

Ode to Night

A towel at 2 a.m., a damp throw rug by the bathtub,
suggests a life lived, a body cared for,
from which has run off the weight of a day
so that the towel is heavy with the hours, and the rug
carries an impression of footsteps
where someone has labored to finish a day refreshed.

Now faceless, timeless sleep
overtakes the rooms, the furnace exhales, but I
stay awake, a few words at a time,
an odd comma, an echo, a facsimile, a searching
reiteration of the inner shape
of a few small birds beneath night's eaves.

I cannot stop a sentence from fulfilling itself
any more than I can separate the helplessness of waking
from the nearly-woken, or the dead
from the walking wounded. I am up late in wartime,
war's imprint within all of us who now
die of the earth and the water with which to wash it off.

Here at the threshold of the spirit,
not waking the body from soul, but bearing the day,
the weight that lay inside the very light
descends, even crumples, toward a day
without day and the endless nights of no night,
the prepossessing digestion of every inkling.

But enough of this. Better the memory of Moondog,
traipsing Times Square with his ethereal music
that would survive him in recordings,
and Joffe Stewart, anarchist of Chicago's South Side,
leafleting the streets, beaten by the police
who hit him where it wouldn't show.

Who's the kid on roller blades who trails the girls
on the Santa Monica boardwalk, half-strumming
a plastic electric guitar, wrapped in the sunshine
among the sporty, the fit and the successful,
his fluid line and talk a sweet, comic gesture
toward something, anything but living alone.

At what age does the life force turn,
and begin to give away its story, and the books too,
and cease accumulating the material,
and the images too, for a more abstract existence?
The towel has fallen from the rack,
my typing makes the birds rustle at the roofline,
and it was bedtime long ago.