



Shadows In The Ecluse

Shadows In The Echoes

Poems by Barbara Phillips

**Cover by Patrick Phillips
& Gregory Phillips**

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Shadows In The Echoes
Barbara Phillips

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Shadows End

there are shadows at the end of the garden
 under branches of trees grown to ambush
 proportions that spread rumours
 I can't hear what they are saying there among
 the shrubs and the beds over run with pink
 phlox and delphiniums leaning like ink-stained
 amazons among daisies that have no place
 to hide as they speak to each other in white-shine
 flashes about boughs that break and twigs that snap
 when light leaves chase thunder fractures
 along paths lost in gloom opaque as dust
 behind mahogany claws of the grandfather clock
 and I remind myself to stay out of shadows
 dark as forests smothering truths buried in secret
 ruins crumbled by roots writhing at the end of the garden

Velvet Box

she lives her life in a velvet box
 trimmed in platinum and diamonds
 her hands are soft her hair is gold
 her lips are au courant
 she works out at the gym each day
 all her clothes are dernier cri
 her furniture antiques du jour
 what she thinks is read by all
 in morning news a la mode
 she walks in Blahnik shoes
 so chic and never has far to go
 her world revolves in harmonies
 she strolls on deep turf green lawns
 holidays are plentiful and droll
 in parts known only to the few
 her heart is strong she does no wrong
 she cannot feel the souls that daily cry
 in voices shredded paper thin

Dancing Steppes

The traffic circle hums
 swarming with vehicles obsessed,
 while baboushkas in their market stalls
 sway in tune, to reveries
 reverberating through sun-streaked skies,
 watching bread brimming on oven-warm steppes,
 rearranging with work wrought fingers,
 produce wrenched from loamy beds, pumpnickel black,
 and salt-stiff fish, frozen dead with longing
 for the cooling purity of ocean depths.
 In a space apart,
 smiling silent songs to distant dances,
 pulsing through villages slumbering like sheaves,
 sits the accordian player, letting loose
 proud melodies, boldly slinking
 supplicants, taming generosities,
 lurking among shoppers shuffling by,
 observed by the woman withered by wanhope,
 who clasps within her arms a child, tormented by sickness,
 mutely staring into a world whirling away,
 as a passerby drops into her limp, parchment-thin hand
 the change he has mined from his pockets.

The woman rocks the child she clings to shield,
 grateful for the stay from starvation.
 Yet still she whispers to her God
 chants pleading for salvation.

Break Point

a pretty child she was with her brown bouncing curls
 and eyes as clear and blue as the September sky
 above the children's hospital with corridors of many
 comings and goings by parents with offspring clutching
 blankets, teddybears, lollipops, bottles, dolls, baseball caps
 the fuzzy bear under her arm leaned precariously
 towards the floor, googly eyes spun to focus on dimensions
 somewhere beyond comprehension, south of reason, west
 of sunset, as she half skipped and ran to keep up with the father
 who pulled her along in a coat-flapping rush towards the exit
 But I don't want to die Daddy, I don't want to.
 Daddy I don't want to die. I don't. I don't.

the man barely looked at her as he answered,
 It doesn't matter, you will anyway.
 he opened the door to the street while she kept calling
 out as she followed him down the subway stairs, and the traffic
 played itself out in the windwired afternoon beneath glass
 glazed towers that stared at dances of linden and honey
 locust branches, shivering under sun sunk shadows

Kite Song

String tangles and loops the toddler's fingers.
He is carefully extricating himself from
capricious wiggings of white cord leading to
brilliance of red, blue, and yellow
geometric configurations in the kite that throws
itself exuberantly into brash breeze
blustering in comedic confrontations with beach
horizons and scudding sky-tinged clouds.

Free now of kiteful mischief making
he pushes the yellow baseball hat off his eyes
and squints as he tracks the kite leaping off clouds,
tugs back the cord, bracing against gusts
greedily swooping around the kite flapping signals
in successions of yellow-red, blue-yellow, red-blue.

