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## The Seventh Night

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## The Seventh Night

It was the seventh night and he walked out to look at stars. Chill in the air, sharp, not of summer, and he wondered if the geese on the lake felt it and grew restless and if that was why, in the late afternoon, they had gathered at the bay's mouth and flown abruptly back and forth, back and forth on the easy, swift veering of their wings. It was high summer and he was thinking of autumn, under a shadowy tall pine, and of geese overhead on cold mornings and high clouds drifting. He regarded the stars in the cold dark. They were a long way off, and he decided, watching them blink, that compared to the distance between him and them, the outside-looking-in feeling was dancing cheek-to-cheek. And noticed then that she was there, a shadow between parked cars, looking out across the valley where the half-moon poured thin light down the pine ridge. She started when he approached her, and then recognized him, and smiled, and said, "Hi, night light." And he said, "Hi, dreamer." And she said, "Hi, moonshine," and he said, "Hi, mortal splendor." And she said, "That's good." She thought for a while. Scent of sage or yerba buena and the singing in the house. She took a new tack and said, "My father is a sad chair and I am the blind thumb's yearning." He said, "Who threw the jade swan in the boiling oatmeal? Some of the others were coming out of the house, saying goodbye, hugging each other. She said, "The lion of grief paws what meat she is given." Cars starting up, one of the stagehands struggling to uproot the pine. He said, "Rifling the purse of possible regrets." She said, "Staggering tarts, a narcoleptic" moon. Most of the others were gone. A few gathered to listen. The stagehands were lugging off the understory plants. Two others were rolling up the mountain. It was clear that, though polite, they were impatient. He said, "Goodbye, last thing." She said, "So long, apocalypse." Someone else said, "Time,"

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but she said, "The last boat left Xania in late afternoon."  
He said, "Goodbye, Moscow, nights like sable,  
mornings like the *persimmon*." She said,  
"Day's mailman drinks from a black well of reheated coffee  
in a cafe called Mom's on the outskirts of Durango." He said,  
"That's good." And one of the stagehands stubbed  
his cigarette and said, "OK, would the last of you folks to leave,  
if you can remember it, just put out the stars?" which they did,  
and the white light everywhere in that silence was white paper.

*Robert Hass* was Poet Laureate of the United State from 1995-97. He gave a public reading in a fall visit to Grand Valley. This poem is reprinted here with his permission. It is from *Sun Under Wood*, Ecco Press, 1996.