

Three Poems From a Sequence: Nightmare Versions

In these bizarre times our own nightmares can seem a refuge

by Evelyn Hooven (February 2016)

A SUMMARY

It does recur, yes often—

The voices intimate, stern,

Say over and over

She has not done enough

And what she has done

Is not good enough.

Over and over

The nightmare

Turns into deans and professors.

Though she professes nothing

Records are *there*.

And the questionnaire deletes

Proof of fame and honor

To include

How long has she professed nothing,

How well has she done with it?

They meet and come to decisions.

Though they pretend reluctance

One sees they are eager.

Consider enforced labor,

Delete *all* question of honor.

Go quickly, go to the limit.

There was a train—

She did not get on it.

There were well-dressed, talkative

People for whom soot

Falls elsewhere

For whom the engine

Is silent.

She is one

Who arrived too late

Or was it too early?

She is the one
Whose fabric unravels,
We must turn elsewhere.
The coal ash is lodged
In her cornea,
We must leave before
It appears we refuse
Our instruments
To remove or sustain.
Make brief attempts at repair—
A pin or two, then bandage lightly—
THEN SEND HER THERE. . . .

PRELUDE

The arm of this school chair
Compels me
To do and do and do
Until the spell is broken,
The arm of the demon
Harmless as a mannequin's—

Is there a place away

From space I occupy—

The shell, the house and skin?

The air supply is gone—

Not one mask for breath—

A danger of voices. . . .

I sit quite still and remember

An indignant blare.

I braided your hair

I sent you out fair

As a princess, where

Is *your*
kingdom?

I've worn out my days

In stitching and waiting

But your thoughts are cripples

That fall to the bottom,

How can anyone care

What happens to you?

Will the demon let go?
My hand is trembling
And the sound of my name
Does not steady me.
There are some I indict
Yet I cannot unlove.

There is no camouflage
For this jungle—
Weapons falter
And the guide
Is an enemy.
The sound of my name
Does not steady me
Yet it is time. . .

THE FEAR

Din, armour, rain—
Your face dwindles
Your voice has no tone.

Hammer, tunnel, clock–

It is morning

Your hands are stark.

This is a visit from the dead–

There is nothing

You can hold.

Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOp: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

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