



# **Almanac: Poems (Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets)**

*Austin Smith*

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## **Almanac: Poems (Princeton Series of Contemporary Poets) Austin Smith**

*Almanac* is a collection of lyrical and narrative poems that celebrate, and mourn the passing of, the world of the small family farm. But while the poems are all involved in some way with the rural Midwest, particularly with the people and land of the northwestern Illinois dairy farm where Austin Smith was born and raised, they are anything but merely regional. As the poems reflect on farm life, they open out to speak about childhood and death, the loss of tradition, the destruction of the natural world, and the severing of connections between people and the land.

This collection also reflects on a long poetic apprenticeship. Smith's father is a poet himself, and *Almanac* is in part a meditation about the responsibility of the poet, especially the young poet, when it falls to him to speak for what is vanishing. To quote another Illinois poet, Thomas James, Smith has attempted in this book to write poems "clear as the glass of wine / on [his] father's table every Christmas Eve." By turns exhilarating and disquieting, this is a remarkable debut from a distinctive new voice in American poetry.

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### **From *Almanac*: THE MUMMY IN THE FREEPORT ART MUSEUM**

*Austin Smith*

Amongst the masterpieces of the small-town  
Picassos and Van Goghs and photographs  
of the rural poor and busts of dead Greeks  
or the molds of busts donated by the Art  
Institute of Chicago to this dying  
town's little museum, there was a mummy,  
a real mummy, laid out in a dim-lit  
room by himself. I used to go  
to the museum just to visit him, a pharaoh  
who, expecting an afterlife  
of beautiful virgins and infinite food  
and all the riches and jewels  
he'd enjoyed in earthly life,  
must have wondered how the hell  
he'd ended up in Freeport, Illinois.  
And I used to go alone into that room  
and stand beside his sarcophagus and say,

"My friend, I've asked myself the same thing."

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