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John Brantingham: Two Poems from The Green of Sunset

John Brantingham · Wednesday, March 19th, 2014

John Brantingham has had his work featured on Garrison Keillor's *Writer's Almanac* and hundreds of poems published in magazines in the United States and England. His books include the short story collection, *Let Us All Pray Now to Our Own Strange Gods* and the crime novel *Mann of War*.

His newest poetry collection *The Green of Sunset* is published by Moon Tide Press. These two poems are included in this collection.

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The Green of Sunset

I saw your sonogram this morning, heard your heartbeat for the first time, and it got me thinking about life, how long it is, how much happens to one person. I wished you health and happiness, of course, but thinking about you fifty years from now, I mostly hoped the world would not make you disappointed and bitter. If life does beat you down, I hope you realize bitterness comes only from moments that stick out in our minds like pustules on a tongue. We chew on them, give them an importance they don't have to have, forget that anything else exists. I hope you remember that there are good times too, beautiful times, and more importantly there are all those moments in between the good and the bad. That's what life is, those moments in between – like when a sunset goes from orange to green. People forget the green of sunset because it's not as dramatic as the orange burst at the end of the day or the void of black at the beginning of the evening, but it's there for a second we all ignore. If you find you have become bitter on your fiftieth birthday, I want you to dwell not so much on the great loves and graduations as on the trip to the supermarket when you had a craving for a kiwi fruit or the long walk home from school when you just thought about your day. I hope you remember that there are so many green moments you will have forgotten, as you will most certainly forget what happened today, for these moments inside your mother, these moments you will not be able to remember, are just as important and just as real as any other moment. Today, you danced inside your mother because she drank orange juice. If you ever become bitter, remember that there was a moment today when we all watched you dance your orange juice dance and listened to your orange juice heart and though you cannot remember it, you heard your father's voice through the thin flap of your mother's stomach as he said, "My beautiful child, I love you, I love you, I love you."

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Edmonton, Summer 1974

And there was my mother, taking deep breaths, cupping her hands and shouting a sound that lost itself somewhere ten or twelve feet in front of her, my mother, a giant at 4 foot 11, and me at the back of the yard, out there with the blackberry bushes, those bushes I'd tangle myself into to gnaw fruit and bark and thorns, my mother trying to yell over thunder and blowing, the lightning strobing the clouds just above.

In two days, she'd take me out back again and show me how to make the Northern lights dance by humming, talk about how God gave us power over everything in the sky, but this was the day that she taught me to scream terror just below the volume of the wind.

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