The kite cavorts as it courts sun, sky, and wind.
The child holds on, both hands in fists.
He grabs the cord that spins in speeding twists.

His father pushes his hands deep into jacket pockets,
steadily watches his son who chases after the kite,
face turned upwards,
mesmerized by kite gambols in sun singing skies.

Grasping To Reach

The homeless man stands in the doorway of the Trust Company,
shrouded by late afternoon shadows.

Wind tears at the tattered hat the man clings to
with one hand, while waving back and forth with his other hand
the newspapers he daily sells at this same location.

He chants in a raspy voice that braves the cold of January--

"Get an Outreach today folks—

It's only one dollar and you help the homeless.

Only one dollar. Get an Outreach today."

He shrugs into the collar of his worn, brown coat, and steps
from one ill-shod foot to another, as he sings his mantra to
passersby quickening their steps,
anxiously rushing away to run
errands that cannot be delayed.

The man in the doorway looks at the backs of receding pedestrians
as he says--"Thank you. And a very good evening to you too."

Shivering, he steps further back into the doorway,
grasping his newspapers tightly against his chest,
a Lazarus without a resurrection.

VIRTUAL THERAPIST

we greet meet
in this cocoon
vapour more than womb
you are paradox of flesh
not-of-the-flesh
you seek confirmation
need validation
only I it seems
am able to heal
your soul's searing pain

I step into the role
of sagacious therapist
whose hands'touch
discards your tortured fears
soothes your agitation
smoothes away aggravation
brings you back to what
we left behind
when we went away to find
a place to be simply
you and me

Spit And Polish

As a cadet, he was taught to shine.
Shoes were mirrors; pants were pressed straight as arrows.
He never had a hair out of place.
He knew how to march in formation.
He never missed a step.

Now he stands in a trench, shoes weighted
with mud and stench. His pants are torn, pressed
against dirt walls. His hair is plastered in sweat
beneath his helmet. He does not know when to step

out of the hell he has marched into.
He was not taught to miss formations,
looming labyrinths laying spaces,
cleared for marching in eternal time.

River Walk

high on rain water
 the river recklessly storms rocks
 to plunge into the greedy
 lake that wavefully gulps it up

my dog is baffled by the river's mood swings
 down muddy banks smeared by footprints
 she runs to drink the gush of sun-smashed
 cocktail on shores parched only yesterday
 before the storm baited torpid shallows
 made them foam

above my head trees exhale whisper green leaves
 and strange blossoms like awkward adolescents
 who wait for magnificence

red-winged blackbirds unnerve the air with calls
 as they fitfully inspect branches
 weigh suitabilities against stresses
 in webs of canopies bent over waters
 willful and wild

Cry To Me

blankets tie themselves into shackles
 I kick into half wakefulness
 slide away from the dreamless Dream
 who caresses eyelids
 lays the body into Elysian stasis

a child is crying in the night
 my brain buzzes a check
 list in overheated urgency
 it can't be true I tell myself
 I can't bear it now

but all is quiet
 then sobs soak darkness
 I gather them to me
 in the morning when there is light
 I'll cast them into
 a talisman for the future

Pygmalion Alien

why does every man
want to be Pygmalion
turn his woman into
ideals of what he
thinks should be but is
blinded to what is there
beneath what she thinks is
required or at least desired

why is it not sufficient
to wonder at the wealth
of what she is by herself,
layers packed so tightly,
fit into a psyche compressed,
once released would fill
margins of galaxies yet unknown

After Battles

beneath the sod souls bleed
roots claw away from trees
supplicants who raise arms skyward
imbued with eternal grief

winds erase time
stunned into skeletal silence
across walls stained by tears
immovable through rains or snow

voices rise in dry whispers
ricochet across violated spaces
wasted into voided sepulchers
past hope of reclamation

