

Night Light

A Collection of Nocturnal Poems



This enigmatic sky now closing day with fake finality.... ("An Evening Question")

Alan Harris

Night Light

A Collection of Nocturnal Poems

Written by Alan Harris

**Clocks accurately tick while time slips
away like a black cat in the night.**

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An Everywhere Oasis

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Night Light

Melancholy needs a walk,
so out I carry it at 11 p.m.
to study two universes,
out and in.

Our neighborhood is dotted with
random porch and yard lamps
lighting the way for nobody
and me.

An hour above setting in the west,
our less-than-first-quarter moon
smiles inscrutably like a queen
in state.

Gliding through the trees, she
offers only used rays to my heart,
but light being now difficult to find,
I accept.

With far-away stars shining only because
they must, above a neighborhood where
yard lamps are glowing, thanks to
owners,

a breath now washes through my chest
inviting me to turn my melancholy
over to night's infinite matrix of Beings
who shine.

I do, and return home with lungs full
of light from outer and inner space,
and from yard lamps left on for all
who walk.

Stars

Skyspread of stars
on this clear night
quivers my heart
because all these
are merely what
can be seen.

Stars may see me
naked in clothing,
caught up in the
heresies of here
and there, now
and whenever.

“Brothers,” I yell
into the infinite,
“Greetings to all
sources of light!”
The aftersilence
calms my heart.

Midnight in Midwinter

Just the finest trace of snow fell
unseen yet tingly on my face,
and the streets were whitening under
a semi-coating of this semi-snow.
I knew the moon was up there but
clouds were having their way.
I walked familiar streets,
my neighborhood oddly hushed,
no traffic, dogs all quiet indoors.

Far off I heard the muffled horn
of a diesel engine pulling its
rumbling train along the single
trunk line past the edge of town.
With each crossing its wail and
rumble became a little louder,
and then each wail became quieter
until silence comforted the streets
like a forgiving mother after
her child's necessary cries.

All of us had our way tonight—
the snow was able to hint of itself,
my footprints showed I'd been there,
the train took some of the silence,
and midnight was allowed its hush.

Now my coat is hanging to dry
and I know where the moon is.

Meeting

Letters to mail
and a twilit beckon
from the dimming sky
tempted tonight
my walk to the mailbox
that never seems
to come to me.

At my first turn
the fat, lop-lit moon
shouldered me
and whispered,

“I’m here with you,
never not here.
Turn you to dust
or turn you to ash,
I will be here.”

I mailed my letters
and walked for home.

So simply it came to be—
my ageless friend and me
slipping past tree and tree.

Christmas Awakening

From the mantel, stockings
packed with Christmas
tinyness and sweets
dimly hang at 3 a.m.

Cold wind outside
shakes and snaps the house.
The dog is asleep on the couch.

This artificial tree, lights off, points
second-floorward with wrapped
bounty beautifully beneath it,
testimony that goods are good
and glitter is better.

The dog sighs and turns over.

From underneath,
the furnace exhales warmly
upon tree ornaments
livingly aquiver.

All else is motionless,
and less,
except for the dog
now snoring on the couch.

What if this—
right here, this instant—
is Christmas?

What if this quiet room
is flooded with the future?

What if an unseen star
is shining here,
lighting the way
to a new beginning?

What room, I wonder,
is this? Do we have here
a manger?

The dog sleeps deeply.
The room is ready.
One waits.

Claire de Lune

Uncle Bill's piano rolls mellowly along,
Touching dim moods and whispering old warmth.
In its ethereal arc outside the window
The full moon is smooth and slow.

As Uncle Bill's fingers coax the keys
His cigar in the heavy green ashtray
Emits a flimsy plume of fragrance.
The smoke, like Debussy's essence,
Rises straight up and flutters a bit
Before it disappears.

Aunt Martha's supper dishes
Clatter a counterpoint in the sink.

January Adagio

Tonight at 10:30 I went out
for my walk. In the distance
I heard a major commotion
of geese. At first I thought
a flock might fly overhead,
though the hour was far too late
for geese to be aloft.

But the sound wasn't moving.

I heard a train's rumble,
then its mournful horn.
A freight was crossing
the railroad bridge
over the Fox River
close to where the geese
were overnighing.

As I turned around toward home
I still could hear them fret and scold
in chaotic counterpoint with
the diesel's basso continuo.

