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A Walk

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KEITH TAYLOR

A Walk

1.

... from that place in a hall in an old farmhouse,
at the foot of a narrow stairway that rose
up to darkness at the top—no one believes
I can remember my first steps; *you heard it
from your family*, they say, but I remember
I was alone and no one saw the things I saw;
I know a man who remembers his own birth,
I say, who remembers pain when he was pushed
into his life—and I pulled myself upright
by that stairway, turned and walked, uncertainly
of course, back to the living room and the light.

2.

... on New Year's Eve after I snuck out of church—
the Watch Night Service where my family watched
minutes crawl, sang hymns, and prayed until midnight—
and outside in air so cold it hurt to breathe,
air that rose up dense and smoky around me
when I walked fast, faster over the snow
crunching back at me, until I was running,
exhilarated, until the twelve bells chimed
and the drunk and godless yelled through their windows
to the boy running by—*Happy New Year, kid!*—
and all I wanted was to join the party.

3.

... alone from the East Station to the river,
then west through courtyards and the palace gardens—
and somewhere here among the fountains the sun
finally broke through the trees, over the shops
and hotels onto the first old man reading
his morning paper on a bench wet with dew—
to the Fields of Heaven and all the way up
to the Place of the Star—and I understood,
or thought I did for a minute, maybe two,
the notion that the sun might need one of us
each morning (and this morning it might be me)
to bring it back over the crest with the power
of our joy—and I returned to the river
to stand in line before the sparkling tower.

4.

... in the Manistee National Forest
on snowshoes, probably four feet on the ground
already and more snow falling, and I lost
direction out in the scrub oak and jack pine,
then wandered for hours hearing only raven
croaks and the deceptively close nuthatch calls,
nasal and metallic, until I stumbled
on a snowed-under fire-access two-track road
I vaguely remembered and found my way back
to my friends, their cabin, their woodstove and fire.