

John Valvis

ALTARS

Where the robin meets the oak
fresh from flight
this is a holy place
and the river that sands smooth
a thousand colorful stones
for your palm
also the place on the rug
your wife's foot falls
each morning
as she slides out of bed
set your altar there
and remember the smell
of your father's dentures
in a blue-tinted container
and the sound of a baby
getting a sink-bath
tiny toes curling
around the spigot
water splashing the kitchen
set your altar there
and the waning moon
the rattling under the E1
skid of the trombone
flex of plastic
on your lips as you sip Coke
and eat picnic coleslaw
with a flimsy fork
these old jeans are raiment
this noir paperback
your hymnal



AT LEAST PEOPLE

There are two kinds of people. First, there are at-least people. They say things like, "At least I'm not as fat as Aunt Sylvia." And, "At least I'm not in prison like my second-cousin Charlie." All their lives they walk around saying at least, at least, at least. It is their one abiding comfort. Whatever flaws they possess they're certain to find another whose failings are even greater with whom they can make an at-least comparison. "At least I never killed millions like Hitler and the Nazis." At-least people comprise most of humanity and are so pathetic all the remaining people take pride they're not, at least, like them.