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In the Absence of Love, There Are Engines

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Two Poems · *Arthur Smith*

IN THE ABSENCE OF LOVE, THERE ARE ENGINES

That first night gone, I was struck
Most by the noises that emerged—
The alarm clock whirring

Dawnward in its greased gears,
Cicadas whirling ratchets in the trees,
The simmering approach

Of a car
Wheeling downtown
Over the dew-lathered asphalt.

The neighbor's mongrel
Woofed and snuffled in a circle,
And then barked

Toward the distant skyscrapers,
The cells, almost all of them, blazing and empty.
I, too, felt that reverberation,

That churning so indifferently relentless
It seemed the earth churned with it,
Or because of it,

And even then, I think, I sensed
That without her breathing in sleep
Beside me, this was the permanence

I would turn to, shuddering,
Through the years, less and less in anger
Than relief.