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Uninvited Guests and Ghosts

Mary Dengler

Dordt University, mary.dengler@dordt.edu

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Uninvited Guests and Ghosts

Dr. Mary Dengler — Professor Emeritus of English, Dordt University

Why is it early childhood memories buried deep
Within will suddenly appear like loving guests
Who bring us comfort, peace, security
In fractious moments when we've lost
Our way and feel displaced and insecure,
Or reappear like dreaded uninvited guests,
Like ghosts, to haunt us, make us sickly think,
"I know now why I am the way I am."
The first appeared most recently in weeks
Of unexpected happenings—from data breeches
Letting private information slide into the dark
Unknown, to copyrighted documents rejected
Due to radiation damage by a source unknown,
To loved-ones dying suddenly in unexpected,
Brutal ways, to warnings of tornadoes in our small
Midwestern town and hurricanes out West when
We arrived. By then, I'd noticed strange internal storms,
The heartbeats dancing out of rhythm in my frantic chest,
Especially when the daily news prognosticated
Catastrophic change of every kind. By now,
I looked for solace in the works of Bach, Beethoven,
and Rachmaninoff, and more so in Apostle Paul,
Who, recognizing torments of the Evil One, said this
To troubled folk, "Be anxious about nothing; but instead,
In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving,
Make requests unto our God, and He will give you peace
Surpassing understanding." Suddenly a peaceful memory
Appeared—my upstairs bedroom in Grandmother's house
When I was young and parents lived apart. The windows,
Curtains, paintings on the wall, as well as "Now I Lay Me
Down to Sleep," appeared to soothe my troubled soul.
But all too soon, that peace was broken by the memory
Of a stained-glass round church window, seen from windows
Of the bathroom in our New York house when I was four:
I'd focused on that round church window to escape
The curious gaze of an intruder, lasting much too long
To do me good. A child can sense when something is amiss,
From wandering eyes and hands to uninvited kiss. So life
Becomes a rapid seesaw betwixt peace and fear. Between
The two, assisted by our loving God, we find the balance
Of our quickly changing lives.