Stairs

she rocks back and forth
glass eyes on the door
she spurts out small noises
from somewhere inside herself

she trips around ninety years
through relics without clues
unrecognizable jumble
cluttering the attic of her mind

her fingers twitch as she reaches
to claw at phantom objects
smoothes her trousers
picks at lint that lingers

even in her sleep
her hands smooth the air
she strokes the blanket and sheets
tries to make everything tidy

but the chaos rages on
she can't find her way
a stranger in her own life
unable to remember what
she has forgotten

the phone repair man is the son
she expects each day to see
her daughter is a visitor
who just happened to come by

her son-in-law is the husband
who has been gone two decades
on the stairs she waits for him
she is lost inside her head

Power

how many tonnes of ammunition are required to
 devastate crops
 demolish a house
 crush a human skull
 kill a child

why is it that arsenals cannot overcome
 irrational belligerence
 wilfull stubbornness
 misguided pride
 blatant blindness

when will we discover killing people cannot erase
 inspirations for dreams
 longings for liberty
 aspirations for independence
 passion for freedom

will we tell children whose trust we plunder
 war is inevitable
 leaders are infallible
 peace is a myth
 lost in an age
 past remembrance
 past recovery
 past redemption

Slick Jeans

he's wiggling into blue jeans
 pulling at the crotch
 afraid his erection
 will betray him if he doesn't watch

he sucks in his belly
 regrets the extra beer last night
 does up the zipper
 yup he feels alright

*grabs the cool man shirt
 boy he's a hot stud
 in the mirror tonight*

*that poor girl won't know
 what hit her
 he's a Cassanova heavy weight*

a quick comb through

*as he splashes on designer cologne
he can't help but sing*

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*oh my darling you'll be mine
before the sun can shine
I've got you in my sights now
I'm gonna bed you
that's all I'm gonna say*

the keys to the sports car
are just where they should be
he's out the door
pedal to the floor

she's beside him
trying to hold her breath
he's the prince she thinks she's found
she's the chick of the hour
with her he'll paint the town

she tries not to imagine
when she'll be a bride
he chases thoughts of odds
she'll be angry condoms hurt his pride

Amber

the day we dismantled our Christmas tree
spruce needles fell in pin-sharp showers
our fingers hesitated to pluck discomfort
from the minefields of socks and slippers

we could not free strings of lights
from layers of fragrant branches
we took to breaking twigs
until the amputations became more brutal

we wanted a quick end
to pack away our victim
send it off for municipal composting
bring closure to winter rituals

the prickly remains resisted plastic
peevisly protruded in jagged protests
my son grabbed an unruly branch
pushed it back into the bag

"Ohhh!" he exclaimed regretfully.
"What's wrong?" His observation snapped me back to mothering
"This has sap in it."
"Look at it; it's running down the branch."
"And so?" My mind was blank.
"It could have become amber," he answered.

in the silence of the setting sun
the brown ooze glistened
we stood before it thrown
into eons of probabilities

"But you wouldn't be here to see it anyway,"
I offered by way of consolation.
quietly he said, "It doesn't matter;
it's too bad anyway."

Blank

Josephine is collecting
they think she has gone mad
but she knows what things
must be put away
for days bleak with blankness

congealed in streaks of chicken
bones grayly gaunt on her plate
twigs bruising pink roses
in bloom until the smash
shreds them into shards

thread in bits and twist ties
she winds up slowly around
the comb with lost teeth
binds it all in strips of cloth
from the sheet that bared itself

into the box with the broken pearl
necklace stuffed into a ziploc bag
carefully she lays
what she has gathered against
days when bones rip the air

Diplomacy

UN
NATO
Nuclear Non Agression Pact
Alliances
Total Immunity
UNICEF
Rights
Army
Liberation

Phoenix

when you speak
you are billions of light years away

who is to say
who is right
who is wrong
who is weak
who is
strong

minds
don't
love

the phoenix
rises from ashes
only in mythology

yet we can build
our own
mythopoeic

truth

is

not
always

what
seems
to be
is

Donde Esta Usted Dali?

