

Matters for You Alone

Matters for You Alone
Poems

Leslie Williams

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B O O K S

MATTERS FOR YOU ALONE

Poems

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for a friend
whose heart demands the infinite

Who breaks the thread, the one who pulls, the one who holds on?

—JAMES RICHARDSON, *APHORISMS*

MOONSTONE, TIGER'S EYE

It's called *chatoyance*, the gems' bands of reflected light.
Bright blinked streaks in metamorphic rock, rock
that makes up much of the earth's crust
here at the grassy boundary where I'm lying creaturely
as a shrew, pressing cheek to ground
at cat's-prowl level, watching
stalks come out and beaks go in.
Night hunters, I'll learn from you.
It's not like looking for arcane cave marks
or shadows on an ultrasound. What there is to know
is like the cool within stone
vaults, while outside summer's wrinkling through
the foothills' pleats, sunlight through the chinks.
I would creep closer. I would be less
about things and more inside them.

I

IF YOU PREFER NOT TO FILL OUT THE VISITOR CARD

In the film loop at the entrance to the aquarium,
Jacques Cousteau tells of a dolphin in captivity
who, on the death of her companion, stubbornly
kept the corpse from sinking. I think about my body
and its flagging spirit, nudging it up for air.

Have you ever asked for glory? When Moses did,
God hid him in the cleft of a rock, covered him
with His hand and passed on by. When Moses came down
his face was shining fearfully such that he had to wear a veil.

There was one dolphin I grew attached to, came back often
to visit. His face, like he swallowed a canary. The perpetual smile
lost me in an ocean, another flesh, a tank. Stayed with me
in kindness I hadn't felt or given in a while.

As I entered the Sunday door, the woman in the denim shirt
clasped my hand, said *welcome*. Her eyes were lit with the greatest
greeting, as if for the sun itself. I had to turn and run
away, unable to stay a minute more. In a flash-burn instant
I became bearable, but then the kindness itself
became too much to bear.

PILGRIM CROSSING

I watched the well-washed women
in pearls and power suits stride
across the seaport, smashing
wet leaves underfoot, my own precious
hours jimmied loose and spiraling
away, the mountain looming
in the far off, sphinxlike.
I'd been harboring a home-dream,
the almost active hope. At salty bars
I'd belly up, listen to the locals talk,
see them laugh, and in the morning lie
so blithely, drinking up my breakfast—
unvarnished, crude, most true. I walked
down to Kinkos, put the letter—*dear*
L.—in the mail. Thin crust of snow
so crystalline it broke under my boots.
I didn't know to whom I was always
saying *sorry, sorry*. But now I do.