

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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A weekly poetry resource
from St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



from *Sancta*

Tonight I will leave the cabin. The stars begin to gnarl
in the corners of the sky. I've had enough of nursing my
senses awake: they are keened to any vestige of God.
When I say God I mean any way of navigating the radiant
aftermath of loss. And what I mean by radiance is what
the lake is doing, marbled by the moonlight and shaking
like a lost man.

Andrew Grace¹

Reflections

Wellspring featured this poem nearly three years ago, in one of its very first editions. Returning to it, as happens when returning to the best of poetry, is a unique reward. As one great writer said to another, "It is like being alive twice."

Sancta is a book-length poem and the offering here is one of my favorite vignettes. On each page of Andrew Grace's collection is a 70-word prose poem, an interesting hybrid form that straddles both genres. The prose poem appears as prose but reads as poetry, with attention to compression, lyricism, intensity, and fragmentation. This one is the very last in the collection and it ends a book-length journey of a man who brings his desperation and sorrow to a cabin in the woods and becomes, as one critic writes, "a naturalist...for whom the landscape's particulars offers a glimpse of salvation."

Sancta is the plural of *sanctum*, a sacred and often completely private place. (The word *sanctuary* is of this root, meaning a holy place.) In this excerpt from Grace's work, there is an interesting tension between the speaker's solitude and privacy and the reader's invitation to witness it, (thereby making the experience a public offering.) Often when we study poetry, we talk about audience and address; in this case, it is as if the reader is glimpsing what would otherwise be unavailable, let in on something inviolably innermost, a secret, and permitted to wander around in the experience of "the radiant aftermath of loss."

Now, it is Eastertide. Fifty days, I now realize, of "radiant aftermath." And the Easter lens atop this poem of loss leads me to consider carefully that phrase "vestige of God." If a

¹ Excerpted from *Sancta* by Andrew Grace, Ahsahta Press. Used by permission.

“vestige” is a trace, a remnant of what has (seemingly) disappeared, it suggests something of the paradox of faith—a presence in absence, a sense, a glimmer and glimpse, an awareness—and of the particular joy of Easter in which the celebration of resurrection is all the more profound because of the loss we first endured. Radiance, indeed.

✚ About the poet

Andrew Grace grew up on a farm outside Urbana, Illinois, as part of a third-generation farming family. He is the author of *Sancta*, *Shadeland*, *A Belonging Field*, and *The Last Will and Testament of Said Gun*. He has taught at Stanford University, Washington University, the University of Cincinnati, and Kenyon College. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *Boston Review*, and other prominent journals.



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