

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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



End of April

Under a cherry tree
I found a robin's egg,
broken, but not shattered.

I had been thinking of you,
and was kneeling in the grass
among fallen blossoms

when I saw it: a blue scrap,
a delicate toy, as light
as confetti.

It didn't seem real,
but nature will do such things
from time to time.

I looked inside:
it was glistening, hollow,
a perfect shell

except for the missing crown,
which made it possible
to look inside.

What had been there
is gone now
and lives in my heart

where, periodically,
it opens up its wings,
tearing me apart.

Phillis Levin¹

¹ "End of April" by Phillis Levin from *The Afterimage*, Copper Beech Press, 1995. Used by permission.

☞ Reflections

It is the perfect occasion, in every direction, for this particular poem—indeed the end of April in the Easter season and the world around us is touched with a glistening gold. Things are on the cusp of their fullest bloom; every shrub and tree, every blossom and bud seems to have prepared its own announcement, oblivious to pandemic and catastrophe. The whole world, somehow, has an alleluia on its lips.

“End of April” is a poem of tenderness, attentive to fragility and transience. Of course, the impetus for the poem—the found eggshell—is a literal illustration of such delicacy. But, in the skillful hands of the poet, whose observations open and widen in metaphor, we are moved toward a much more transcendent subject: beauty in brokenness, invisible presence, the possibility of miracle.

I find the poem’s restraint interesting—there is nothing overtly celebratory about finding the “blue scrap” though surely if you have ever seen a robin’s egg you know the shock of that color on the ground, the double-take recognition of its out-of-place-ness and the thin, “light / as confetti” perfection of it. Whatever sudden joy the sight of it being there brings is replaced by a peculiar solemnity for what *isn’t* there; it is a visual reminder of loss, a perfect emptiness, tomb-like and hollow, filled with the absence of what was.

Oh, but then the exquisite turn: “What had been there / is gone now / and lives in my heart.” How *not* to read this poem as an Easter poem, victorious and hopeful? If not celebratory in tone, it is indeed triumphant in image and in conceit. To be torn apart by that heart-nested robin is to be, I think, torn apart by splendor, by nature, by living, by flight. It is only in the shell’s brokenness, after all, that we are able to see to the inside of its beauty.

☞ About the poet

Phillis Levin is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *Mr. Memory & Other Poems* (Penguin Books, 2016), a finalist for the 2016 Los Angeles Times Book Prize. Her other volumes are *May Day* (Penguin Books, 2008), *Mercury* (Penguin Books, 2001), *The Afterimage* (Copper Beech Press, 1995), and *Temples and Fields* (The University of Georgia Press, 1988). She is also the editor of *The Penguin Book of the Sonnet: 500 Years of a Classic Tradition in English* (Penguin Books USA, 2001; Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 2001). Her many honors include a Fulbright Scholar Award to Slovenia and fellowships from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Born in Paterson, New Jersey, Levin earned degrees from Sarah Lawrence College and The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. A professor of English and the poet-in-residence at Hofstra University, she lives with her husband in New York City.



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by Allison Seay, Associate for Religion and the Arts,
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