

# *Darklight*

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# Darklight

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*for Miriam*



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## Darklight

Darklight above the doorway  
in both X-ray and photography . . .

but not the deep significance this time  
or the surface

which vibrates in the eternal present.  
It's the way of the world seen

and the one apprehended, blue moon  
in a haze of yellow

[she was older than she was in reality,  
the fire in the hearth had died away]

though on some days  
there's a certain clarity of light.

I fear this kind of thing increases  
as time goes by,

though it's not exactly like that,  
maybe sad sack's meanderings, half blind.

And I think this means the end is coming  
before too long. If it is possible

I will miss you. In the meantime  
perhaps this undeveloped deep

in dated chemical's reaction  
can rise to the surface

and also be interesting,  
as delicate and sentimental.

I could ride forth on a pale horse  
called Dark Lantern

whose light can be blocked off  
as by a sliding panel.

## Hesitation Waltz

Returned again to find that spot  
    where I had rested. It was gone  
or changed utterly, so that I could not sit  
as pivot for consideration  
    nor find comfort in standing  
above the spot.

All this had been mine: window, table  
and chair, that illusion  
    of a virgin's intensity in seeing  
each beloved distinctly,  
the objective world.

A tube driven into a congested throat,  
    the withdrawal of a cannula  
for breathing, that moment,  
then a jay's cry  
    called song  
which is made light of in poetry,  
but is lighter than that.

*Here's that rainy day,*  
    its first word, "maybe,"  
held in Bill Evans' fingers for exhaustion  
of what might have been,  
or a big band rendering  
of *Sentimental Journey*,  
a medley,  
*blame it on my youth*, so  
*sweet and lovely*.

Once came to a place heady  
with possibilities of tempo,  
was crazy for intricate figures

in the cowboy squares.

That was dancing, fleetingly,  
like the memory  
of freestyle later,  
an Arizona stumblebum.  
What is revealed, but such hesitations  
as we go down?

Yet it's still early May, clatter  
of wet chickadees insistent  
pin points of black-cap on the pine's needles  
(be then  
joyful?),  
dissonant melodies over block chords,  
a red sail in the damp distance,  
considerations of tables and chairs.  
*I can't get started.*

Rivers of memory, sea of memory, rainy ripples  
on a golden pond, notoriously placid  
and temporary, before the arrival  
of the actors  
and strife.  
It's come from the desert of my boyhood  
in some fashion. That boat.

These are the pines grown into a screen  
at the pond's brink.

This is automatic writing.  
The trees cry out  
as the axe enters the forest,  
"Look at the handle,  
he's one of us!"  
I could have discovered



below crinoline,  
notes spilling  
to a wash of sawdust near a household table,  
“I’m leaving,”  
gone into the death that is memory  
    of a boy’s boat under red sail  
at the pond’s iris, her face  
    then rising like the moon itself  
through seaweed.

This is the danger zone of the virgin.  
This is automatic writing.

    These are the spot’s projections  
on the pond’s moonglow surface,  
    a carousel of shadowy faces,  
my dream girls, under glass.

Yet in this rain, old interlude, other  
seeds germinate invisibly  
    in that sodden garden, awaiting  
the new chicken-wire fence  
and rabbits, some wholesomeness  
of hard work  
    beyond thoughts of dream girls  
as women,  
    or a few popular tunes: *slowpoke*,  
*heart of my heart*, *red roses*  
*for a blue lady*,  
    hesitant *deep purple*  
in a cowboy waltz tempo.

The cardinals have arrived,  
    their insouciant arrogance tentative  
in first flowers wavering

on delicate green stalks, daffodils  
heavy in a freight of rain, goldfinch,  
red red robin,  
a mix of wild bird seed in the rickety feeders,  
that geometric pattern  
of quick chickadees lifting  
some invisible net of crinoline,  
gold spun, and the weaving traces  
of my neighbor's  
black cat through hay.

It's early May too in that distant desert:  
what buds, what boy? Each memory  
only a fake of hesitant music,  
be it squares  
or the bright blindness of *moonglow*.  
This is automatic writing,  
"as the axe enters the forest."  
Try to forget it, in this  
burgeoning.

