

# Light Years

[12 lines]

*For James Salter*

It was like a garment, this life. Its beauty was outside, its warmth within.

—James Salter, *Light Years*

An afternoon in autumn, and a small breeze,

like something you feel sure you've overlooked,

Lifts a hem and lets it fall. The moment might be an artifact,

Otherwise. Some perfect thing. A god

on daylight's mantelpiece. Raven rows by,

High on the heady stillness of late April,

regretting everything

for all of us. Birds take turns casting

Spells on the silence, which deepens and spreads. Two egrets fish the shining

Stream. And in their wake the wind

makes its move, laying down

a hostile bid for the whole afternoon.

The afternoon, though, is nobody's business

but its own. It sits the trauma out; the river

picks up its pieces, and gets on. The cows

Crunch their numbers and hold their ground, stilling the sibilant grasses, restoring

Afternoon to its fortune. On the river bank,

where the shade of a hawthorn falls

like a garment,

She sits reading to their children: *The Wind*, improbably, *In the Willows*.

The dog searches dutifully for trouble; she finds

his feet, instead, and settles for those. And he takes all this

In, as if remembering it, and gives himself back to his book: *There is no happiness*,

he reads, *like this happiness*. Light from the river,

Autumn throwing shadows all the way

back to spring.