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The Shade Man · Patricia Eakins

A STREET LIGHT shining in your window affects your word-count, even with an entrance *consuetude*, **page 32** harsh scrutiny day and night diminishes **see also** *battle lantern* program Mozart, the rays from the sodium-vapor arc in the street lamp pick out dithyrambic *gesticulative* oh, a guttural voice bellows lyrics extolling arcane sex acts; the treacherous blood *ignoramus waltz* your shadow the garish green of an LED *hook-swinging* cover the *craunch, latakia, mittler, reciprocate*, **page 94** shift tectonic plates in your *wiping rod, ibid.*, “You will pass a difficult test that will”

called Triple-A Shade, the rockers of my chair were rutting the floor; my cat Simplicissimus slept sitting up, the knives between his paws extended, though at his age, he needs to *schoolom*, **page**—the half life—that is—

“Just a good old tiger,” said the shade man, fanning samples of plastic linen. “Those teeth. How’s ’bout a nice egg-shell mwa-ray for you and Tiger?”

“Prince Hairball,” my ex-called puss **page 94** the shade man noticed my finger white where Norbert’s ring had *floeberg*

Felinus Simplicissimus alter-ego-philicus, pedant skulking in tiger fatigues, battling for turf with cultural oppressors he could no longer see through filmed-over *pyxix, land flood, citrus acid cycle, op. cit., ca. 1932*, “The star of riches is shining on”

displayed his collection of ring and tassel pulls, Ché Simplicissimus retired from combat, no ceremonies, just a tail flick **page 10** pursuing his medical degree, residencies folded in the rug, experiments and control groups, opportunity in the surgical theater with its *sureseater*, **page 45**, *trantlum, pyridone*—you know what I mean, I mean the glare. The street light irradiating scalpeled paws performing open-heart surgery, without anaesthesia, on the **see edible dormouse**, **page 96** shade man stroked his chin and squinted, turned his back on me clinging to Grandfather’s rocker, my neurons firing at needlepoint—a unicorn, a fence, a stupid aging virgin with a half inch of roots beneath blonde.

Simplicissimus “A trip by air is in your” medicine for philology, the little crimp at the end of his tail switching, a word shaped and *spilogale, slaughter, adjustable*—no. A hieroglyph code for silence deeper than the

silence of the phone, which had fallen into a habit, yes, a custom, inveterate? invertebrate? costume failing to ring in the evening hours when people devote telephone time to social arrangements across gender **pages 243-245**, “Smile, it’ll make the world”

“Be reasonable,” Norbert had said. Waving his arm at my, my, my dictionaries of art, music, myth, etymology, phrase and fable, synonym, biography, common usage, biology, historical *magnaflux* doesn’t know what she might need to “display the wonderful traits of charm and” Call me a cultural gene bank, redeeming etymological possibilities the way *regena-trix* save pennies or string or every fortune they ever **page 7** the wreck of *unwordable*, **page**—comma, comma, coma—please! “You are contemplative and analytical by”

“Maybe we could give up your rowing machine and chinning bar—” I meant **also** *fistulose*.

“Those green-shaded lamps,” Norbert thought they could go. “The rocker broken and wired together? You have no idea where you found those pudding stones marked by what you claim are runes. They all look the same, even the ones in the fish bowl without fish—no fish? A bowl of water just to wet a bunch of rocks so the so-called runic colors will be more intense—we’re talking flotsam! Jetsam! Statuettes of cats—turn them upside down, they miaouw! A miaouw you say is almost language. Sea shells that roar in *your* ear! Dolls that call you “mama,” dolls that wet *your* lap. And the photos! Do you think I *want* to move in? With your sacred typewriters? Your wounded carriage returns? Your rent is lower. We’d be saving—oh forget it.”

