

## Len Krisak

### *Double Villanelle from a Line by Weldon Kees*

—from “A Late History, 4.”:  
“...‘It is as late tonight as it will ever be.’”

How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear  
Despite the dark, for all the dark that I can see.  
My shrewdest guess is, this has always been the case,  
Which demonstrates our comfort in the coldest laws:  
It can’t get any later now that night is here;  
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Now day is done, the worst is surely over, dear,  
Which seems to mean that you and I at last are free  
From every degradation . . . and from every grace.  
It is enough to give a man and woman pause:  
How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear  
Despite the dark. For all the dark that I can see,

The darkness, like the future, looks quite bright and clear.  
See how its blackest Bakelite shines abundantly?  
There’s got to be a lesson there—some fact to face—  
That humbles us with hope, intimidates, and awes.  
It can’t get any later now that night is here;  
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Why *do* we miss epiphanies when they appear  
To all intents and purposes nothing to flee  
From in the least? So often, there’s no other place  
As softly reassuring and as free of flaws.  
How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear  
Despite the dark for all. The dark that I can see

Is deepest just before the early light draws near,  
Confirming that a pessimist’s eternity  
Can’t last forever; that Achilles *wins* the race,  
Even as clocks wind down and darkest night withdraws.

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It can't get any later now that night is here;  
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Courage. You're lovely when you're seen, but *I'm* the seer  
My darling. Yes, the time grows late for you and me,  
But we shall find there's more than world enough and space  
Within the night, believe me. Why? Well, just *because*.  
How good to know, in time, there's nothing there to fear  
Despite the dark, for *all* the dark. That, I can see.  
It can't get any later now that night is here;  
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

**RILKE: SONNETS TO ORPHEUS, II.15**

Provider; mouth; the fountain's mouth that speaks:  
A pure and endless oneness is your space  
That fronts the everflowing water's face—  
A marble mask before the background peaks

That fill the aqueducts. From far away,  
Past graves, and from the sloping Apennines,  
They carry you the very thing you say,  
Which down your aged black chin then twines

And spills, to fill the basin set before it.  
This is the sleeping, upturned ear. You pour it  
Endless speech in the marble that lies cupped—

An ear of Earth. She speaks her sibilant stream  
To no one but herself. And it will seem,  
Should you put in a cup, you interrupt.

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**Len Krisak** has taught at Brandeis, Northeastern University, and Stonehill College. His two chapbooks, *Midland and Fugitive Child*, came out in 1999 from Somers Rocks Press and Aralia Press, respectively. In 2000, his full-length collection *Even as We Speak* won the Richard Wilbur Prize and was published by the University of Evansville Press. In 2004, *If Anything* appeared from WordTech Editions, and in 2006, Carcanet published his *Complete Odes of Horace*. His work has appeared over the years in *The Sewanee Review*, *Agenda*, *Commonweal*, *The Hudson Review*, *PN Review*, *The Formalist*, *The National Review*, *Margie*, *The Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Tennessee Quarterly*, *Classical Outlook*, *Pivot*, *Rattapallax*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *The Oxford Book of Poems on Classical Mythology*, among many others. In addition to the Richard Wilbur Prize, he has received the Robert Penn Warren and Robert Frost Prizes, along with numerous awards from the New England Poetry Club, the Los Angeles Poetry Festival, and over 50 other organizations. He reads extensively throughout New England. He is the former winner of the GoldPocket.com National Trivia Competition and is a four-time Champion on *Jeopardy!*