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Stephen Edgar

Out of the Picture

And so, as in some formal wooded scene
 By an Impressionist,
 The lady with the tilted parasol
 And gravel-kissing hem saunters between
 The poplars, where contented couples loll
 Beside a river's idling sheen,
 Then turns aside unnoticed and unmissed

Out of the picture. Still that patient eddy,
 There where the willow's pending
 Compliant withe is dabbling in the stream,
 Revolves the same reflexion with a steady
 And self-absorbed attention. The couples seem
 Insensible. The path's already
 Forgotten her, her promenade and its ending.

The day, indifferent to both time and place,
 Moves elsewhere and moves on.

As pointless to depart as to delay:
 In either course is folded the same space.
 In Istanbul next year or here today:
 The figure with the unseen face
 Steps quickly from the picture and is gone.



Time Out

Only the trees perhaps, the sleeves of grass,
 Leaning against the light learn to compose
 The windbent seconds as they pass
 In cells of cellulose.

Or else the creatures in their quest to kill
 And to survive, deliver or devour,
 Stretch to its limit as they fill
 The membrane of the hour.

But you, where *are* you in the falling day?
 Some drowned god drags your foot off Sounion.
 This quartet eats your heart away.
 You stare, but the sky is gone.

2:00

The hook receives the wire and its null weight.
 Hung on the white abeyance of the wall
 This door into the dark at two a.m.,
 A blackness framed in black, seems to install
 An absence there to unsubstantiate
 Canvas and plaster where the two of them
 Meet to contrive their empty stratagem.

At lower left the first step of a stair
 To nowhere. A bare doorframe climbs to lose
 Itself in shadow like a seeping stain.
 Beyond the door the same shadow imbues
 Bare floor; the hallway and its wall are bare:
 A vacant threshold, immanent membrane
 For what may pass in or return again.

And so I woke up at the painted hour
 And turned and found you there, my dead beloved,
 Deeply asleep, washed with as faint a glow
 Of night as that in which the floor is covered
 Before the doorway where the shadows lour.
 Shaken from sleep and propped on one elbow,
 I stared to see again that face I know.

I watched your dreaming profile, I watched you,
 Pillowed in shadow and your wavy hair,
 Your body's form unthreatened and content
 As in the life, till waking should undo
 What sleep persuaded in my eyes. But there
 You lay and stayed for time to represent
 Your long unbeing's brief embodiment

Not as the lapse of seconds but an age.
 No fear, but passing shock, then wonder filled
 My watching as I leant by you, held fast,
 Certain that you would turn to me, and thrilled
 By what soft whispered nothings would assuage
 The three mute years without them that had passed.
 But not a move. No word. No breath. At last

I tentatively stretched a tender hand
 For you, both to confirm and to caress
 The thickness of those waves, and instantly
 The whole of you resolved to evanesce.
 Your head became the shade it lay on and
 Your shape was made away; it seemed to me
 The quilt sank into your nonentity.

Why did you choose this night of all the nights
 That I have lain here asking for your ghost?
 Perhaps for all the doors I thought to lock
 Against the dark, the one that matters most
 Is in the house and open and invites
 Your coming with no need to call or knock;
 And you entered by the door of two o'clock.



Pat Jones

Stephen Edgar is an Australian poet known for his mastery of form and, in Clive James's words, "a limitless wealth of cultural reference, and an unmatched ability to make science a living subject for lyrical verse." He is a former poetry editor of *Island* magazine. His six published collections are *Queuing for the Mudd Club*, *Ancient Music*, *Corrupted Treasures*, *Where the Trees Were*, *Lost in the Foreground*, and – the most recent – *Other Summers* (Black Pepper, 2006). His new collection, *History of the Day*, will be published in early 2009. In 2004 he won the coveted Australian Book Review poetry prize for "[Man on the Moon](#)". He lives in Sydney.

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