The Dixie Mafia

Larry Rogers

Six adult males, each of whom dresses
and mopes around like a pallbearer,
have moved in across the mountain from us
and built a mini-fortress with its front
turned away from the pig trail winding past it.
This family doesn't even have a mail box.
When I ask my grandfather about them, he mumbles
something about respecting the privacy
of neighbors before changing the subject.

Songs for the Lost Hazzan

Allen Mendenhall

I. What Stood, Doesn't

do you remember how we climbed the wall
hated the wall
as if it were generations past
wanting up
to the top
up and over
and then down
down to the other side

at the top we saw
heaven meet earth
an awful horizon
vast but small

and we kissed on the other side
and we danced about
and we hugged our last hug
and we turned around
and the wall was not there
and there was nothing to climb
and no going back
I was Adam
you were Eve

this was our garden
everything we wished for

and then I sensed them
the serpent in your eye
the apple in your stomach
and I knew it was over
all of it
over like the sunset
we never saw again

II. Calling All Workers

Come, let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem

see the sun rising after cool rains
puddles gathering in sunken streets
birds bathing before the nomads return
mosquitoes feasting on our flesh
shadows making shadows of us all

quick, gather stones from the riverbanks
the smooth ones
which hands can shape and tongues can lick
call the others that they might join
filling their mouths with rock

here are children with hands full of clay
their faces dirty
their brows straight and sweaty

They wag their tongues
at vacant windows
where vacant souls
leave vacant bodies

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust
the weight of the past on our shoulders
our backs hunched, our legs strained
we lumber until we cannot stand
we shrink in our beds at night
like fermented grapes
shriveled in the sun

Eat us

Drink our blood

Our veins fill with emptiness
drained of nothing

but everything

Here they come
the keening women
bare as at birth
this one a mountain
her breasts knowing grief
lost life
her loins a thicket
devoured by animals

This is the age of silence
the age of self
the age without answers
but on the riverbank
beneath a tree
—its branches bowing—
a young girl talks
to the nobody that's somebody

She kneels and rocks, kneels and rocks
forehead pressed against clasped hands
nakedness covered by daylight
her lips issuing words
you can almost see rising
like fog
if it weren't for your doubt
that there's nothing to doubt

When the walls are rebuilt
our task completed
she will be here
praying

III. What am I?

I am optimistic
about pessimism.
I am loathe
to seek answers
I know
I cannot know.
I like watching
coyotes at night
in the fields by my home
on the gravel road
by pines that do not die
except after storms.
I make love to myself
armed with my body
my body in arms
my arms around hips
a sword through my side.
You have seen me in paintings
but have not noticed me.
I do not sleep
but cannot stay awake.
I long to return
to earth
inside the belly of the beast
on my throne
away from time
stuck in place.