

Vern Rutsala

This Life, This Day

It is this: the Spanish rice we had
for dinner, the movies we
saw—*Badlands*, *Days of Heaven*—
and the cat now sleeping
on the box of old pictures, my photo
at twenty-four on top, SP4 in khaki
so long ago. Does anyone
remember Charley Starkweather

and peace-time armies?
All days reach back and forth—
all radios squawk and spit,
old teams run on fields
in ghost stadiums, old
thunder booms and snaps
over Iowa and Bavaria, over
Minneapolis and London as this day

reaches back and forth, here and there,
now and then. This day
was Spanish rice and movies,
memory and sadness, the films
telling us how those brown album pictures
of my father may have been, the music
teaching us a lesson we almost
learned before it stopped.

But we are here with the huge
insignificance of this day—
see us return from the movies,
see the small red car nudge
against the curb, hear the dog bark
his accusatorial greeting, see us walk under
the leaves to the door. What
we saw is behind us now—the pictures

we paid to see and those we
didn't: dark buses returning to the barn,
leaves flying and falling in streetlights,
clouds against the moon.
See us now drink glasses of juice
or milk, see us drink beer
or wine in this quiet sacrament
of the return. We carried our lives

out with us like canteens and brought
them back to be refilled.
We're not asked to believe this.
We don't know what it means.
It is here as we are here now
in this house and need no
camera to confirm our presence.
We move at ease through these rooms

that we've never seen before.