Eulamellibranch, *gastriloquist* stick to the subject, walk in step with **page 6** same size strides, don’t use words like *intrapulmonic* thighs like rotting leaves when an autumn rain extends through a soggy **skipband**, **pawky** hair stuck tight to the rules in his head, which looked so small with his brows scrunched, the wrinkles between “Bide your time for success” concentration, squeezing words in, squeezing them out *eversible*, *puyalup*, *maux*, *ibid.*, *ibid.*

involuntary patient, thesis subject of Dr. Manmade Moon, reflexologist, hypnotist and liar, I didn’t bother to draw the curtains. I didn’t want to miss a transmission from the couple across the courtyard “You are going to have

a very comfortable old” secret calligraphy, shapes behind a bamboo shade so translucent you could see the hieroglyphs of their bodies’ language flowing into *halfbent*: the woman arranging **page 23** tossing salad, the two of them, cakewalking, jitterbugging *pyelonephritic*, *substringent* swayed and swooped and seemed to **page 18** caught her before her long red-gold hair touched the *dipetalous* Poppaea Sabina and Phocylides, these names of all thrown stuck; I never knew their names for *claustral*, *scapegallows*, *knucklesome* guffawed, Poppy’s tossed hair a shower of *eudaemonics*, *macaronic*, **pages 63-65, ff.** “Behind an able man, there are always other able men.”

What? Yes, *before* Dr. Moon’s electric eye opened to stare us down, Phossie and Poppy’s cat, Zingarelli, stretched on top of their sofa to sleep. *After*, Zingarelli crouched *pararescue*, *ramrace* her flame-green eyes on Simple’s white-filmed ones, displaying her teeth. *Solenostemus*, *linear* linear? *balibuntal* Simple **page 918** out for the diving team so leaped or leapt? *uveal* hutch, crashing fragile hand-blown amethyst-stemmed *roomage*, then *nullisomic* in his litter, to hell with diving, why not archaeology? **See Appendix A.**

Phossie tried to lure Zingarelli from the couch-back with *paideia* something—fish?—between *entelechy* stared across the courtyard at Simple. Phossie paced. Poppy **page 26** Norbert—who wasn’t an ex- yet, worked for the city—under-assistant something, sanitation—gave me a number to call—the mayor’s office **page**—no! I called “You have a deep interest in all that is artistic” said the energy was wrong, was awarded another number, told the *tongueflower* light, was dubbed with the accolade of still another *valorize*, **pages 77-84** testified—no, no page—no light was needed outside our entrance *hypsicephalic* light—light, I said, would not prevent the skulking of children in stolen leather *simious* teeth with—no, I said—car antennas. At least, I told, I begged, I implored the—no, no, no—turn off the light by **page 9** “Confucious says stuffed shirt usually very empty”

work at home—indexing, fact checking, proofing, lately *sling pump*—please—the scrutiny of Dr. Moon slows my rate of **page 17; pages 101-103** a form in the mail. Official. Someone had signed a name; I had an identification *aretalogy* the last *telephone* number I had been given and gave my *identification* number, I was told my case did not exist. Not **page 37, no?** No improvement resulted from dialing my *identification* number or from

identifying my case with *vacuolar membrane* “Answer just what your heart”

talk to Poppy and Phossie about a coalition to fight the conspiracy, but “Good news will come by” *muckerism*, **page 19** real, that is, official names or their apartment *washpot* the super—he would have known Poppy’s hair, yes, **page 71** nipples pricking her leotards, Phossie’s funny wire glasses, his narrow shoulders, his skinny orange tie. But **page 65** super sitting on a milk crate by the service *ganoid* dominoes with other men in khaki **see also**—no—bulge in his trousers.

“So please—tell them for me about the city’s response to the light.”

“Sure—I tell them, lady. You relax.”

Sure, he’d tell on the not-wrapped-too-tight lady across the *garden chafer* **page 36; pages 10-13** Poppy and Phossie would move to a vacant “A friend asks only for your time not” the dark side of *phenazone* pierce their nipples in peace. I’d be alone with Moon.

Didn’t I have Simple? And Norbert? And the unicorn on the *chivage*, **pages 3-7** better for Poppy, Phossie and even Zingarelli to move away from “You will be fortunate in everything you” I could have sacrificed—could have changed. Yes, yes *tromba da tirarsi* keeping more and more *jacksnipe or judcock*—too abstract. The glare of Dr. Moon trained on the ego, you need a body of tangible *paedobaptism, smilagenin, doup*, **pages 10-13** shells, it might be dolls, it might be evidence from closer to bone, slivers of clipped nails and tweezings *xanthic*

had my hair cut, I said, “Just sweep those cuttings into a bag.”

“A doggy bag,” said Blaze.

“I don’t have a dog.”

“The colorist stuffs pantyhose with hair cuttings, hangs them from the fence of her garden upstate. Keeps away the deer.”

“Hmmm,” I *chiurm* because I don’t have a place upstate.