And the stars tonight burned
bright holes in the sky, decorating
bare tree branches overhead
like lingering holiday lighting.

After the train had rumbled off
to where nocturnal trains all go,
the neighborhood assumed a hush
perturbed only by my footsteps.

Hardly anything is quieter
than distant sleeping geese
and star-bespeckled trees.

Muse on a Moonbeam

Twinkle you don't
but glow you do
not yellow not white
through my window.

Half the month I see you
riding above my maple
and I mostly ignore you
because you're steady
and I'm busy with trivia.
I file you under L
for later.

Since muses unused dry up
in the dark of the moon
(or so some poets fear),
tonight I welcome your light
as a loving underflow
beneath my busy overflow.

Tuning into your glow
far beyond the maple
yet as near as here,
I let my writing listen.

Lullaby

For a new grandchild

When Mom sings me a melody
And with a kiss turns down the light,
I drift off free and lazily
To join the mysteries of the night.

Across the sky soft clouds go by,
In each a face I've known by day.
They sing and sigh a lullaby
Which soothes, delights, and fades away.

In waves unknown I rock alone
As if my bed were a little boat
That sails a zone of undertone
And keeps me safe as I dream and float.

Now the clouds begin to wane and thin,
The last one showing my mother's face.
She strokes my chin and brings me in
From far adrift to her warm embrace.

A Christmas Light

At Christmas some will doubt—
they'd rather see first-hand
the legendary holy child
than hear fine stories told.

Some legends place a star
above the manger scene
to be a beacon guide
to men who had wise gifts—

but if a body of heaven
were wanted to remind folks
nowadays of this child
who was gifted and gave,

why not the unassuming moon,
whose quiet beaming gives
us all an inner warmth
akin to Yuletide happiness?

Humbly shines this second light,
relaying solar guiding rays
to people lost within a night
who wish to find a path.

Who hasn't sometimes wished
to thank the moon for glowing
above a ride back home
from church on Christmas Eve?

The lowly moon a Christmas light?
How daily seem its rays to us—
no special star sent from afar
that never will be seen again.

If peace and softness were
required, the moon has both.
If mystery were needed,
where could more be found?

Perhaps someone is in the moon,
as nursery rhymes suggest—
let's grant this may be true,
and this man or woman is you.

The moon inside you is
your inner manger birth,
and you inside the moon
shine gifts upon the earth.

Meteor Shower over Tucson

November 18, 2001

For Brian and Patrick

3 a.m. stars were holding
brightly tight to their dome
as desert chill challenged three
watchers alarmed from bed.

The Big Dipper's handle
had fallen straight down,
but upness was everywhere
and never all to be taken in.

Earthbound, we flashlit our
paths around backyard cacti
while overhead, quick meteors
like flaming needles pierced
and sewed at the night.

Several arrived each minute
but seldom did any two
claim the same piece of sky.
Some blazed up so bright
they lit up the desert floor—
doubt but believe.

We embodied three generations,
we watchers who stood or sat
or reclined on a blanket.
Endless depth boggled our eyes
yet we little asked and less knew
why we were alive just then.

Boy, father, grandfather were we.
What all might have happened
or not happened in our three lives
to cause any of us to be absent?

We had beaten unmathematical odds
to meet for this familial, communal
sky harvest, as had the listening lizards
who heard our "Hey!" and "Whoa!"
and "Did you see that one?"

And how better to bond
than under a needled infinity?

Down, Down in the Tao

A Grand Unnameable
inaudibly speaks
from endless here,
else could speak we not
nor be.

Feathers, we,
on a deep bird
unseen between
two night skies,
flying because
feathers can.

Listening are we, with
our universe held to one ear,
to keeps-playing scuffles
between Isn't and Is, boisterous
in their muffled playroom.

To dance is the rule
in our This-That school
excepting that sleep
too is a rule
and quite more deep.

End of the world?
Peace after that?
Perhaps—but from within
the Night of All Nights
some eventually tickled
divine sleeper may
dreamingly laugh aloud,
stirring breathing into the mist—
and back soon will be we,
guns, and daily newspapers.

Call this if you wish
“The Little Laugh Theory”
although nameable is the Is
no more than is the Isn't,
down, down in the Tao.

An Evening Question

Blackbirds crackle random
sonic pepper under fading skies
at end of day when silence
brings more pain to birds
than sounds held in can bear.

