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Gift Horses

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Two Poems · *Jack Gilbert*

GIFT HORSES

He lives in the barrens, in dying neighborhoods
and negligible countries. None with an address.
But still the Devil finds him. Kills the wife
or spoils the marriage. Publishes each place
and makes it popular, makes it better, makes it
unusable. Brings news of friends, all defeated,
most sick or sad without reasons. Shows him
photographs of the beautiful women in old movies
whose luminous faces sixteen feet tall looked out
at the boy in the dark where he grew his heart.
Brings pictures of what they look like now.
Says how lively they are, and brave despite their age.
Taking away everything. For the Devil is commissioned
to harm, to keelhaul us with loss, with knowledge
of how all things splendid are disfigured by small
and small. Yet he allows us to eat roast goat
on the mountain above Parakia. Lets us stumble
for the first time, unprepared, onto the buildings
of Palladio in moonlight. Maybe because he is not
good at his job. I believe he loves us against
his will. Because of the women and how the men
struggle to hear inside them. Because we construe
something important from trees and locomotives,
smell weeds in a hot July afternoon and are augmented.