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To the Housepainter

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Ankney: To the Housepainter

TO THE HOUSEPAINTER:

DIGITAL
LITERATURE

SHERMAN
ALEXIE

**CHRISTOPHER
ANKNEY**

A winter-fat robin pecks at snow
over the empty granite marker—
your name chiseled into little canals—

your body broken down by fire
into ashes, jarred
at Riverview Gardens—ironic,

considering you were crippled
by open air, by lungs
that couldn't handle pollen

or the flame of human voices—

couldn't handle your love
smoking her pack-a-day of Salems.

The problem isn't that you died
so early in your life. It's that you died
so early in mine.

I offer the name of my first-born
to know you better, longer— What sacrifice
was buried in your chest? Anxiety tucked
up your flannel sleeves?

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Ankney

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Do you have wet flake of fall
on your tongue? The cornmeal sun?

Do I say now—the pink and orange blurs
to a sweet violet night—that God's a Van Gogh fan—

for light dances at a rhythmic speed
our eyes only blur what's left?

My brother taught me how to hook
a worm—its raspberry and butter insides—
my sister, how a doll can speak.

Of justice of course they've likely sought out why
God dropped stone relics in their bodies. To deliver
these thoughts to the world, though, is a sign of weakness.

It's simply a third or fourth stab inside the belly
Or simply too large a problem for anyone else
to tackle or better yet, Confessions are to be whispered

to the solitary confinement of assembly lines
where one only has time to think of going on
with the company order: noodles, tomatoes, beans

driven off to Indianapolis, Chicago, Cleveland
So she grew into the "kooky" aunt who fed her remaining sons
as if fattening cattle and they grew into college

football players. The second aunt, a first, powerful woman
of few words, a nature genius at party, the first
who can control an ear into the opposite of orgasm.

the first lies in place of the beautiful swim
The third one leaves and returns as often as tomatoes
around Ohio always, a minute's wreckage set off

years of repair. (once, she brought a black man home
from Belarus, and it was love and prizes
just as my uncles predicted. Only their wives were tender