Up west, three backlit
afterclouds, blue-gray,
suggest a breathless blessing,
outer sky to inner eye.

Two robins try antiphony
positioned fence to fence
and trade their choruses
across a subtlety of dew.

Overhead, a helicopter's growl
subdues the singing birds
who observe a silent minute
waiting for the bully to be gone.

Next door, the dog
barks out his being
at something heard or felt
and with each bark
a girl shouts "Shut up!"
until he does.

A cat comes walking by,
surprised at me,
too close,
but quickly taking care
to show no fear.

Quietly alert,
I stare across
this outdoor table—
top all strewn with
wings of maple seeds
delayed from
reaching earth—
and I bow within.

My breath amazed
at simple dusk,
I fold in half,
and half, and half,
until there's hardly any I.

This enigmatic sky
now closing day
with fake finality
while straddling
yin and yang
abstains from answering
my wordless
evening question.

Healing Meditation #3

Gentle go the waves
that heal me in the night.
Soft are the sounds
that give my body light.

Now my room is dark
and sleep is nowhere near,
but hints of future joy
are warding off all fear.

Soon will come a time
when pain has gone away,
when Yes, a healthy Yes,
will have its mellow way.

With medicine to comfort
and universe to cure
I see no need to worry
as impure turns to pure.

Moon and Mars Conjunct

Walking at night
to the corner mailbox,
breathing deeply of
cool September air,
I look up and see
Mars by the full moon,
quiet friends,
like a tiny garnet
by a round opal
set in the sky's
planetary ring.

A carful of teenage girls
zooms by,
emanating shrieks and
laughs and
whoops,
careening between curbs
through our
planned community.

The red taillights
soon zigzag away
into velvet distance,
and silence prevails,
broken now by
this old mailbox accepting
my letters with a chuff
and a clanky groan.

I look skyward again.
Mars and the moon,
quiet friends still,
stare winkless from the surface
of the universe.

Has anything changed?
Yes, my letters are
in the mailbox;
yes, the car has painted
a picture in my ears;
yes, the moon is
imperceptibly
closer to Mars now—
but nothing deep
has changed.
The night has merely
taken a breath.

Juggler

The blue-black plate of sky
Teeters on a point of zenith
Like a juggler's disc
Twirling on a stick.
Intrepid owls (2)
Interrogate the
Intruding moon
Until splashjangling
Dawn splits
Night blue into
A billion oranges
Molded into a smolder.
Up comes the sane sun
Wheeling the lunatic
Moon on ahead and
Tumbles it off the brink
Of spinning sky,
To be caught by the
Juggler and thrown up
There perhaps again.

Listening to Christmas

Have you ever heard snow?
Not the howling wind of a blizzard,
not the crackling of snow underfoot,
but the actual falling of snow?

We heard it one night in Wisconsin
quite unexpectedly
while walking up a hill
toward our cabin in the woods,
a soft whisper between footsteps.
We stopped, switched off our flashlights,
and just listened.
All around us in the darkness
we heard the gentle fall
of snow on snow.
No wind, no sound
but the snow.

Have you ever heard Christmas?
Not the traffic noises in the city,
not the bells and hymns and carols,
beautiful as they are,
not even the laughter of your children
as they open their presents—
but Christmas itself?

Have you been by yourself
and just sat and listened to the silence within,
patiently, without letting the mind
race to the next Christmas chore?

Perhaps if you have,
you felt the pulse of all humanity
beating in your own heart.

Perhaps you noticed
an outflowing of love
for all your brothers and sisters
on the earth,
a soft sense of Oneness
with all that lives.

In the silence of a snowy night,
listen intently, holding your breath,
and you may hear snow on snow.

Serene, alone,
undisturbed by thought,
listen to the silence in your heart,
and you may hear Christmas.

May Nocturne

Half a cool moon
peekaboos along through leafing trees
over a suburban sea of haunting sounds.

I follow the dim white sidewalk,
hearing rhythmic whispers
from my hush puppies,
when suddenly a vigilant Pekinese
barks out its puny protest and retreats,
chain dragging against wood.

Evening's sonic ambiance
flows intravenously through me,
every outer sound seeming to well up
from some ghostly inner depth.
As I move along, a faraway car honks
a velvet chord into my core.
Now a strobing jetliner
thunders overhead
and reverberates in my belly,
the after-rumblings in its wake
fading away into a silence
too immense and profound
for human thought to fathom.

