What Will You Do, God, When I Die?

—after Rilke

What will you do, God, when I die—
when the last bell of Santa Catarina
leaves her winter carol and snow
begins its slow, fulfilling moment of erasure.

What will children say about the moon
who now has no reflection?

How will the raven greet your morning
without my steady shovel, the crack
of the long curved axe
splitting the frozen air? Who will clear the soot
from the crenellated chimney, the ash
from the fire's brick box, light
the crumpled lists and vanished symphonies
that spark each day's new kindling?

Will you shoulder the battered bucket,
the two blue metal barrels
parked under the gutters, carry again
each precious month of rain?

Will you stack and stoke the fire
with the same orchestration—
a pyramid of pine,
a stick of clean-split cedar, set
the coffee boiling in the white Sears pot,
the steel tureen of Anasazi beans
fat on the cast iron stove.
Bring each hour to simmer
in such burble and aroma?

Who will ride with my three-braid rope
to rein in the Lightys' mare when shots
go off from a lost hunter's gun
and she breaks down the wall of the barn,
and if another porcupine
  lashes their brainless Jackie—grab
these gloves and pliers, yank a thousand spines
from the corgi's wretched face?

God, what will you do
  when I can no longer find
this pen, this page, the soft dawn
of the silver fox tracking her song in the snow,

when hoof beats on the mesa
  become another animal, another cloud
forming its fleet of battleships, another
country rising from my resignation?

Will you take my father's saddle
  from the tack house? Put the Zuni blankets
back up on the wall? Take me back
to the trunk line trails, bells and summer sheep

crossing the Ortegas, Servilleta,
   Canjilón, the Vallecitos mill. Back
to Katie Harris. Katie. Katie Harris. Oh Lord—

        Katie Harris. Will you take me back.