed, and the gatekeeper groaned.

The usual trickle of ascendants
through God's ribs, the bars of heaven,
had been drying up for centuries,
and who could blame them?

The animals kept becoming
animals and elements,
women turned into horses,
men into half-decent ideas,
and everyone was stripped
of sorrow and suffering
as blood gave earth back its salt.

You'd get a handful of bible thumpers
whose fear forbade the good life
in favor of sickly virtue,
holes in their shoes

and promises of hell
hot as coals on their tongues,
but you could count on them
for a half-dead joke
and a really good glass of water.

You'd get a woman who raised ten children
she didn't have the sex to bear
but who, in the unplanned hours
on any given, could milk
the neighbor's goats for chèvre,
nurse a newbie, solve for x,
brush five heads, inspect ten gaping
mouths of dominos blackspotted
by heredity and McDonalds.

There were others, in his journal
the gatekeeper recorded
the storied ages and ordered species
that have all but been wiped from our cells,
but most, even those who qualified

to spend eternity repeating
the moment when the wine kicks in,
teaching Bach new ways to jam,
chose not to attend.

They found heaven where they were,
made it in their own
deluded image,
and they liked it dirty,
themselves the product of dirt,
an earth moonlighting as human,
and this, of all things
worth a half-wit's
attempt at contemplation,
they were just beginning to consider.

The heavenmakers, as he called them,
liked their mirrors tarnished,
the glass opaque,
the silver flaking at the corners,
antiques kept because

they know how to reflect
without buying into appearances.

And with their newfound powers
the heavenmakers smoothed their wrinkles,
shrunk their ankles, made breasts
and bums identical twins,
but left the scars, the stories of war,
and over the light behind the bar—
the beer dark for the meek
and light for the cheap—
they often hung an inappropriate remark.

Of course some idiot would come along,
have too many and stir up
some nonsense about offense to God,
but God was not angry because
God did not playact as human behavior
and only simpletons
thought God was anything other
than the precision of is;

as if being everything wasn't enough;
as if, despite universes happening
in a nanostretch of God's graces,
God still had reason to be
sat at a stool and pissed off,
a pen low-on-ink
in her three-fingered hand,
crossing off names from heaven.