Aubade

BY PHILIP LARKIN

I work all day, and get half-drunken at night. 
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare. 
In time the curtain-edges will grow light. 
Till then I see what’s really always there: 
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now, 
Making all thought impossible but how 
And where and when I shall myself die. 
Arid interrogation: yet the dread 
Of dying, and being dead, 
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse 
—The good not done, the love not given, time 
Torn off unused—nor wretchedly because 
An only life can take so long to climb 
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never; 
But at the total emptiness for ever, 
The sure extinction that we travel to 
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here, 
Not to be anywhere, 
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid 
No trick dispels. Religion used to try, 
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade 
Created to pretend we never die, 
And specious stuff that says No rational being Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing 
That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound, 
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with,
The anaesthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
A small unfocused blur, a standing chill
That slows each impulse down to indecision.
Most things may never happen: this one will,
And realisation of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink. Courage is no good:
It means not scaring others. Being brave
Lets no one off the grave.
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
Have always known, know that we can’t escape,
Yet can’t accept. One side will have to go.
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
Work has to be done.
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.
Rhymed Stanza

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