I stop beside a fragrant lilac bush
and stare at the sky's endless upness.
The waning moon seems content
to be quietly lunar,
lopsidedly smiling from its effortless perch.

Aloud I ask the moon,
"Where am I?"
A startled bird flutters in the lilacs
to let me know I am right here.

Night Thoughts

Sleepless tonight inside my skin and bones,
I feel that life must be a cruel curse—
Begun with squall, cut off with pain and groans,
A little joke told by the universe.

Why am I here? What accident of fate
Breathed life into this form I occupy?
What kind of God would bother to create
A fragile human life, then let it die?

A voice within my heart says, “Mend your ways,
And light inside your consciousness will gleam.
Your bleakness, like the earth, delays dawn’s rays,
But love and hope will end your desperate dream.

“Depression fills agnosticism’s night,
But soon your soul must rise and follow light.”

Sunday Profundity

As the sun pulls up
the blanket of night
to its western chin
and sinks into slumber,
our neighborhood transforms
into a blend of haunting sounds.

An owl cries out—bats flit by—
something whispers in the grass.
A distant rumbling train wails out,
then wanes undulatingly away.
Two hidden toms of a feline triangle
howl their indignity into the dark.

A throaty sports car rushes by
with radio booming
to replace
the dangers of silence
with the safety of din.

The neighbors sit and gesture indoors
like a mute puppet couple between the curtains
of their lamplit picture window,
their children eating popcorn near a vacuous tube
that splashes youthful eyes with artificial color.

No boundaries here outdoors
except the neatly folded edges
of the universe, tucked in
behind a sea of gleaming stars.

When Monday morning opens up
its brilliant eastern eye,
a thousand fervent birds with thrill
and trill their greetings
through the bedroom window glass
in rows of mortgaged homes,
alerting sleeping citizens
the coast is clear once more
for them to venture outside
(after coffee)
to their dewy cars
and motor off into their week.

Stray

As I gaze nightward at our
volunteer chandelier of stars
light-years away (each point
a twinkly memory of a light that was),

a white tomcat approaches me
like an old friend and brushes
my pantleg, crying up from the snow
as if in hungry agony.

I fetch some dry cat food,
pour it into a Styrofoam tray
on my porch, and watch him
dine with great crunching.

My eyes in the blazing sky again,
I drink measureless ancient light
into my emptiness as a gift
from the magnificent All-of-it.

Is our future in the stars?
I laugh aloud into the night air,
feeling the moment so mightily
I care little for any answer.

The speckled black overhead ocean
absorbs my laugh with dignity
while the white stray, finished with his meal,
wipes his chin on my pantleg.

A universe above and a cat below
circumscribe my being in this
delicate wintry instant—
love coming from both ways.

To Sleep

Body and bed go soft.

Final thinking fades to formless vapor.

Mattering gives way to “all is well.”

Breathing forgets breathing.

Shapeless shadows welcome a friendly falling.

Wishes murmur up through moving images.

Dewdrop opens into endless ocean.

Time unknown . . .

Innerly free . . .

Floating . . .

Drifting . . .

Peace . . .

80-megaton alarm clock explodes.

Santa's Interior Monologue

Boy, it's dark.
Sure is cold.
Housetop—whoa, boys!
Got the bag.
Suck it in.
Down the chimney.
There's the tree.
Gifts out of bag.
Stockings are here.
Stuff 'em.
Eat the cookies.
Drink the milk.
Wink.
Suck it in.
Up the chimney.
Ready, boys—away!
Sure is cold.
Boy, it's dark.

(Repeat a billion times.)

Tree Choirs

High twigs in the trees—
do they croon nocturnal chords
to you out of a winter-spring wind?
Chords not merely for ears, perhaps,
but chords filling human with being?

Seasonally smitten with tingly new sap,
each leeward-leaning trunk
resigns helpless branches to the air,
eerie groans waxing and waning
as from a deep unknown
just behind where you live.

How do you feel?
Try setting aside your daily newspaper
and turning into nothing but ears
to follow these pining strains.
How far inside of you go those moans?
Have they turned you inside out yet?
No?

Then listen all night, all night, all night.
Listen all night,
and waken.

Song of the Sick Minstrel

The winter night droops down
Around the scratchy trees,
Tinkled by an icy breeze,
Snapping.

