

Room Prepared for an Unknown Guest

F. Daniel Rzicznek

I'm farming these ashes into eternity. Each cloud rolling by keeps your name from my mouth. Thank heavens. In the morning, the old trembling climbs back into my stomach, settles like a rattler in the pit. Even the mountain can't draw a smile from my beard this winter, as the hours slip over me: smoldering sleeves of light and wind cut to fit tight. Too much breathing. Your queries are piling in drifts four miles below, the clerk's bloodshot boredom scanning each like a victim, an unclaimed corpse. If I could muster myself to coax the ancient engine from its death and clatter down there, you'd have a narrative beyond reckoning, a lamp for the last corner of your heart's attic. But the wind is cold. My will withers from its own heat, shrivels into itself and is unborn without a sound. And the trees remain unknowable—the light remains terrible. And the wind still is cold.