I could see he was looking for a reason to respect me. If I didn’t supply one, he would *ramiform pit* good cut again, but reason or not, I had left “You have a keen sense of humor and love a good” *truebred, serger, iatrophysics*, **page 1043**

lost face with Blaze, I wasn’t about to lose it to a super in a khaki *save-all*

worried about Poppy and *jouy print, washway* cooking meals from cans. They no longer danced; Poppy kept her hair pinned back; their friends came over less and *kamelaukion*, **page 35**

“I do all the work,” bellowed Phossie. “Cooking—the cleaning—all you do is brush your hair.”

“And who does the laundry?”

“Whoever—hasn’t been done in weeks. The sheets are filthy, filthy, filthy.”

Jower rattled my mother’s teacups, and one of the three remaining amethyst-stemmed glasses **see page 73**

“Because you stopped taking baths.”

“What about your baths? Your feminine hygiene?”

“I’ve been told my hygiene’s fine.”

“Told by—?”

“Never—”

“That super?”

“Please!”

She picked up a book. All the words fell out in **pages 53-59** recognized the one on top.

“Who?”

She bent her head to the book; I should have bent mine to the stitches *Doveprism*, bury, *opacus*, bury.

“You’re going to tell,” said Phossie, grabbing her wrists so she dropped—could have been *screaky* or even *bothros* on top of **page 9**

She said something I couldn’t *psychomimetic*. Sew it up.

He shook her and said something else I couldn’t **page 21**

She must have spit in his *scran bag, applanat*. Have to squint to thread **page 5**

dropped her wrists and wiped his cheek, then picked up the empty wine bottle, broke off its base on the edge of the table, started circling *Trinity column*—could I?—**see also page 12** Were his knuckles white on the neck “You will step on the soil of many”

called the police, but Dr. Moon had perplexed my telephone, which talked back rather **chapter 6, page 512** And quickly it was over, Poppy “One should never neglect the elders” body shaking, Phossie laying down *button test*, **page 3** wiping her—no, not now— unpinning her hair, Phossie unbuckling *bocage*, **page 117** Zingarelli watching Simple watch her

through his dim old **volume VI, passim**—grid of stitches *aporrhea* the starlike flowers around the silk-white **page 3; pages 17-25; page 121** silver mane and golden *millmoth*—too abstract! But I just mopped my sweaty brow with the cloth I kept for that, never washed it, no, had a nice collection of hard-sleep crumbs in a match-box, another of tears I wept into a bottle like Nero, who kicked Poppaea Sabina “Don’t let friends impose on you. Work calmly and” long ago, in the official *goosedrowners*—see? **page 12** toothpasty saliva I swallowed instead of spitting *tatpuresha* meanwhile sewed over *samisen*. I had everything under control—a lot of work, a lot of vigilance *lugsail, samite* biff! biff! biff! holding my own. And Dr. Moon could have the phone.

Then one evening Norbert, in a brand-new navy polo coat, cartons of Chinese and a paper cone of white carnations sucking up a great deal of red ink, lurid pink *weatherfish*, no *tizwin*, no, regular wine—a label with an engraving of a mansion but no “apellation controllée.”

“I’m chivalrous,” he opined, lifting his chin to show his *ibid.* completely oblivious? **page 6** curtains open.

“Don’t bother closing them. Lace curtains? They’re nothing to Moon.”

He pulled the cords. “There!” he said. “That’s better!” Though it wasn’t. “Aren’t you going to put the flowers in water?”

I arranged the pink carnations in a cut-glass *tightside* flowing into the last two amethyst-stemmed *gillygaupus*, **page 58** the French waiter’s corkscrew, kicked off my maribou *pheon, gambo, dominant term* Norbert pulled the cork from *spissitude*, **page 111**

“To us,” he *lurdane, proneur, suspensive veto*

rifled his pocket appointment book while he **page 15** a dentist, an eye doctor, a mother who served dinner on **page 12; page 98** shoe repair near home and work, a few friends “You will be singled out for promotion” noted the numbers of hundreds of women with no last names. Definitions *lurement, joyance* an infection disease—so abstract, with no “Mise en chateau” on the wine cork, yet still I thought it prudent not to *vespertinal, cottice*, oh please.

“To us,” I agreed.

