



# SOLUM JOURNAL

## VOLUME IV

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# TAMARA NICHOLL-SMITH

## **Petition**

(for Larry Lines 1970-2022)

These are the days  
    when phone calls  
from friends  
    are increasingly likely  
    to inform  
of some new cancer,  
    remission, recurrence.

These are the days  
I spend on my knees  
    at the front of the church  
    in petition to Mary  
        clothed in stained light  
    sliding folded dollars  
    into the brass mouth  
of the offering box,  
using the slender wood  
    to carry flame from one candle to another  
before putting it out  
    in a dish of sand.

I can see  
the light's lineage  
    how the candle may hold the flame  
but cannot control  
    when it is lit  
and when it goes out  
    by sudden wind — the side chapel door  
swinging open in spring  
    or the slow spending  
    of paraffin wax.

It might appear  
I am quite alone,  
but the air around the altar  
is saturated  
    with spent wax, burnt wood,  
and a haze of incense —  
        where prayers hang —  
    like droplets  
caught in low clouds  
and saints are drawn —  
    like deer to graze  
in the leafy rain.

## Song for the Slow Road

I forget sometimes that I have aged,  
that time has turned me snowcapped,  
especially when I see you, daughter.  
It can be like looking at my own face.

My heart longs with yours,  
as you gaze upon the road below,  
on fire with red-leafed flame,  
your possible future,  
riding towards or going past.

When I go to rise, my bones creak  
like door hinges craving oil.  
Memory twines its vine branches  
round the rough porch pillars.  
Just yesterday, you were small,  
swaddled and scented with milk-breath.

I am not yet ready to yield  
to the forgetful mist  
though I slow to a lumber  
long' the moss-lined lane  
caught in the linger of lowing  
cows, their plainchant resting  
like fog on the far field.

The air cools,  
yet I am filled  
with a brightness  
that defies  
the shortening light.

**Tamara Nicholl-Smith** is a Texas-based poet and workshop leader. Her poetry has appeared on two Albuquerque city bus panels, one parking meter, various radio shows, a spoken-word classical piano fusion album, and in publications, such as *America*, *Ekstasis*, *The Examined Life Journal*, *Kyoto Journal*, and *Joi De Vivre*. She is an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Saint Thomas (Houston). Her poem on Saint Jerome will be a permanent part of the display featuring a perfect replica of the Peplin Edition of the Gutenberg Bible to be installed at the University of Saint Thomas Library in Houston. She enjoys puns and likes her bourbon neat. Visit her at [tamaranichollsmith.com](http://tamaranichollsmith.com) or connect on Twitter @tnichollsmith.