Donde esta usted Dali?
Que hora es ahora?
De donde comprendo que los dias
Son muy buenos
Son lindos
Son para mi corazon
El sol ?

Mi corazon esta aqui
Soy aqui
Donde esta usted Dali?
Que hora es?

Where Are You Dali?

Where are you Dali?
What time is it now?
Where will I learn
Days are very good
Are very beautiful
For my heart they are
The sun?

My heart is here
I am here
Where are you Dali?
What time is it?

Good Soldier
for Jozef Konrad Ferdynus

a good soldier never runs from a fight
a good soldier knows might is right
a good soldier sees when right is might
a good soldier fights the right fight

a good soldier eagerly goes to war
a good soldier joins his country's roar
a good soldier lets his courage soar
a good soldier is not deterred by gore

a good soldier is immune to fear
a good soldier arms himself against jeers
a good soldier ignores what he hears
a good soldier stares down a child's tears

a good soldier does not complain
a good soldier stands his guard on enemy terrain
a good soldier believes sacrifices are not made in vain
a good soldier prepares the way for death's reign

Evening Chant

the child at the screen door
yells to everyone on the patio

My mother's dead now.
She's dead. She's dead.
She won't come home anymore.
My mother's dead.
My mother's dead.
And I'm glad.
I'm glad she's dead.

the words ricochet through
the bird feeder, scatter seeds
over the stone path
they collide with the stately
garden swing, make it creak
the swing backs into the cedar
makes it shiver; sends a blue jay
winging into the west

the child pulls on the ruffles
of her pale pink dress
silence crashes down
freeze frames the garden
echoes of the child's chant
hang like scars as evening
falls and stills
the quiet clink of glasses
hushes the patter of words
that cannot find a voice,
slips like shadows
into the seeded stones

Hell must be this

garbage is the stench in the air
 piles mauled by racoons during mad
 nights when heat scorches desire
 tears limbs unable to rest as lungs
 stretch for coolness, and we drown in sweat

---hell must be this,
 separation from love, cage full of putrid stench,
 nightmares scripted by maggots fat with frenzy
 fed by rotting riches

civic workers will be legislated back
 to work within the next few days
 thrown into their own torments
 by men with soft hands, big pockets---
 they hide too late what is done
 -- we have seen the twisted souls
 beneath the tales they sell

Nascent

words know dimensions
 stretch arcs
 spring inversions
 ignite arsenals
 bank kames
 needle treasons
 gnaw treasures
 nerve sinews
 hound Horus to catharsis
 net neophytes
 nascent in natal narrows

Black Sea Cossacks

sunflowers are leaping
through fields bleached blue
by cornflowers goaded into splendour
beneath the simmering Crimean sun
In golden hordes they swoon
to the seduction of the sea
where Black is shamelessly forsaken
by parades of technicolour bikini swells
idling far from diesel dronings of meadows
pinned to earth parched for dreams
beguiling sultry swimmers languishing
on the wide washed waves
champagne bubbles exploding into rainbows
frankly exhaling ecstasy

Crow Variation

crow on fresh roadkill
shaman dancer darkly struts
faint ancestors grin

Hospital

under white tin ceilings
grey floors spill from white walls
through the cot's bars I watch
the nurse in starched uniform come towards me
I hide under white sheets
pulled over my eyes
I still see her mouth
a fresh red wound

rushed footsteps scrape cries into crescendi
a tin bucket collides
with my disembodied voice
slammed shut by doors

silent words rise as prayers
off salt sting on lips
against loneliness wound
in endless gauze tasting of abandonment
in ooze of feasting leeches

THE POET

On the edge of a rough road
 baked unmercifully by sun,
 out of a leathery, mottled shell
 emerges the top of a pebbled head.

Hampered still by camouflage of gravel-tinted egg,
 the turtle squirms decisively, and bites.
 Not heeding passersby who stop to witness,
 the miniature amphibian heaves heroically,
 hauls herself over the edge
 of her former bed and breakfast,
 flops impatiently to the steaming sand.

