

Last Rites for a Lame Bird a Few Days from Christmas

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Roosters come and see. They tilt their heads upside down
because you're hurt. Then eat your feed. The pan I laid
in front of you. You sank it with your beak. That might have been
your last night, but you still breathe in the lift and lilt of your ruffled body.

You have another darkness before you. It will be
the long night of your fowl life while I sharpen steel to stone
so that its edge becomes almost invisible. In the morning
if you see the ice cycle in my hand, it's just a reflection.

He ain't got no legs with nary a drink, Lem said and
shook his head. Your two hens are here. They come and go.
Vanilla tan hues still tint their outer feathers like dried
beech leaves. They cluck and croon question marks against near silence.

White scratches of frozen air skate downward like motes
cast out of heaven. The scratches heal over and close up
tight like skin around a splinter in hardening windchill that hurls
smoke down from the chimney.

Don't forget, the fire glow inside is the color of your
weary eye. It slips and winks and strays its gaze
away in a lick-log flame, staring inward through
increased aperture to hold its heat in a lame body of ashes.