But we were dancing, or she was  
spinning alone on her own spot, elsewhere  
and ecstatic,  
within that isolate figure,  
one of many,  
characteristic of a cowboy square,  
unaware of those spectator figures,  
to the far corners of the hall  
and the one rocking us gently,  
that childish wrangler and his allemande girl,  
the hum of the world turning  
under the sawing fiddles and guitars.

We fumbled around in our bodies,  
got crazy over supposed slights  
and adulteries.

We went to the movies  
for those common agonies,  
traded a few awkward kisses  
in a dark alcove in Tucson  
that time we drove there for a school concert  
in your mother's car.  
Even then,  
given such virginal passions,  
this was not exactly clear.

I remember the ice-cream cones,  
at Castle Rock below Copper Man.  
It was early spring  
and sundown:  
your eyes, your face!  
We licked our chops,  
at the taste. *That* was sweet.

There was even a boat with a red sail,  
a boy in shadow at the tiller  
on a pond in desert oasis,  
Saint David,  
not exactly golden  
but still water  
fed from a deep wellspring, no pines,  
but willows at the brink.

"I'm leaving," going off to Texas  
for another teen life.  
The tiller wobbles

under his hand in a quick breeze.  
Enter the axe.

*I'm through with love*  
(for a little while  
at least).

All this is part  
of the disposition of the figures in the dance,  
    though they are not actors,  
so long as acts of memory  
    are discounted,  
as well as an old man's garrulous  
enthusiasms  
in searching elsewhere for his spot.

Beyond the window now,  
in fog and rain,  
the sun sets this evening like clockwork,  
a common perception  
recently.

And if the world doesn't hum  
in its turning, I seem to  
and imagine  
that pine, skeletal  
    in slow advancing,  
as it fades back into shadow  
and the axe flashes  
    at the pond's brink. Here it comes.  
It is one of us.

## Swiss Miss

Lingers now in peace upon the swollen tide,  
ruby-throat fallen from sky in the last few hours.  
This information: unblemished, on her good side,  
not sleeping, and Swiss birds won't eat thistle.

After the circus and before investigation,  
the fliers linger on imagination, the Bohemian  
Waxwing juggler, those quick Chickadee tumblers.  
The Swiss detective wears wingtips.

Lisalot, I miss you, I didn't mean to release you.  
Flights of fancy and flocking in the banquet hall,  
while the river, beyond filmy curtains and balcony,  
runs to the lake, carrying her body as if sleeping.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you will please quit chattering,  
if you will just try hard to remember, the details,  
anything in the recent past. It shouldn't be difficult.  
Time was I loved you, dear Lisalot, I never dropped you.

Check everyone's wrists, the nature of their shoes and  
identification. Is there residual powder in anyone's palms?  
Check times of arrival, those missing, each performer.  
Remember, Swiss birds won't eat thistle.

Was it the proud German, Finch? That week in Luzern?  
You flew as a hummingbird from the bar then, in Bern.  
And check also the Limmat River, send in the clowns.  
Embraceable you, sweet ruby-throat, I've washed my hands.

Feathered boas and short tights in the banquet hall,  
Madam Vireo, the contortionist, and her dwarf entourage.  
Check for splinters, look most carefully under the nails.  
Lisalot: tossed high up in the contest in St. Gallen.

We were the rage of the competition, the odd birds  
who flew out in our nature and faked danger theatrically  
after those months of practice, home in Furna. I never  
looked at you closely, gripping your ankles, in that way.

Then the German, Finch. Or was it that Harlequin, Jaeger?  
Take but a moment to consider, Swiss birds won't eat thistle,  
then take each one into a room, backstage, and ask questions.  
Lisalot, my darling partner, little Swiss Miss, I warned you.

[General atmosphere: the river, ominous mist over the lake,  
the Swiss detective, maybe elaborate cages hung in the hall.  
He could be innocent, an accident. She could be a strumpet.  
His hands, or he stands at the rear of the line murmuring.]

