

HARVESTING. MIDDAY ●

Patrick Kelly Joyner

I came to
on my back, grass blades
sawing my ears,
the recollection of blood below my knees.

You'd better raise yourself up.
I wiped at the words until
realizing my hands hadn't moved.

In the distance, I heard the engine. Idling
but sounding like—
from the bump and shudder— it
was drifting still, and I ached
to look around for it.

I want to tell you.
All my hairs seemed to taste the breeze, every uncovered inch
of skin
crawled in tiny circles.
And my eyes swelled until I could not see.
I cursed God but asked not to be taken
too soon.

Instead,
he brought Anita to me, our new baby Jess in her arms.
I didn't fear for them. Many a time, she had
the measure of me, and
she would've done the same now:
"selfish man.
Staring down purgatory."

And then our firstborn, Charlie, for my sins,
placed his cold hands upon me.
If his mother ever suspected

the worst of what I'd done, she kept it to herself.

It was in a drunken state that I fell.

But she watched my grief,
looked around at her life,
and decided to believe me—
Sometimes, young as that, a child stops breathing.

The sun bled over to my left side.
My body pointed like an arrow at the house.
The engine began to sputter.
More and more its dying seemed something I shouldn't miss.

A mighty rumbling built until it covered the engine,
and a jet plane filled the air —
I thought I was dreaming
 it flew so slow.

It was coming for me.

My eyes had dried by then, and I looked through them
like through a tube shrinking, the edges gray
the middle shifting
purple wheat grass and burning sun. The plane
dropped a crooked line of people who
 dove at me
waved and passed

some of them hung up in the caterpillar contrails
some plunged into my middle
and filled me with longing to stand
and race to my front door, throw it open,
take my wife and child in my arms,
heave them skyward, and

stand below them,
smoke, stars, and all.

The whoosh died down and the tractor
fell silent. A single
black bird
cut me in two, flew off
with part of me trailing behind it like a canopy on a string.