

## The Omega Bell: toll and carol

At moonlit twelve the world stood still, looking for birth.  
A child hidden among beasts, embraced by a mother and the yearning earth.  
At hollow Friday noon as day swung forward, hope swung back.  
The soldiers struck at nails and played at dice and waited; sky grimaced black.

Cast from earth

smelted from rock,

a man stretched against sky

sinews taut, skin cracked under sun.

His head wore mock majesty and pilloried pomp.

His face carried spite's spittle, and the scars of shame

not his, but the scarifying taunts of those who hate themselves first,  
who reign, lost amidst stinging scorpions and stones offered for bread.

This noon from which the shadows lengthen, so far from midnight's glory,  
echoes with silence; not the silence of peace but of absence, of loss, of despair.

In the unbearable waiting, women come and go, save one who watches and waits  
biding in the silence, wrapped in the remembrance of shepherds and chiming stars.

The sun's passing brings no light, only heat, the nose of death and the droning flies.

Friends like morning dew evaporate, flee through crowded streets and recriminations.

Two thieves, eager for final breath ~ end's certainty ~ find instead the strangest promise.

What has paradise to do with a skull, with a place of refuse, where dreams lie tattered?

How can one immobile man, one naked man, one rejected man reverse all expectation?

Yet here where death sucks its victims, truth bleeds and shows the contours of love.

Those who come to break bones, reveal instead sacrament at the end of iron's cut.

Death has placed its sting (so it thinks), and soldiers fulfil their duty before night.

There is no fuss, a winding sheet, a body for removal, a burial before Sabbath.

From quiet shadows others come to carry and bear a body that has born it all:

shoulders that heaved with every breath, breath that exhaled every wrong.

No tolling bell, no temple prayer, no elaboration, only the barest human rite  
of disposal, erasure, of silhouetting shapes moving gloomily as night draws.

Across stones and pebbles, through scrawny weeds where crows and pigeons feed

bodies and the body move against a dissenting sun with no power against invading dark.

Into deepest shade they move through an awaiting portal where the hollowed rock receives its guest.

Morning comes ringed with fire, comes with the aroma of herbs and spices, comes with unknown fear.

There is no darkness but a new uncertainty; the women of yesterday bring news of a new day, the first day.

Now men come running, come racing: who is fastest? Who fears less? What secret has the rock disgorged and  
The tomb made known? And now their voices peal with wonder as though a baby had been born and all the world

must know:

He is Risen!

He is Risen!

Alleluia!