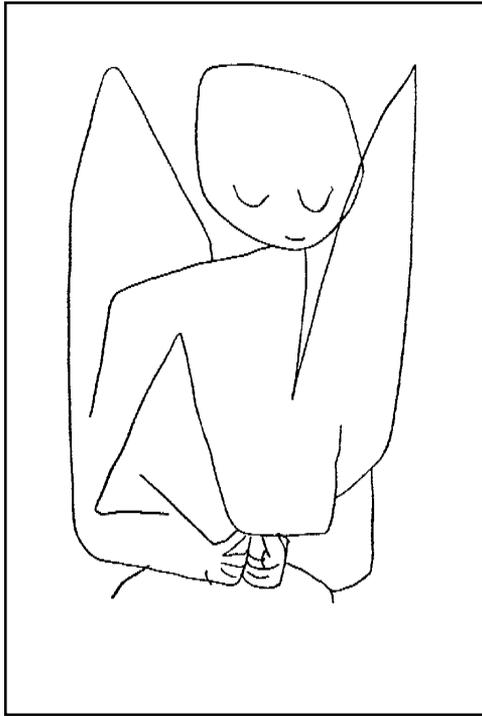


A Small Book
on Darkness



*Selected from the Pages of
Poetry East
Edited by Richard Jones*

D A R K N E S S

“Someday death will take us to another star.”
—Vincent VanGogh

First Song

There is a bird that started singing
at five in the morning,
in the dark at five in the morning
just as I started writing.
That's how I know
that it's spring, that I should keep
writing, that the darkness
has not swallowed us,
and that there will be morning
and noon and evening—a whole flock
of hours—although at this moment
in the dark there is just this
one bird, and no one
who can tell me its true name,
or why it is out there alone and singing.

Household Resurrections

Surely some things will be raised
while we still molder in our tombs:

the coffee pot, the jam jar,
the comb—such things,

for considering the coldness
of our hearts and hates

who would damn the simple warmth
the coffee pot provides,

or the sweet, snug way
the jar preserves its jam?

And contemplate the comb,
its care in smoothing snarls;

and bars of soap—those
odorless or scented cleansers—

their slivers surely will be spared
from slipping down some eternal drain,

and toothbrush and toothpaste
deserve to shine with pearly light

long before our ashes stir
and our bones put on new flesh,

for God who is just
is quick to reward what's good,

yet God who is love
may someday save us, too,

despite the way we go on making
the bomb, the bullet, and the noose:

because God knows we also fashion
jam jars, coffee pots, combs, and brushes,

God may raise us up at the last
to share their glory with them

along with such other household saints
as milk bottles, toasters, bath tubs, spoons

Room to Room

I go in one room, he follows me.
Everywhere in the house
it's this way, he follows me.
When I settle he settles.
He just settled on the couch
over in the corner,
a little black donut,
because I'm settled behind
this computer telling you
about him. It's that simple.
Where I am he wants to be
this dog of mine. If I get up
from this poem about him
following me he'll get up
to be where I'm going.
Earlier, on the patio, him
in my lap, we both watched
the desert fog give cover
to several antelope a mile away.
(I counted seven.)
His little head below me
moved at the same speed
mine did following them.
So, you can see
there's not much he's not in on.
I don't know how he'd take it
if I died, me not here
any more to move from room
to room so he'd know where to be?

Garage Sale

I sold her bed for a song.
A song of yearning like an orphan's.
Or the one knives carve into bread.

But the un-broken bread
song too. For the song that rivers
sing to the ferryman's oars—with

that dread in it.

For a threadbare tune: garroted,
chest-choked, cheap. A sparrow's,

beggar's, a foghorn's call.
For the kind of song only morning
can slap on love-stained sheets—

that's what I sold my mother's
bed for. The one she died in. Sold it
for a song.

Grace

Since the hour of your death a month ago,
the elms outside my window have scarcely changed,
the glittering October days, the obstinate sun,
strong enough to preserve the green of August.
Still they wear their summer wardrobe,
washed and line dried, a bit wrinkled now,
pale but still alive. Refusing to turn,
leaves shimmer with each breath of northern wind,
clinging to limbs which will not shake them loose.

Today, as I shake warm laundry from the dryer,
recalling our laughter when we shared this task,
I hear you whisper that this string of golden days,
unearned and unforeseen, is a season of Grace—
a word I thought I'd never understand—
given to save me from a bitter fall,
to pull me through a winter filled with absence,
preserving me until the first green shoots of spring
restore the steady rhythm to my heart.

Afterlife

When the owl came down

through the branches of an oak,

having left its perch in a black cherry

where my son sat in a ladder-stand

waiting for deer to trail the old ravine,

its face was illuminated by the last

of the moon, wings nearly silent,

my dead father's face staring at me,

grinning with rings of feathers

and a plump shrew dangling

from its beak.

The God Particle

I'm thinking about the 17 seconds
the eyes continue to blink
after the neck's been guillotined.
The missing 17 grams of weight
that leave the body after death.
The ghostly voices that sometimes emerge
from radio static, voicemail, wind.
I'm thinking about the 17 miles
of the Hadron Collider, subatomic
particles crashing at lightspeed,
bespectacled scientists examining the debris
as if it were a chicken's entrails.
I'm thinking of our Paleolithic ancestors
smashing rocks for tools, fire, weapons—
then painting their dreams
by firelight onto cave walls
as if it were the sky.
I'm thinking of the 17 hundred shades
of gray discernable by the naked human eye,
the 17 tones of the bone flute
carved from a bird's tiny femur,
found on the cave floor in the hand of a boy.
I'm thinking of the 17 days
the jetliner's black box
pinged from the ocean's floor,
before it went silent.
The 17 years before the pilot's last letter is found.

Contributors

Matthew Murrey
“First Song”
Poetry East #66

Jack Anderson
“Household Resurrections”
Poetry East #60

Tom Crawford
“Room to Room”
Poetry East #67/68

Tom Crawford
“Come Sun”
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Laure-Anne Bosselaar
“Garage Sale”
Poetry East #79

Susan Dworski Nusbaum
“Grace”
Poetry East #80/81

Todd Davis
“Afterlife”
Poetry East #70

Peter Pereira
“The God Particle”
Poetry East #86

*At Poetry East,
we believe in words. We
believe poetry is the highest
art. A poem clarifies our deep
humanity, though its grace remains
a mystery. Poems illuminate the world
we live in—a slow dance in the kitchen,
birds in flight, a loved one's death, silence
in an empty room. As you read these
seven poems, we hope you will read
with fresh eyes and full hearts. Poetry
opens a door, inviting you into its
home. Here, come a little closer,
these are for you.*

Artistic Director: A.M. Prentice