Simple let out a yowl **page 29** demolition seemed fine or **page 5** or Kamikaze Kat leapt onto the tray and knocked the amethyst-stemmed glasses to *hystericky* they *coucha, iteflyi, besticul, hermofo—op. cit.*

Dr. Moon—of course—but the room across the courtyard was dark and **page**—forget it—out the silhouette of Phossie’s biceps. Was he naked? Or wearing briefs? His elbows jutted out from his head—he seemed to *ibid.* binoculars. Norbert came up behind “Always accept yourself the way you”

“Could we m-m-m-m cat in the m-m-m-room?” nibbling on my ear.

“Simple? He lives here.”

“What about m-m-m-m-m? M-m-m-m-me sneeze.”

“It’s the light, and the neighbors—”

“Maybe you didn’t understand. The *cat* makes me—”

“Poor old thing! He stares at the light, then—”

“Are we going to put him in the bathroom?”

The place between Norbert’s brows was a knot like “Keep your feet on the ground even though friends flatter” needlepoint threads, tangled ironic squiggles. No, words were trying to free themselves letter by *s-g-c-p-q-r-l-x*

“What’s your problem?” He had gone for the dustpan, was sweeping up the *dictaphonic* sensible! His brow fonts had absolutely “The straight road is the quickest but not necessarily”

“Say there were war or a plague would you put me in the bathroom? Or say I get old?”

“Very funny.”

“Your eyebrows—they darken with your mood.”

He smiled.

“Is it eyebrow pencil? Norbert?”

“Don’t you think it’s a more executive look?”

Eight years **page 27** unicorn pillow **loc. cit.** believes cosmetic ads *phase-wound* emmanuenses with low self-esteem.

“Did you hear me? ‘A more executive look?’”

“Let’s just have the wine in juice tumblers, O.K.?”

“Didn’t you hear me?”

“Maybe some carrot sticks—crudités, yes?—or cheese and crackers, *with* the—”

“Never mind crackers, what about my—”

“Very impressive.”

“Just—sentence form—just let me see what—”

“Write it out? Like, cursive, script or block?” O.K., mean.

His eyes had a soft, odd shine. He blew his nose, and several letters dribbled onto his upper lip. “U,” “Z,” maybe “X.” Maybe he wanted to spell *uxorious*, but then Dr. Moon threw a C. That Moon! Sodium vapors making Norbert’s nose **page 19, pages 64-65** Dr. Moon insinuating “To believe in yourself is what” Should I crack the bottle on the edge of a table, prepare for *cusks, hypohyaline* Simple leapt into Norbert’s lap and dug in his claws. Norbert backswung, Simple gathered his ancient bird-bone “You will soon be crossing the great” leaped over Norbert’s swiping *cant window, hypolocrian mode* laughed, shaking all over, like Poppy with Phossie and **page 17**

“Stop,” said Norbert.

Salt River in my sides, *unfaceable* running down my cheeks. I had to blow my nose. Yes, a Q on the tissue.

“Stop it,” said Norbert. He stared at the rough stitches on the back of the pillow cover. He blew his nose. “I’d better go home,” he said. A *W* was trapped in the little tuft of hairs that protruded from his left nostril.

“Nose Scrabble. *Wallow.*” I gave him that, but the knots between his odd dark brows had come undone, the forehead letters had flowed away. He was heading for the door, stepping carefully around the spilled words, setting his hat very straight on his head—a gray felt hat with a small brown-and-white feather—professor hat, *Herr Doktor* hat, fedora *sanglier, talmouse, unyieldingness*—I’ll say **page 101**

pulled off Norbert’s ring and dropped it in a plastic bag with my hair cuttings and the bottle of tears and drafts of several indexes Dr. Moon had ordered me not to *gigantism, pages 36-37, unfair competition, page 324* bag beneath the sofa bed where no light strikes “To do what you want and enjoy it is” called Triple A.

“Black-out or regular?” the shade *unreave*

the tip of his tape measure under his thumb and drew a long ribbon of steel from the case. He snaked the tip of the ribbon up the window frame, pulling more and more steel from **page 5**

Ralph, his name “You will conquer obstacles to achieve” smiled when I said *black-out*—big white teeth.

“Ike a seep ate?” *onchosphere* newspaper on the radiator, pinlike finish nails delicately clamped between his teeth, tapping *sandboy, page 44* brackets that would hold up the roller *guard report, page 8* correcting echo: “Like to sleep late?”

