

Classic Poetry Series

Kate Knapp Johnson

- poems -

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Parker's Mountain

It is the summer bears ruled, the last summer
of pure breathlessness
when I moved unaware, taken in
by the netted branches of raspberries, held
in trance by the sweet air
of the orchards. My grandfather
died at home one night in early July
as expected, and the white clouds drifted like snow
on the face of the black lake.
Grandmother swept her porch clean, every morning
pushed grief under the railings like wisps
of an old bird's nest. Together
we watched the she-bear heave both bins
of garbage across the red clay road, her cubs
somersaulting each other, never minding
their mother's cautioning strikes. It is the summer
I was on the brink of seeing
some unexperienced light, although I stood
in darkness, or swam in spools
of dark while everything was bright around;
the gold lilies and their shadows flickered
one on one and the two swans stayed
faithful and fierce in their cove. I was twelve
and though I knew language
I did not know the meaning of things--
I lived within a lattice of time, unhurt,
undifferentiated, so that even in remembering now
there is only the singular quality
of that time itself; while I was there,
in its duration, I was possessed, wind-mastered
as the scrolled fields of clouds and disappointed
when the spell was broken and the real snow
came, and the cold.

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The Meadow

Half the day lost, staring
at this window. I wanted to know
just one true thing

about the soul, but I left thinking
for thought, and now -
two inches of snow have fallen

over the meadow. Where did I go,
how long was I out looking
for you?, who would never leave me,
my witness, my here.

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