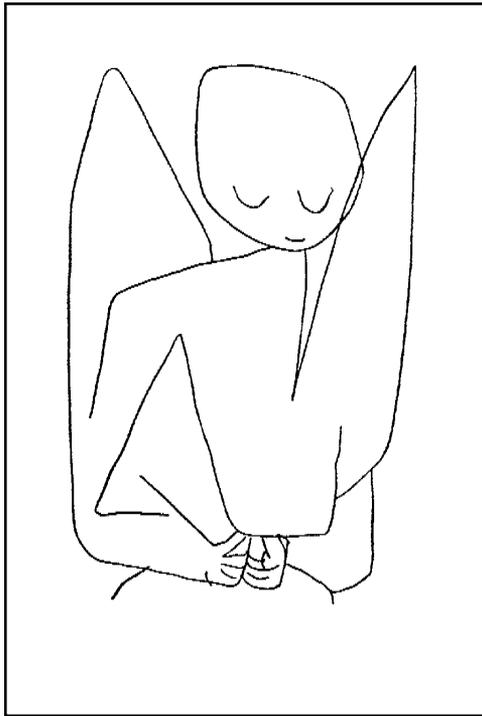


A Small Book on Home



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

H O M E

“We’re all just walking each other home.”

—Ram Das

Green Tent

Erect, the green tent is a gable,
the attic of the earth.
We enter on hands and knees,
by means of a long zipper
delicately undone.
Inside we're still outside,
still vulnerable
to a leaning pine or a bear
rummaging through the pantry.
The walls are green drapes;
they're a green balloon
we filled by sighing.
It's home, though, a studio apartment
you invited me to
where the only place to sit
is the bed.

Shadow

Every morning my sister went out
into the cold dark air
before school, before breakfast,
to the barn to feed and brush her mare,
a golden palomino none of us knew
was with foal. And so, one morning,
a shadow stirred in a corner of the stall—
a colt, black as the night, on wobbly legs.
His eyes caught the light of her surprise.
My sister exclaimed her blessing
and came running back to the house
to announce to us the birth,
the miraculous birth,
of this child in a stable dark and cold.

Where I Come From

We didn't say fireflies
but lightning bugs.

We didn't say carousel
but merry-go-round.

Not seesaw
teeter-totter
not lollipop
sucker.

We didn't say pasta, but
spaghetti, macaroni, noodles:
the three kinds.

We didn't get angry;
we got mad.

And we never felt depressed
dismayed, disappointed
disheartened, discouraged
disillusioned or anything
even unhappy:
just sad.

Come Sun

We all make flowers
of our failures,
but we don't know
in which life they might bloom.
The early morning silence.
A cup of coffee.
The moment, its own pleasure
is the soul, gardening.
I say this because it's true;
dying is the only solution
for our small, impatient lives,
our bad habits. Time
to gather up, again, the tools,
the hoe, the shovel
we hardly used. Who am I
that can love the morning
but not the day
which wears me down?
Come sun, so I can see again
how you open up the tulip.

My Mother, Pretending to Move to Alaska

For thirty years my mother pretended she was moving to Alaska. She owned no maps of the state and did not try to visit; she lived on a hot island in North Carolina and could not drive in the snow, owned a thin winter coat, no boots or gloves. My mother survived things she hated by pretending she was leaving: baby showers, years of teaching in classrooms where children built fleets of paper airplanes. She told me sometimes about Alaska: a place where she would live so far from the neighbors they could not maintain an interest in her business, a place where there was so much snow she would not ever mow the lawn. On bad days my mother imagined who she would be in that eternal winter: rugged, adventurous, warm because she was not thin. My mother was going to Alaska and if she never got there it was because her Alaska was not on any map and could not be reached by boat or bobsled; her Alaska was a blizzard of privacy and imagination, its borders hidden or revealed by the snow drifts in her mind.

Handkerchief

At the funeral of a colleague's wife,
I'm surprised to find it folded neatly
in the side pocket of my bag—tissue-thin cotton,
machine-scalloped edge, printed with flowers
that could be jonquils if they weren't so
impossibly blue-green, no doubt manufactured
in the fifties, but pressed upon me not long ago
by my mother, who found it too pretty
to leave behind in the consignment shop,
who must have carried it home, washed it,
laid it to dry against the side of the tub,
and ironed it into this soft and perfect square
smelling mildly of soap, which I hold
against my face now, blotting away the tears.

Nursing Home

Home also for the sparrows
leaping
calling
on the red-tile roof
with their fledglings
twittering
with open mouths
in the eaves

Contributors

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“Green Tent”

Poetry East #67/68

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“Shadow”

Poetry East #67/68

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“Where I Come From”

Poetry East #67/68

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“Come Sun”

Poetry East #67/68

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“My Mother, Pretending to
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Poetry East #84

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“Handkerchief”

Poetry East #76/77/78

Jianqing Zheng

“Nursing Home”

Poetry East #76/77/78

*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