“Dr. Moon can translate anything.” I owed it to Ralph as a human being
first flight cover, markweed

face tender and red, like a safe-cracker’s sandpapered fingertips.

“The cat, the fights.”

“It’s how they mate.” He jumped lightly down from the radiator, taking half the words from “New and rewarding opportunities will” *Jacent* went and *bearwalker*. Mother’s cups rattled in their saucers. She was always **page ii**

“The people fight. Poppy and Phossie, Norbert and me—Norbert wanted the cat in the bathroom.”

Ralph shook his *idem*. his bushy brows at the moon-eye in the vanishing point. He *urticant*

“If you take the eggshell mwah-ray black-out, I can fit you today.” He was very near me. I smelled *cockandy? gillflirt?* just tobacco.

Then **See Chart A** tongues long in each other’s *oriflamme* slurp-a-lurping behind the dentition, up in the cheek pouches, tonguing any little *syncopative*

not true. He didn’t “person’s wealth is measured by his”

said, “I may get in trouble, but I can do better than the black-out.”

He checked the action of the roller, looked around for “Confucius says stuffed shirt usually very” settled on a one-volume desk encyclopedia, gift from **page 9, page 9**

I said, “You can’t throw anything that heavy so high and so far. And words—his game. Moon is invincible.”

Ralph shrugged. He picked up the botanical dictionary, the how-to-fix-anything *alblumblatt, celestial crown, journeywork, palanquin*, try *cornered* anticlimactic. No sooner had Ralph gone outside than a crash was followed by darkness. No more light beneath the half-lowered egg-shell shade. I raised it all the way. There were stars in the dirty sky, the fallow old-time moon, the rank odor of dead words. Poppy arranging daisies and irises; Phossie tearing red lettuce leaves; Zingarelli washing the claws extended between flexed toes of a paw. I sat in the rocker and Simple leapt shakily onto my stomach, kneading my sweater, sucking a fold near the waist. Milk, he purred, closing his white old eyes. And blessed silence flowed. Silence and dark.

I had given the shade man a check; to the contents of the bag beneath the sofa I added two small scraps of eggshell moiré. With the bent finish nails

I found on the floor, I tacked the unicorn pillow-cover to the bread board and gave it to Simple for a scratching post, in case he still needed one. And that was *wing-dam* “You have the ability to adapt to diverse”

crash, no silence, no dark. Say Ralph threw one by one at the unblinking eye of Moon all the books that Norbert ever begged me to chuck, then smashed the furniture, heaved rocker, dresser and bed parts at *stringendo*, *karyogamy* my check didn't clear; I hadn't been able to *Smithfield bargain*—not now—the shade was too short by half an inch; it had been custom-made for someone else's **page 333** though Ralph had charged *vestee*, *hydroextractor*, *clapdish*, yes, full *inveiglement* threw book after book, the light was stronger than ever, somehow he gave me to know—Moon or Ralph—*aflicker* cutting my shadow carefully from my body with a single-edged razor blade or cutting Ralph's *vacation church school*, *jonathan freckle*—I said not now. Get out. “The time is right to make new friends” peeling off my shadow—oh tricky, blood so close beneath the surface of the skin everywhere on my body, the shadow itself increasingly *unvendible*, *earthtongue*, *belemnite*, *labiodental* Ralph forced to return, pile the sheets, towels and *rightaboutface* in front of the *edge effect*, **page 23**

opened the door with volleys of *zwazoku*, *babblative*, *antifluoridationist* “Don't blame failure on others. You didn't” instant coffee from a paper *exagitate*, **page 9**; **pages 77-78**, *gingerspice* yes, I did, unzipped his *remanence*, *cantwindow*, *knosp* on the floor “You are open-minded and quick to” unzipped his defenses. I pillaged his *rutter*, *page shoe* the white parts no light had *labefaction*, *babbitter* his *urgrund* stop! his *eelery* I said *disc plow*, *sanious* said—O.K. my mouth and **page 763** slashed his *capitular* a laser scalpel across *packing radius*, *stringways*, *axiological* eye of my loveless *girasol* hieroglyph crimp in the tail of *spikepitcher* straightened and curled and *whalehide*, *potbank*, *iconolater serodiagnosis vesicant ice candle bombax floss* the proof I existed shone in *serrated impulse winter-habited* yes, then Moon **page 396**, *passim* exploded the words I could **page 1**