Let's stand beside this creaking tree
And watch the bold eclipse
Devour the midnight sun
As if it were a yellow wafer,
Crisp and cold.

At full eclipse,
Then shall I love you,
In snapping cold,
Beneath a moon-dark tree.

Night

Upside-down flowers,
are we not? With stems
rooted upward into the deep?

Your soul, a kindly conduit,
umbilicates your body
into the placental night

that is fathomless and
fully empty of
where and when.

Take away the night? Absurd.
One night minus one night
equals one night.

Afraid of night?
Dread the shadows?
Learn from them.

Shadows tell stories,
emit fragrant meanings,
take you deeper than your feet.

Especially observe inner shadows,
even if they speak no words—
hear them out, and hear them in.

Look beneath shadows—
drop through into wider shadows
and feel safe in full bewilderment.

Afraid of unknowing?
Make your peace with it,
and your days may smile.

When you know definitely,
the vast night will remind you
that you know nothing.

When you wish for powers,
the night may wisely
hold them back.

But to be still with night
may bring you as much truth
as your heart can hold.

Night wants to abide
underneath your day
while you work—

wants to
enwomb you
between days.

Let night have its way,
its gentle way—
soften into its fullness.

Night is the container
of nothing less
than everything.



About Alan Harris

Born on June 20, 1943, Alan Harris was raised in Earlville, Illinois, a small farming community of about 1,400. His father Keith (1919-1980) was a World War II B-17 pilot who for the rest of his life farmed the family acreage east of Earlville while also taking time out on weekdays to drive a school bus. Alan's mother Margie (1920-2005) served as a diligent housewife and mother of four children, and for many years was Head Librarian of the Earlville Public Library.

Although he studied plenty of poems (often half-heartedly) in the local elementary and high school system, it wasn't until he majored in English at Illinois State University (minoring in trumpet and piano) that Alan began experiencing strange inner stirrings that resulted in some serious poems. His college poems seemed to spring from a new unknown place and they struck him as rather odd, yet were satisfying to write. Several of these poems were

published in annual issues (1964-1966) of ISU's literary magazine, *The Triangle*.

Alan and his wife Linda were married in 1966, and all through the next 40 years, new poems have continued to emerge and find readers. Every year or two, between 1980 and 1995, he would assemble that interval's crop of poems and self-publish a volume to give to family and friends.

In October of 1995, having acquired some HTML skills, Alan published on the World Wide Web all of his poetry books as *Collected Poems*. Within a year he added four more site sections: *Thinker's Daily Ponderable* (original aphorisms), *Stories and Essays*, *Christmas Reflections*, and *Garden of Grasses*. The latter section, originally co-edited with Lucille Younger and now co-edited with Mary Lambert, is an on-line literary anthology for screened work contributed by other authors.

In 1998 Alan's literary collection took on its current Web address of www.alharris.com and in 2000 became *An Everywhere Oasis*. After buying a digital camera and taking it to the forest, Alan published several photographic essays and poems which are now available in the site's *Gallery*. Also offered are 76 audio poetry readings, with 20 poems being read by actor and friend Paul Meier and the others being read by Alan. New "Web-only" poetry books posted since 1995 are *Writing All Over the World's Wall*, *Heartclips*, *Knocking on the Sky*, *Flies on the Ceiling*, *Just Below Now*, *Carpet Flights*, and *Fireflies Don't Bite*. Launched in December 1999 with co-editor Mary Lambert, a new anthology entitled *Heartplace* began accepting and publishing work from contributing authors. In 1998 Alan's son Brian composed and performed *Bunga Rucka* (a recording of which is offered on the Web site), which is based upon Alan's chant poem of the same title.

Alan has earned his living in a variety of occupations—high school English teacher, junior high band director, piano tuner—all of these before settling into a long career of computer-related work. He retired in 1998 after 22 years' service at Commonwealth Edison in Chicago, having worked initially as a computer programmer, then a systems analyst, and later a computer training coordinator. For his final three years at ComEd he developed Web sites for its corporate Intranet and the Internet. Linda retired in 1999 after working for 20 years at an insurance company, but she rejoined the work force in 2000 as a transcriptionist in a large medical clinic. Since retiring, Alan has been doing freelance Web design for individuals, non-profit organizations, and other non-commercial interests, as well as continuing his creative writing.

