



Photo by Kaplan

## Nighttime Song (In Memoriam)

by Mary Woodell

i stayed a night  
in a house of people who were once in love;  
i swam through heavy currents  
and got lost in their lives' labyrinthine grotto.  
i felt the swarming ripples,  
the spirit of someone  
who'd laid him down easy  
and long ago.  
i listened; and heard nothing.

they polited each other  
and played house  
all for me.  
the children romped and shouted.  
i watched and applauded  
and i asked them why  
(our eyes did for ears and tongues):  
we have buried our dead.  
"we have laid it down quiet  
"and long ago."  
i touched; and felt nothing.

but when everybody slept that night, finally,  
voices rose,  
and i caught it.

-fragile as the dandelion ghosts  
that children blow for wishes—  
i could not come too close,  
lest it take flight from my breathing.  
but i held it in my palms  
(though the tiny thing trembled)—  
i would not let it go.  
i felt a breeze of butterflies imprisoned in a finger basket,  
invisibly seeking escape.  
i waited in darkness and quiet,  
and it stilled.

the cup of my joined hands grew warmer  
and glowed.  
slowly, so slowly, the light unfurled  
like a frightened moonflower  
and spread out on my hands' lined floor.  
it fragranced the dankness of unused air.  
i heard murmurings:  
of pine needles combing out the wind,  
of underwater dead men and their mates,  
of lovely houses,  
and of people who had been in love;  
and i was filled with songs of ages and constellations.

i watched.  
the last petals of light unspiralled.  
and i held in my hands (though i thought i dreamed)  
a tiny man with woman's breasts  
pulsing with light and crouched in a ball;  
the shining beard caressed his knees  
and rainbows were caught in the tangled hair.  
his wings flatfolded against his back,  
a little runner tensed for go.

its pale and luminous pinprick eyes never loosed my face  
as the creature stiffly rose to standing,  
aided by a silver shepherd's crook,  
slim as a slanting line of rain.  
he stood before me

naked as water and open as air,  
silent, awaiting my command.

"hello," i said at last, staring back in kind,  
for i didn't quite believe.  
"who are you?"  
"you stupid fool," he snapped.  
"you got eyes, ain't you?"  
and he forgot me before i could reply.  
"when the house was through and they all moved in,  
"i knew it then and there.  
"all those kids and that damn' paraquite—  
"i knew it couldn't last.  
"ever, ever, or at all."

i tried to ask what all this meant  
but he didn't hear;  
he went right on in reminiscence.

"i could have told 'em,  
"if only they'd of asked.  
"people got no common sense these days.  
"christmas '61 was a lot of fun, though.  
"before they all grew up  
"to acne and the opposite sex.  
"too bad, too bad. the mating urge is a damn' nuisance.

"christmas '61, yes. only the four of them  
"and me. i was around all the time  
"in those days.  
"robbie and chuck were five and six  
"(it's 'roberta' and 'chas' ten years later)—  
"the babies weren't even thought of.  
"just the five of us at christmas.  
"he gave her a flimsy nightgown  
"you could see straight through.  
"she blushed, 'for the children's sake.'  
"the children laughed and laughed.  
"and she gave him a golden pocket watch  
"(he'd wanted one for years)  
"and everybody crowded and kissed."

"but what about you?" i asked him in a pause.

"you fool."  
he said it with a sad disgust.  
"i could have lived forever  
"but they simply wouldn't learn.  
"they took it for granted  
"and took my sight  
"and they stretched me too far  
"and they laid me down dying  
"and long ago."

dawn broke.  
the light in my hands rose once  
and then died once more.

i brushed the ashes from my hands  
and went to bed.  
i slept without dreaming,  
and left the next day,  
by the back door.

## Poetry

Jesus

by mjf

When I was a child  
I wanted to be Jesus  
and walk across the water  
to feel the salt between my toes.

When I was a young man  
I thought I was Jesus  
but the spikes were too painful  
my prayers unheard  
and Easter never came.

Now I am a tired man  
I do not need to be Jesus  
the spikes do not matter  
and I utter no prayer

When I am an old man  
(singer of bitter songs)  
I will want to be God  
and I will tell all the children  
they cannot be Jesus.

by Robin Kaplan

## The Hero's Last Words

"We live like a sigh to the wind,  
We feed the sun with blood  
And vanish, like God, behind laws."

He cut his flesh like melon!  
To live in fragments no longer,  
He betrayed the isolation that was breath,  
The beast and the monk.

Here wind listened, sky opened,  
And light fell full on his life.  
He left his body lying,  
A sprawled thing now,  
In the happiness of the knife.

A people's quick-natured passions,  
Separated like shore points,  
Remitting, infold in pursuit  
Of a severed stream.

Dogs bark for joy in their cellars;  
Crowds, like milky wounds, enshroud him  
In a vision not born from the masses.

## In The Jungle City

"Get rid of this nuisance, Sandhu!  
He sways our trellises with climbing,  
Our vines wither at his glance;  
In the day, he brings clouds over us,  
At night he makes this house moan.  
Even the dogs are humble in his presence!"

"Our trellises sway with the wind,  
Our vines wither with your neglect;  
The clouds clip the sun,  
This house moans always.  
Even dogs know that he will do them no harm!"

If he and I died at this moment,  
We would embrace in your sight, shaking with tears.

## The Fall of Other Men

Above the declivity, we watched,  
Mournfully, the fall of other men;  
Though we forged their wounds,  
We mock their scars.

From where we stood  
The stars could be numbered;  
Yet we are counted among the dead,  
And the dying sketch our faces  
In fevered dreams.

Strain to recall our disburdened passage  
Into the hallowed brink of self-exile,  
Into the sift of the world,  
Where together we stood, indecisively,  
In love that lasted a breath,  
And gave nothing its name.

by E. Henry Power

Tracks of animals lead through ice and snow  
and take us where no one has lately gone.  
In the end, they must surely stop,  
for all must end somewhere.