

J. M. Jordan

Blue Nocturne In Staunton, Virginia

Night falls. The screen's cold glow
beside the open window there
has fixed your unremitting stare
on a thousand things you need not know.

A thousand sights you need not see.
A thousand wants you need not feel.
A thousand wishes as unreal
as a tinsel moon in a cardboard tree.

So leave the aching pulse of words,
this parched unreal scriptorium
for the strange unreadied world, the drum
of strangers' footfalls, wings of birds

unseen in the now-dark air.
Set out and leave that place behind —
that trap, that manacle of mind
and failing spirit. Leave it there

for shadows and the sweet dark musk
of honeysuckle as it falls
in great heaps over garden walls,
of distant music in the growing dusk.

You have known too much today.
So step into the inscrutable blue
of night, that truer world that you
can't know, can't see, can't say.

Contra Tenebris

Q: You said in a tweet that, when pulling down a statue, a chain works better than a rope. Why?

A: It has less give, so more of the force of the pull will be directly conveyed to the statue.

— Professor Erin Thompson, John Jay College, *New York Times*

I.

Beware the Ministry of Wraiths, my son.
Beware the insubstantial ones who drift
about the dark ways of the world, bereft
of flesh or bone or memory of their own.

Beware the ones who have no songs to sing,
whose muteness is a howling emptiness,
a stalking hate, a hunger to possess
the breath and being of some living thing.

Something must die. Something must be killed
so that this howling emptiness might be filled.
And so they stalk the vacant spaces in

the commons, seeking some bright life to take
so they can lap the blood like dogs and make
their shadow-selves articulate again.

II.

*Nothing you love is yours, they hiss. We will burn
your temples to the ground. Nothing belongs
to you — not your houses, your children, your songs.
And you belong to nothing in return.*

*What you thought you received as a gift is rotten,
a ruin we will finish with acid and flame.
Your children will not remember your name.
Your stories and your prayers at last will be forgotten.*

Now they are prowling the quiet corridors.
Fingering the hasps and the latches of doors,
Prying at back gates rusted from unuse.

They are rasping through the grates. They are creeping
into the hall to set the Shadows loose
in the dark rooms where the children lie sleeping.

III.

They see the fields you have inherited —
The bloom-rich gardens, the house on the hill
That shaped the contours of your native will —
As something to be torched and ploughed instead

Into a graveyard. Even the town nearby —
With its half-lit bars and shadowy hotel,
Its small stone church with its persistent bell —
To them is fit for nothing but to die.

Refuse the coffin they have made for you.
Refuse the dust, the darkened cell, the silence.
Refuse the headstone they have etched. Recite

The verses that your family taught to you.
And when they come at last, pray not for violence
But arm yourself against the rising night.