1990

The Coffee Cup

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Recommended Citation

Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3855
Two Poems · Donald Hall

THE COFFEE CUP

The newspaper, the coffee cup, the dog’s
impatience for his morning walk:
These fibers braid the ordinary mystery.
After the marriage of lovers
the children came, and the schoolbus
that stopped to pick up the children,

and the expected death of the retired
mailman Anthony “Cat” Middleton
who drove the schoolbus for a whole
schoolyear, a persistence enduring
forever in the soul of Marilyn,
who was six years old that year.

We dug a hole for him. When his widow
Florence sold the Cape and moved to town
to live near her daughter, the Mayflower
van was substantial and unearthly.
Neither lymphoma nor a brown-and-white
cardigan twenty years old

made an exception, not elbows nor
Chevrolets nor hills cutting blue
shapes on blue sky, not Maple Street
nor Main, not a pink-striped canopy
on an ice cream store, not grass.
It was ordinary that on the day
of Cat’s funeral the schoolbus arrived
   driven by a woman called Mrs. Ek,
freckled and thin, wearing a white
   bandana and overalls, with one
eye blue and the other gray. Everything
   is strange; nothing is strange:

   yarn, the moon, hair coiled in a bun,
      New Hampshire, putting on socks.

THE VALLEY OF MORNING

Jack Baker
rises when
the steeple
clock strikes three
to shape dough
into pans
and wed pale
rising bread
to the fire,
trays shoved in
clay ovens
over wood
coals. After
the summer
sun touches
the church’s
steeple, he
pulls from his
bakestove two
hundred loaves,
crusted brown
with damp fire
inside. Now
the valley