



# Days of Blue and Flame

SARAH YERKES

## MOGUL MUSINGS

In India, I'm told, I'm very strange.  
Old people are not often seen about  
exploring here and there, peering into shops,  
a subject for friendly photography.

But what a host of memories I have!  
I've seen such splendor one can barely grasp.  
Never mind mortality.  
The opulence was always built to last.

Folks need work so build a new palace,  
revere an ancestor, build him a tomb,  
defeat a neighbor, ruin his waterworks,  
lust for a young wife, add on a new wing.

Plotting and scheming, does Mogul writing  
wallow in blood, here, among the peacocks?  
Severed heads grimace over the ramparts,  
strange crenulations like Guelph-Ghibelline.

Where now is Real India? In cyberspace?  
They build clusters of towers, incipient slums,  
a lost feeling for values, no sense of elegance,  
jammed close together – no air, light or sun.

As the past to us seems so glamorous,  
will the mess we now make be excused by our young,  
pollution and density and greenhouse gasses  
ignored as we search for a nostalgic song?

## AUTUMN

We build our little house up on the ridge  
through Indian Summer days of blue and flame.  
We prune and cut down trees to clear a view  
eastward, back along the way we came.  
Our small dog leaps and lollops through the grass,  
reminder of the other young we've known.  
The sunset from behind us gilds our world  
and I am home.

## PUZZLES

Before contracting chronic Poetry,  
Sudoku was the bane I had to bear.  
I fussed and fitted numbers in a square  
and filled in meshes with embroidery.  
Can such a rigid sensibility  
provide Erato with a downy nest  
in which to fledge her brood and then suggest  
they fly away – lyric maturity?

Though playing games with words' all very well,  
a fundamental theme to work on will arrive  
from nowhere, whole, demandingly alive,  
insisting that it has a tale to tell.  
To figure out what words will best express  
this upstart will be anybody's guess.

## CLOSED DOORS

Outwardly smiling,  
inwardly stoic,  
widow ladies live behind closed doors.  
Suffering with hearts jagged in fragments –  
    comparing not the *then* with the *now*.  
Sighing relief – they hadn't much loved them –  
    discovering no one ever likes change.  
Thinking they couldn't go on without them –  
    finding they can,  
    not sure that they want to –  
    lonely is better than those they don't love.  
Sunshine, a blessing –  
Creation, a solace.  
Accomplishment, satisfaction –  
Self-discovery, a project.  
Friendship is cheering but still they are grieving –  
    don't like what's out there,  
    they keep the door shut.

## TERZANELLE FOR BILL

Now more than ever, I want a small pill;  
I witness many friends who've lost their mind.  
Does one like living? Does one have the will?

I wonder what of interest they find  
to fill their vacant, dreamy night-and-day.  
I witness many friends who've lost their mind.

So does affection, tender touch, convey  
a comfort to them, showing love's at hand  
to fill their vacant, dreamy night-and-day?

Is life glad or sad in that unknown land?  
Do poems, pictures, music still appeal:  
a comfort to them, showing love's at hand.

What is it like? Does the real seem surreal?  
We on the outside cannot ever tell.  
Do poems, pictures, music still appeal?

Like death, is it heaven, is it hell?  
We on the outside cannot ever tell.  
Now, more than ever, I want a small pill –  
Does one like living? Does one have the will?

Sarah Yerkes' *Days of Blue and Flame* is a message to future generations whose world we have mottled with lasting trauma and ecological scars; but hers is a calm and generous voice of deep intelligence and compassion. As she imagines Dickinson alive today, writing her poems in chapbooks rather than sewn fascicles, Yerkes herself sews a pre-nuclear America to the computer age, and she leaves space enough for our pages, and our children's pages, all the stories yet to come.

DAVID KEPLINGER, *Another City*



Passager Books  
Baltimore, MD  
\$16



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