

SECOND LIFE

~by David Whyte, from *Pilgrim*

My uncourageous life
doesn't want to go,
doesn't want to speak,
doesn't want to carry on,
wants to make its way
through stealth,
wants to assume
the strange and dubious honor
of not being heard.

My uncourageous life
doesn't want to move
doesn't even want to stir,
wants to inhabit
a difficult form
of stillness,
to pull everything
into the silence
where the throat strains
but gives no voice.

My uncourageous life
wants to stop
the whole world
and keep it stopped
not only for itself
but for everyone
and everything it knows,
refusing to stir even a single inch
until given an exact
and final destination.

This uncourageous
second life wants to win
some undeserved lottery
so that it can finally
bestow a just and final
reward upon itself.

No, this second life
never wants to write
or speak, or cook
or set the table
or welcome guests
or sit up talking
with a stranger

who might accidentally
set us traveling again.

This second life
doesn't want
to leave the door,
doesn't want
to take any path
that works its own
sweet way
through mountains,
doesn't want
to follow
the beckoning flow
of a distant river
nor meet
the chance weather
where a pass
takes us
from one discovered
world
to another.

This second life
just wants to lie down;
close its eyes
and tell God
it has a headache.

But my other life
my first life,
the life I admire
and want to follow
looks on and listens
with some wonder,
and even extends
a reassuring hand
for the one holding back,
knowing there can be
no real confrontation
without the need
to turn away
and go back
away from it all,
to have things
be different,
and to close our eyes
until they
are different.

No,
this hidden life,
this first courageous life,
seems to speak
from silence
and in the language
of a knowing,
beautiful heartbreak,
above all
it seems to know
well enough
it will have
to give back
everything received
in any form
and even, sometimes,
as it tells the story
of the way ahead,
laughs out loud
in the knowledge.

This first life seems
sure and steadfast
in knowing
it will come across
the help it needs
at every crucial place
and thus continually
sharpens my sense
of impending
revelation.

This first
courageous life
in fact, has already
gone ahead
has nowhere to go
except
out the door
into the clear air
of morning
taking me with it,
nothing to do
except to breathe
while it can,
no way to travel
but with that familiar
pilgrim
movement in the body,

nothing to teach except
to show me
on the long road
how we sometimes
like to walk alone,
open to the silent revelation,
and then stop and gather
and share everything
as dark comes in,
telling the story
of a day's accidental
beauty.

And perhaps
most intriguingly
and most poignantly
and most fearfully of all
and at the very end
of the long road
it has travelled,
it wants to take me
to a high place
from which to see,
with a view looking back
on the way we took
to get there,
so it can have me
understand myself
as witness
and thus
bequeath me
the way ahead,
so it can teach me
how to invent
my own disappearance
so it can lie down at the end
and show me,
even against my will,
how to undo myself,
how to surpass myself:
how to find
a way
to die
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