

Trying Not To Be Cynical *Stephen Dobyns*

These early risers—the cardinal’s tenacious alarm,
the mockingbird’s artful imitation of the street—
how keen they are to get started. I imagine them
alert all night on their perches awaiting the signal,
which is not dawn because they begin long before
the first hint of light. The way that sunflowers
ardently follow their master or how the Irish setter

next door always has its sneakers on: it’s not
the immediate moment they embrace but all moments.
The forward-looking, the ever-eager, surely they
suffer set-backs but the next morning the cardinal
is out there once again with its pygmy trumpet blast,
not only broadcasting its breathing but its readiness
as if the day had too few minutes for all its plans.

Don’t we know people who are equally forward-looking,
unable to stay in bed, rushing from one embrace
to the next, eternally excited by the unexciting?
But there I go again: too cynical. As a hand fits
within a glove, so the energetic fit within their day.
The foolish ones have foolish projects, the brilliant
forge the ladder up which humankind has climbed.

What joins them is their embrace of each waking hour,
their gusto for existence, the joy of inhalation,
but how trying to those others for whom the moment
is a burden. How can one assert the superfluity
of all life when the fervent and forward-looking
are rushing back and forth like a cheerful spider
wrapping a melancholic insect in sticky strands?

But it's not that, only the cynical think that;
rather the ardent find heat where others find winter.
How eager they must be after death to return again,
standing in line wherever the line forms, perhaps
on sunset's ruby cloud or a rainbow's optimistic arc.
Who would trudge forward without their nudging, these
Casanovas of the instant, these embracers of breathing?

It is not yet four A.M. and the cardinal begins its call:
a benign airhorn cutting across the backyard fences.
In a dozen bedrooms eyeballs rotate toward alarm clocks:
a groan, a sigh and the head goes back beneath its pillow,
hoping to snag a few more dreams before the day thoughts
start their interminable charting of what comes next,
a card house of plans plausible only to the impassioned.