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## The Gift

Hollis Summers

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HOLLIS SUMMERS

*THE GIFT*

Somebody was bound to come before the announcement  
Got out. It was a boy who entered, as wretched  
As alone, hardly knowing the name of the year,  
And never imagining noisy worshippers  
Lined up, as if to have their pictures sketched  
Or act in a rather pretty pageant.

He had decided he was through with sheep  
And being tired and isolate and cold;  
He had left his stupid flock at the edge of town  
And scuttled dark to the stable near the Inn,  
Hoping, at least, to warm a few of his bones,  
At most, to give them full sleep.

The woman had born her baby privately—  
Her husband still searched for a friendly stranger;  
The boy, afraid, but curious as afraid,  
Waited until the woman, crying, made  
A straw comfort in the stable's empty manger.  
The boy heard the baby cry.

He knew that night, here, waited as a place  
To know. He recorded the scene as well as he could,  
The feel and sound and smell of straw and breath  
Moving and being moved. Before he left  
He looked hard at the child's dark head  
And the way his eyes fitted his face.

He returned to his sheep at once, of course, to move  
Among them, not remembering the face at all  
Even while the sky bloomed song and light  
Enough to shatter December and the very night.  
Sleepless, time and again, he could never recall  
The face, but considered love.