

At the End

of a dull, prodigal day
when flurries of fine snow
dispel the hurry of the afternoon

and scattered grains of shadow
promise an indolence of darkness
there again is a mother's signal

a sizzle of frying onions
and a father's countersign
the clump and jingle on the stairs.

The tired brain, vulnerable as a wound,
that sifts all day the ore
of expectation and falls back

dismayed again at nightfall,
looks not for god-forsaken silver
but the half-forgotten testament

of sound, odor, trivial gesture,
the quick kiss on the cheek,
the past ticking quietly again.

Whatever in their particular warps
the sensualist insinuates
or the parson decrees

salvation is neither flesh nor soul
but snow stamped off on a doormat
a plate steaming between fork and knife

the stuff of psalm and metaphor
profound without seal or signature
a wreath on a house of mourning.

Donald W. Baker