



## Missionary

by Nathanael Tagg

At the altar  
of this country church,  
a young man's losing his life  
in order to find it. The congregation—  
his family in every sense—  
howls at his inside jokes  
and nods in support of his calling  
to carry the gospel far and wide.  
How it must feel to be  
the pride of one's family—  
thinks one of the few here  
who hardly clap, or sing, or bow.  
Elders emerge from the ranks  
and surround the missionary  
so a few battered hands can palm his head  
and many more can clutch his arms.  
Each takes a turn telling God what to do  
with an obedient son who, moments from now,  
will depart to the sound of clapping,  
will move stiffly, as if the hands  
neither have nor will  
let go.

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