

Drop the Ecstasy

Tolstoy once said “Happy families are all alike,”
which is why he never wrote of them.
A flat surface offers nothing to build the muscle of the heart:
no climb up rocky promontories, no scaling to the pinnacle,
no portal beneath the surface of things.

You had a rough start?
Let your dark thoughts be climbers up the trails.
Mine your unhappiness for the pure gold,
The nuggets of emeralds and rubies
Locked in rock of constriction and withhold.
Poetry seeps from an underground mine.

There it is, shimmering, still naked and unrefined
In your yearning to release.
Beneath the rock of your battered heart,
Lives a scuttling lizard of longing.
Rumi says, “when you look for God,
God is in the look in your eyes.”
Dive with your long lizard tongue into the longing.
Love what is unfulfilled in you.
Bless it for bringing you to this moment.

And when the ecstasy arises, stand and shout
But not so loud that you are deaf to birdsong
Or traffic noise
Or wind singing through aspen
Or the restoration rumble of men and tools
on the Victorian derelict next door.
Sing your bliss out loud or in silence
But do not drown out the sobs
of the man on the mat practicing next to you
or the rusty creak of the old couple dancing—
who may be your parents or a pair of eucalyptus trees.

Then, when you’ve danced your praise on the mountaintop
And the laundry room
And down the aisles of Wall Mart
And heard it echoed back to you one hundred times,
Drop it!
How many ways can you sing your adoration?
Beloved honeybee, dance with me!
Rose, clover, dandelion—Divine!
I am bored with ecstasy—yours and mine!

Stand still in the cha-cha-cha of your life—
One step forward, one step back
Three steps exactly where you are,
The unsteady wobble and stumble of your gait
Speaks to you of doubt and willingness
and the steady pulse of joy and grief
throbbing through your veins.

Stand beneath a magnolia tree or an old eucalyptus
or kneel before a rose
And let your prayer be as innocent as the Baal Shem Tov's:
“For him, prayer was
a quality of attention.
To make so much room
for the given
that it can appear as gift.” *

Wait, beloved, and watch.
Until you see the deer on the road
through the eyes of your heart.
Stand still and let the wild pumping of blood and breath
move you to gaze into another's eyes
and the solitary doe of your heart
Startles you awake.

~Amy Weintraub

* from “The Baal Shem Tov,” by Stephen Mitchell, *Parables and Portraits*
(HarperPerennial, 1990)