

TABLE BY CELL WINDOW

S A L C E T R A N O

There is room in the slanting light
for just a few considered things,
their selection a kind of sacrament.
A pitted tin tray folding from the wall
like a rusty drawbridge is solitary
relief from the blackset stones. Island
in the air, it catches the dying light
for an hour, radiating a cold fire.

As on my childhood altar, a doily
spread on a dresser top before battered
blinds, things to be lit wafer white
are arrayed, waiting for the sun.
Where once I propped a blue plastic
Madonna, dust about its grottoed feet,
lesser proofs of a loser's God now lie,
drawn from my cache of trivial mysteries:

a crumpled pack of Luckies,
set like a leaning tower; a toothbrush
with a scorpion's tail; a crystal vial
of fudge-dark pennies, stalks of solemn
wheat on dirty copper; some shards of
colored glass to bootleg tiny rainbows;
a pocketwatch, face cut, arms broken.
They wear the captured zebra light

like dreamskin, the glint of cellophane
or burnished coin more precious than
a beggared stint on my own ashen hide.
Even dust, trapped and ignited,
becomes other than itself in silvery ascent.
Yet, the shaft holds no more warmth for me,
no voice, no glimpse of burning doves,
but is empty, empty as the dark.

So I shrink, back to wall, and watch
each pocket apostle give up its ghost,
each marker yield its shadow soul,
in imitation of something gone before.
The man who believes what he can touch
remembers a boy too pained to feel,
and a boy who believed in original sin
sees a man sweep a tabletop clean.