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Four Poems

by Richard Ives

Open

To get to his house he had to walk past the man with the oceanic smile. It seemed like the biggest emptiness he had ever encountered and he was afraid of getting sucked in.

When he got to the bench by the lilac bush where the man was usually sitting, it was empty. He was surprised to find that this saddened him and he plucked a sprig of lilac to take along.

When he got to his house, the door was open. He stood on the threshold expecting something to happen. It did not. He walked from room to room and found them all the same.

After a while, he felt cold, but he did not want to close the door. He turned on the lights and he waited.

In the morning he noticed that the lilac had dried up in the vase because he had forgotten to put water in the bottom. He laid the lilac on his creamy white satin pillow. It looked like someone's memory of a Victorian novel. He left for work.

To get to his job, he had to walk past the rescue mission. Three men holding ratty blankets over their shoulders were standing outside, facing each other, as if they were carrying on a conversation, but they were not carrying on.

A street vendor was selling flowers to the people filing to work and he bought a white carnation to give to his officemate, an exceedingly quiet woman who always wore ankle-high nylons and shiny pants with very sharp creases.

By the time he left work, he had decided to sit on the bench by the lilac bush all night if necessary. Two hours after dark he was still sitting there, smiling, but he changed his mind. He was upset with himself because he had forgotten to pick a sprig of lilac.

When he got to his house, the door was open. He was afraid if he went in, he'd be there.

Poverty

The beggar's knife was not visible before the murder and it was not certain the beggar was the one who had used it, but who else? Could anyone have known the beggar would be carrying it?

The yellow cat had not been noticed until the red paw-print was found on the title page of the cheap mystery the dead man's sister had been reading. Someone said he could hear a sound like the brush of a tail.

I said, "I am the one who is still here, so I am the one who will solve the murder." I turned towards the whistle of the teakettle. The book with the red paw-print was sleeping on the stove.

I sat down My chair was made of wood and I was sitting in it. It would have been unnatural to grow larger at this moment. The yellow cat was licking its red paws. It seemed so long ago

that it mattered.

The rain was falling and I was not in its path. I knew I was not solved but still solvent. I knew I was not here to answer the book.

I reduced the top button of my shirt to an object by placing it on the table. I was certain it had not been visible during the murder, but I did not know why I thought this was important.

A piece of ash from the pages as I burned the book started floating in the air and it crossed the beam of sunlight cutting through the tear in the window-shade.

I began to select portions of the room to memorize. I began to place the murder weapon in the various wounds I had noticed. I placed my cheek against the table to see if the surface was legible. I was alone and the yellow cat was not part of my experience.

I said, "I am going to remain." I said, "I am going to suffer." The yellow cat turned the page of a different book and it seemed to reveal that I was not the murderer. The beggar had left. The beggar had a calling.

I was not able to lift anything from the table until the knife was removed. I was not able to button my shirt. I was sitting in a chair made of wood and I seemed to be suffering. I guessed that there were only a few more pages to turn. I guessed wrong.

A sound like the beating of a small bird's wings left me exhausted.

Entrance to the Moon

If you wish to visit the future, you should follow a plan. Someone might wish to write an historical review tracing the route by which you hoped to return. This may result in permission from the residents to misinterpret the importance of negligent weather because they know you will not be accidentally harvested. Do not offer blood before they offer milk.

Make a list of questions. Be sure to include some that you want answered.

Whenever you choose to visit, people will expect you to behave according to laws. These laws will not necessarily behave according to reason, but the people you visit will not recognize this and they will not tell you what all of these laws are.

When you return, a thank you letter should be written to each person who didn't try to help you. From these people you learned the most.

You should expect the other travelers to hobble the priest without direct regard for the crime, which placed him in that position. You can anticipate the disregard of the shepherds as well. Their rowdy flocks are seldom available for donations or correspondence. The mistaken carpenters can be expected to post daily the most inappropriate parts of their hammering.

When you are ready to study the reasons you have abandoned your former position, you can enjoy field trips farther abroad with less deception. An imaginary mood torch or an irreverent concept of social integration might become available for companionship. You might need only one symbolic calf to fatten on worried meals of maybe the next time, and if this effort is replacing the right parts of you, you could return to the first field of you, straw words bundled to fertilize a comfortable slow retreat.

Despite the apparent goal of these activities, the future doesn't require preparation and will arrive without pretense, but if you have been traveling without your former intentions, try to notice the fresh night air. Don't forget your milk bucket. Consider how much you can hold in

abeyance.

Climb in and announce your presence. Continuously.

Paternity

A large blue pimple beat his children with carrots while several aging conquistadors eulogized a sacrificial rabbit. It's a disease I can't appreciate, a color found only in rest homes, a rabid moon descended from a long line of surprisingly circular crippled clouds. In a desperate world we wouldn't notice.

Some old tires, a broken couch and a cricket. Life in a clutter. He gave himself away. "Just a moment," the father said, not knowing what he meant and finally meaning it.

Blossoms before the leaves woke.
A father who is always.
It looked like something someone might do on purpose.

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Rich Ives has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Trust, Seattle Arts Commission and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for his work in poetry, fiction, editing, publishing, translation and photography. His writing has appeared in *Verse*, *North American Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and many more. He published a three-volume series of the best of Northwest writing as well as an anthology of contemporary German poetry titled *Evidence of Fire*. He has published a limited edition collection of his own poetry and translated *Yesterday I Was Leaving* by Johannes Bobrowski. He is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from Bitter Oleander. His story collection, *The Balloon Containing the Water Containing the Narrative Begins Leaking*, was one of five finalists for the 2009 Starcherone Innovative Fiction Prize.