Ode to Night

Marvin Bell
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A towel at 2 a.m., a damp throw rug by the bathtub, suggests a life lived, a body cared for, from which has run off the weight of a day so that the towel is heavy with the hours, and the rug carries an impression of footsteps where someone has labored to finish a day refreshed.

Now faceless, timeless sleep overtakes the rooms, the furnace exhales, but I stay awake, a few words at a time, an odd comma, an echo, a facsimile, a searching reiteration of the inner shape of a few small birds beneath night’s eaves.

I cannot stop a sentence from fulfilling itself any more than I can separate the helplessness of waking from the nearly-woken, or the dead from the walking wounded. I am up late in wartime, war’s imprint within all of us who now die of the earth and the water with which to wash it off.

Here at the threshold of the spirit, not waking the body from soul, but bearing the day, the weight that lay inside the very light descends, even crumples, toward a day without day and the endless nights of no night, the prepossessing digestion of every inkling.

But enough of this. Better the memory of Moondog, traipsing Times Square with his ethereal music that would survive him in recordings, and Joffre Stewart, anarchist of Chicago’s South Side, leafleting the streets, beaten by the police who hit him where it wouldn’t show.
Who's the kid on roller blades who trails the girls on the Santa Monica boardwalk, half-strumming a plastic electric guitar, wrapped in the sunshine among the sporty, the fit and the successful, his fluid line and talk a sweet, comic gesture toward something, anything but living alone.

At what age does the life force turn, and begin to give away its story, and the books too, and cease accumulating the material, and the images too, for a more abstract existence? The towel has fallen from the rack, my typing makes the birds rustle at the roofline, and it was bedtime long ago.