

Arthur Smith

Whatever Light

If meaning is the reason
 for mournfulness, then I'm happy
 Camping in the crowded restaurant,
 nursing decaf — bitter and oily —
 As one of the Sunday dusks
 fronting the end of the century

Unwinds in late springtime, Tennessee.
 Outside, the yellow planter mums
 Quake in the wind and, while the willows
 weep and bow, the evening
 Seeps into the booth beside me. I have
 no thoughts, and I long for

Nothing, other
 than being party to the dwindling light,
 Which has come a long way to be here,
 if only for a moment,
 Married to the patient shadows.
 I'm no longer frightened

When I think of the same scene
 without me — tomorrow
 Or forty years from now as though
 it were tomorrow — waitresses, young
 And rushing, bussing trays, men mostly
 ringing the counter, talking as they eat,

And women arrayed in booths, eating
 while talking, and children squalling,
 And someone else in my seat, That's fair,

and fair's a far better deal
Than I have any right, now or then,
to expect, though that's a lesson

Harder learned than said. I'm here.
I've been watching two doves flit from
Branch to branch in a scrawny dogwood,
the one advancing, nodding, the other
Feigning and leading before finally
leaving the one alone,

And though I can't know its thoughts,
there appears to be no sadness in its face
Or in the one eye I can see, only the glint
of whatever light is left
As it glances this way, and that, and then flies off
over my head, which is the roof

Past which I cannot see.