Please stop chattering. Defend your heads against the cages.  
Prepare, please, your stage and real names and associations.  
Have you been with the circus long? How well did you know  
Lisalot? Things like that. What can you tell me about thistle?

Then, in Grindelwald, we were eager. The Eiger rose majestic  
above the chalet, your hair silk feathers in my fingers.  
Lisalot, you called my nose a beak, humming softly in laughter.  
Almost love birds in an alpine cage! What becomes of me now?

A dwarf stands upon the shoulders of the Strong Man, Hawk.  
His real name is Meadowlark and it's taking far too long.  
He opens a few cages. Pandemonium! The fledglings can't  
fly well, and feathers and death squawks flood the Hall.

[I too have been crazy in jealousy. Our cat, Flicker,  
and the foreign sock he discovered under our bed.  
I wanted to kill you, quite seriously, or myself then.  
You, strumpet; I the virtuous dove, already in mourning.]

Attention, please. Attention! Can you please settle down?  
Lunch is on the way. We'll be serving thistle today . . .  
That's right, it's a joke. It's seed salad, and flesh  
for those inclined. Thank you for your attention anyway.

Lisalot, Finch or Jaeger, it doesn't matter; even exotic  
Bachman, warbling MC, whose song might have seduced you.  
Just as I was beginning to touch you, take you under my wing.  
Better had you avoided hunger, throat swelling with thistle.

Be sure, now, to check the empty cages, secreted places,  
keep an eye on the ground feeders, as well as flycatchers.  
Close all the windows. The ones under suspicion might  
seem without guile. Clearly, this was a crime of passion.

Thistle: in his pockets, in his cuffs, in his hair; also  
there is thistle in the matting over muscle on his arms.  
I smell thistle! It's our detective, perky as a sparrow.  
Thistle's stuck in ducts, visible at the corners of his eyes.

[I too have wept around thorns, stuck in rageful weeping.  
Somehow love is indecent, if ethical considerations apply.  
Yet the moves of your glorious legs. I can't describe them,  
but in metaphor: legs of a hawk hanging down at landing.]

Okay, I killed you, thistle in the muesli. I'm sorry.  
The last thing I wanted to do, etcetera. It was a mistake,  
but I am not innocent. Lisalot, even if a dozen young men  
had slept with you, even then I would still love you.

From the dead: Fuck you! I was no willing object of such  
sentimental crap. I had my own agenda, and you killed me.  
Christ, is it gentle here on the waves, almost exquisite,  
to sleep deep on my side upon water, no man beside me.

Please behave yourselves. Miss Pelican, stop with the soaring.  
The line grows shorter, and I grow increasingly satisfied.  
Miss Pelican! It's a long way yet to Tipperary, but one bird  
ate thistle, and thistle hangs around. Miss Swan, that's enough!

Lisalot! Your body turning cartwheels in the air, blah, blah,  
your orchestrated clothing, tights forcing men into despair.  
Your hair: innocent as chick-down or a diaper, blah, blah.  
What can I say now? I still love you. I offer the proof.

[Your orchestrated clothing to say, I am here, look at me.  
Perhaps love of necessity contains jealousy. I told you to go,  
go, get out of here, only because you slept with another.  
This is not love, but hypocrisy. Let me die in your arms.]

Difficulties among flycatchers, high wire and trapeze.  
Count Scissortail comes to blows with a certain Phoebe,  
a ruckus about relatives and partners. Madam Vireo is miffed,  
sends out her dwarfs. The detective calls once again for order.

Quick as water up from the well in Furna, my sister,  
news of incest on the high wire throughout the village.  
It never happened. Check the quieter Towhees, their feathers.  
Lisalot, each gesture, each flight, each time I caught you.

[Atmosphere: the hall a complete mess, feathers and blood,  
empty as this apartment, the fled nest, no Lisalot, no you.  
Thistle weighs him down, a loadstone, as much as absence  
pricks like needles in our pillows, my clothing, this chair.]

You're next, last in line. Raise your arms. Wait! Where  
are you going? Come back! Check the curtains, the balcony!  
[Beware of extremity, hopeless desperation, and suicide.]  
Then check the river for her brother, Pigeon, no kingfisher.