Dry for a day,
 maybe two,
  then like an anxious ticket holder,
 he waits for the clatter
of train on a track,
and he's back
on the Jack Daniel express.

Promises made, promises broken.

The thirst,
 deaf to the cries of his children,
  their tears are like
 rain on the window, a blur
a dull sound against the pane.

Promises broken, promises made.

One drink, then another,
and another,
'till he's free
from the unbearable
transition
of sobriety's salvation,
the jitters,
the shakes,
delirium,
and dread,

They fade
 when the fare is paid,
devotion demonstrated,
 and like Abraham
with Isaac under a blade,
he offers up the rent, the food,
their shoes in winter.

There's no angel with a ram
to stay his hand from the slender bottle
that he empties with supplicant gulps,
of bitter anguish.

The venomous viper courses down his throat.
 He waits impatiently for guilt to subside
 and the intoxicant
 to take away his sins.
  Remorse is for tomorrow.

Plunged into the amber blood of his savior,
the solution, that brings absolution,
the unholy Eucharist led by a spirit
that lulls him into numbness.
Finally, he no more needs to drink.
His eyes fall heavy,
his body melts into slumber,
he is suspended in blissful silence—
that somewhere, where nothing matters
and the soul no longer stings,
where the question of love deserved,
is washed away.

If they're lucky,
he finds a bed, a bench, a floor
to sleep it off,
and not a slab at the city morgue
or a view from a jail-room door
and a Monday morning Judge
who sets a bail they can't afford
but do—
because he clocks in at two.

Lunchbox in hand,
his sober ears ring loud
with the church bell tolls
of mother's pleas
of "Please no more."

And like the sound of a sad violins
the overwhelming guilt
sings its pitiful promise:
  this time I'll
 quit, this
time
 I'll quit, this
  time I'll
   quit
    this time