In a manoeuvre that would do the military proud,
 the new recruit smartly about turns,
 to head for cattails guarding the bay.
 She churns up glinting grains of sand, until she
 reaches the water into which she plunges.

Playing with onomatopoeia
 Acquiescing to alliteration
 Cavorting around consonance
 Arguing through assonance
 Melting into metaphor
 Threshing theme
 Meting out a metre all her own

She swims into the home
 she knew must be there,
 from the moment she sensed the universe
 she found, when she dared to rise above the ground.

Timiskaming

it was in September on the shores
of Lake Timiskaming that I first saw you,
when leaves froze on trees
fixed forever in orange-red
percussions of skies sounding
a blue brilliance I had never
seen before or expect to see again

through bone-cracking cold,
we held hands defiantly
when we invaded snowdrifts,
banked high like albino sandbags
on front lines spread everywhere,
receding into vague horizons
mirror-splintered under frost's fists

often skies were filled with
grand flakes that fell pianissimo
or with stormy crescendo of
sleety snow that drove us
into disguises beneath layers
that seemed to be our
only possible line of defense

walls of houses creaked
and furnaces steamed, petulant
as divas performing extra choruses
chimneys penned concertos for
orbiting celestial orchestras
as the mercury shivered into the
bottom of the thermometer

we kept the cold away with
laughter on ice-misted breath
spun songs for galaxies of stars
whirling in polished pirouettes

What She Knows

he will try to stay in love with her
but he will fall out of love

he promises he will grow old with her
but he will look for younger women

he says he cherishes her body
but with time he will not

he intends to be her helpmate in raising children
but he will lose interest

he considers her to be his wife no matter what
but the what will really matter

he sees her as a wonder
but the wonder will wear thin

she wants to love him unconditionally
but she will weaken

she wears a veil of illusions
beneath which she will break

she knows she smiles now
because the time for smiles is too brief

Urgent

I must write
I must write about it
what happened then
it was long ago
I don't remember clearly
there were people
there were a lot of people who liked me
I liked them too of course
they are gone now
I don't know where they went

Shadows In The Echoes
for Wisława Szymborska

Gdzie są nasze słoneczne dni
które nam dały tyle miłości i radości
serca nasze się zostały
i nasze wszystkie działy
poleciały sobie daleko
po za chmury i po za lasy
teraz nam tylko błyszczą zawsze łzy
one padają pod słońcem który
nie płacze z nami
nad wzajem

Where are all our suntouched days
which gave us so much love and joy
our hearts have been left behind
all our good works
have fled far away
beyond clouds and forests

now all we have to shine for us are tears

they fall beneath the sun's gaze

it does not weep with us

in solidarity

Where are all our suntouched days
which gave us so much love and joy
our hearts have been left behind
and all our good works
have fled far away
beyond clouds and forests

now all we have to shine for us are tears
they fall beneath the sun's gaze
it does not weep with us
in solidarity

About The Poet



Barbara Phillips is also the author of *Tympanic Mysteries: Love Is A Tympanic Mystery*. Her work has been published in various print and electronic publications, such as *Transparent Words*, *Caught In The Net*, *Ygdrasil: A Journal of the Poetic Arts*, *Poemata*, *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine*, *Canadian Writer's Journal*, *Poetry Canada Magazine*, *Malleable Jangle*, *Bywords Quarterly Journal*, *Hammered Out*, *Ars Medica*, *Poetry Super Highway*, and *Writer's Hood*. Her work has also appeared in anthologies such as *Oval Victory: The Best of Canadian Poetry*, *A Time Of Trial: Beyond The Terror of 9/11*, *No Love Lost*, *EOA And West: London Poems Part II*, *Seeds6: An Anthology of Poetry*, and *Handprints On The Future*. She has been a featured poet and was a recipient of the Ted Plantos Memorial Seed Money Fund.

