

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

November 26, 2018

A weekly poetry resource

from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



Narrative

The interior of the car
has gone dark around her car seat,

the lighted highway is flat. I am telling
my daughter a story in which I am a deer

she comes across on the beach,
and with whom she travels

from the ocean to the mountains
and home in a single, hot day,

just to smell the hay ferns,
just to let the creek cool her.

Every moment of this is true
though nobody knows the next word,

and my daughter, nearly a person,
almost a story to reflect the world,

is full of comprehension.

Leah Naomi Green¹

Reflections

With this edition of *Wellspring*, the fall covenant period at St. Stephen's comes to a close; I will return to write to you again in January. For now, as we move toward Advent—a season of anticipation and expectation, a season of winter's darkness but also of approaching light and the lengthening of days—I offer this poem by Leah Naomi Green from her manuscript *The More Extravagant Feast*, a collection concerned with motherhood, beauty, nature, love and, in her own words, “‘the caloric exchange’ between my body, my children’s bodies, the land we live on.” Hers are poems that meditate on family, on inter-dependence, on the marriage of the flesh and the spirit.

¹ “Narrative” by Leah Naomi Green. Used by permission of author.

Advent (meaning “to come”) signals a new year in the church, a new beginning and, liturgically, we turn our attention to the Virgin Mary, a woman said to have pondered things in her heart and who, by divine power, gave birth to the son of God. As Christians await the birth of Christ at Christmas, they may spend this time contemplating what Mary surely felt: a nearly impossible joy coupled with tremendous fear and anxiety that this new life would indeed change the world. In keeping with Advent’s themes of preparation and contemplation, of Mary’s longings and meditations, “Narrative” feels to me metaphorically pregnant with a sacred truth about companionship—human or animal, adult or child, we make our journey together in darkness and, “though nobody knows the next word,” we continue in faith “full of comprehension” that the path ahead is lighted and flat.

I love that Green has used couplets to structure this poem, a fitting form for its subject. In this case it is not only the mother and daughter who are companions for one another, but the daughter and the imagined deer, the mother and the deer of her creation, driver and passenger, storyteller and listener, poet and reader. Even the relationship of reality to imagination is companionable rather than opposing: “Every moment of this is true,” we read. And indeed it is. How true it is, though I have no daughter and am certainly no deer, to recognize myself here in an interior dark, lost in some dream of elsewhere and otherness, part of a narrative larger than any singular story.

Though the long nights of winter have only barely begun, the road ahead of course is lit. This is the season where we tell each other the narrative over and again, where we make a manger of our hearts and prepare for joy, for divine birth, for peace, for comprehension, for salvation and unity and hope beyond measure. “[F]rom the ocean to the mountains” and beyond, those with whom we are traveling this life—those we know and those we don’t, those in the car with us and those far away, those of this species and another—the larger story is always a shared narrative because we do not travel alone.

Just as the girl in this poem may ponder in her heart what she does not yet have language to express, so might each of us listen carefully to the story being told however it arrives. We may not always know what comes next and the space around us may be dark, but we can, I pray, rest assured that there is always light enough to travel and fine company for the journey ahead.

✧ About the Poet

Leah Naomi Green is the author of the chapbook *The Ones We Have* (Flying Trout Press, 2012). Raised in Greensboro, North Carolina, she received an MFA in poetry from the University of California—Irvine. She teaches writing and environmental studies at Washington and Lee University with research interests in eco-poetics, poverty studies, and Buddhist ecology and community. She lives in Rockbridge County, Virginia, where she and her family grow food and homestead on 80 acres with a small community.



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