

JOHN GREY



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Segue is published once a year in August. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction between January 1 and April 30 (closed May through December), and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read our submission guidelines.

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That Beast in Waiting

Mama Seinke, I came here with the beast.
I tied him to the rail outside your house,
left him to munch on the seedlings,
the red buds about to flower.
True, we can hear his ceaseless chewing
from your Victorian living room, but when
I wiped my shoes on the welcome mat,
it was to rid myself of the monster,
to let you and your nervous house know
that I'm coming in alone.

We can rumble through history if you like.
You believe that word derives from "his
story". Papa Seinke's, the one who trod
the corridors of Auschwitz with a lock
of your yellow hair in his pocket,
his mind reverting to memory before
becoming another tear on a country's face.
You tell me of the cottage in Hamburg,
the busy tailor's shop, his cannonade laugh.
But all your creaky words are footfalls
down the concrete steps, watched by men
with grave-stone eyes. He lives in your stories
but dies on the waver of your voice.

The beast barks at traffic, digs deep holes
in the garden, stands on its hind legs,
peers through the window at your weary eyes.
You wonder how I can control him, how any of us
can heel these animals. I lower my voice.
That's one way. I speak of fields, of children
skipping rope, of lovers, of grandmothers on
a park bench celebrating their brood
with a long crackling sigh.

You begin to believe until the dream comes
slamming back: the man writhing on the

ground, his flesh torn apart by a thousand
such mongrels. Each mouthful of blood snaps
away a little of your life. You start to
wonder who I am, how anyone can be what
they say they are when such a beast awaits them.

Reply

There was nothing
or there was great darkness,
silence but for the falling of
water over stones
or the calling of my voice
from a great distance.
There were the roots of trees
or the roots of my existence,
spreading without my body
but with a little of my light.

Choose, said the man
at the pulpit
though it was really the ones
who loved me
who should have been saying it.
It wasn't sermons I was after.
I listened to Gale's heart.
I heard the claptrap of the city.
Yes, one could so easily abandon me
but the other, surely,
would follow me to the depths
of the earth.

There was nothing
or it was me saying,
surely there is something.
Either she didn't reply
or she is nothing but reply.

Author Notes

John Grey's work has been published recently in Agni, Worcester Review, South Carolina Review and The Pedestal, with work upcoming in Poetry East and REAL.