

Sometimes a Light

Hovers about (as aura,)
pierces (as insistent beam,)
or floods the scene
to begin its framing
or reframing,
its giving of depth,
context, perspective...

(And to think
it all starts with a faint
ping of luminescence
insinuating itself into
an otherwise dim world.)

And sometimes
the soft rapping of
opportunity is heeded,
the grim specter of regret
anticipated if the brass ring
were to remain unseized.

I think this means we are forgiven.

It's becoming clear to me now
that we must be little more than
tiny motes floating past
the ever-watchful eyes of God,
a mere hiccup in a vast
field of surplus data, a stray
lyric dissolving, like salt,
into the warm water of time.

...

I think this means we're free.

Or, at least, that I am.

Coda

Again, the soothing refrain
looping its way back in.
Again, the infectious hook—
a kind of beacon beckoning,

Return to me.

And to think I only ever
wanted this: some shore
with no warning scribbled
on its calm face,

the flotsam behind me
once again,
some generous reprise
called “peace-of-mind,” and

even if unaccompanied,
some relatively warm bed.
And to be able to say
We had quite a time that year

and not burden those words
with connotation,
not to imply
I pray we can live the dream again,

and with some metronome slavishly
stitching the worn minutes together,
to get back
on the steady beat again.

And, even if unaccompanied,
to sing once more,
to make the expectant air
tremble deliciously with that rare something

most accurately described as
"hope-in-the-face-of,"
that buoyant melody,
like this shimmering day,

several octaves now above the blues,
leggero.

And, finally, to hear
the dawn's bright pronouncement:

*Sweet aching child,
I have come with a new lyric.
In time,
you will learn it.*

Pleurisy (or How to Drown in a Dry Room)

Given your discomfort with honesty,
I know how you would have responded:
So what? Who the hell cares?

Your physician knew as well,
which is why he told me instead:
She has two, maybe three months.

Although too late, the unflinching
x-rays exposed the cancer's nefarious
plot to rob you of your own body,

the enemy infiltrating your liver and
stomach and brain and lung, mocking
your paltry defenses with each tumor.

Despite its pure intentions, the truth
drags pain along with it too often.
So why not shield the spirit with opiates?

Why not shut your eyes to the gray world?
Why resist as the waves roll in
like a new definition for freedom?

There is a rumor circulating that during
the Great Flood, many outside the ark
misinterpreted the rising waters as
fulfillment of the promise of forgiveness.

And so, as the world bloated with retribution,
they perished smiling, gleeful even—
not afraid, not screaming—believing that this
must be the proper ending to their dark stories.

Blink and She's Gone

A kind of hush blankets the dim room.

The room is still, yet something is falling.

Everything is so soft and white it hurts.

Your eyes complain, but they stay on her.

Something else is being shaken loose.

The air has a grainy texture to it, like truth.

Your eyes protest, but you keep looking.

The night is a strong solvent dissolving her.

Outside, rain pours down hard like judgment.

Unanswered, a prayer burns on a cold altar.

She becomes a stained memory we share.

Her life, just a memorable stain on a sheet.

Leaving, you put on a worn baseball cap.

Any protection is better than none at all.

- James R. Whitley