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By One

Albert Goldbarth

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By One

by Albert Goldbarth

And the opinion that every man hath his particular angel may gain some authority by the relation of St. Peter's miraculous deliverance out of prison not by many, but by one angel.

-- Izaak Walton

That's all it requires. The law of even miracles is economy, and one resourceful angel is all it requires: a sudden doze upon a warden, the several molecules of mortar disappearing from around some stones to the height of a man. He walked out, into this same night air that goes at it like a scouring pad in your lungs and mine. Harsh, revivifying. And the night sky full of too much to be familiar. There's a theory UFO's are the 20th century's angels—sighted instead of those earlier wonders, oxidizing the same small heap of needs. And how many unsleeping nights has each of us prayed—or whatever version of prayer is current—for just a single emissary of one or the other? Not a battalion, but just one angel, sent for just one grief that weighs what each of us weighs, and fills us. And the sleet falls as if being background is all that matters. Or the junebugs whirr, machine-parts down the lines of night's perspective. There are times I've walked through darkness thinking even the hem of an angel would do, a hem like the northern lights but personal—sized to my problems. Just the hand of an angel, just one eddy on the waters that's the print of an angel's finger.



Just one feather to fall
like snow on my tongue, to enter me like
those sugar cubes of Salk vaccine in the '50s,
small and sweet and metabolic.
Just one feather. Or whatever current
version of a feather is here. One glowing,
silver bolt off a wing. A hinge.
One wheel to steer by.

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