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In the Dark

Poetry by Ruth Stone

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Peered up at from below the surface of the everyday by the enigma that is human life, again and again Ruth Stone reels its ungraspable body into the light to reveal its true shape. But she knows to leave the essential mystery undamaged and whole, as in a kind of metaphysical catch and release that doesn't ever break the silver skin of the fish. Her close observation of life on the acre where she stands ("In the white-flocked woods, shy trash, / like trillium") is always tethered, tenuously but tightly, as if by "spider's silk," to a wide open and not finally knowable universe of diffuse sunlight, dust, rocks, and stars. Thus Stone's poems contain sudden dizzying swings of perspective, from the infinitesimal to the infinite, from what she witnesses in the fields around her home to what she intuits of a much wider world:

Orbits

At the end of October, the earth tilts.
Where are we going?" cry the tree frogs.
"Mother, the wind is blowing."
The ignorant renovator has scraped away the topsoil;
in the ruined yard, a vole has found a potato peel.
And yet, the ice crystals of October melt in the morning;
the exhausted spider eats her old web.
And who hears the faint gonging of the sun
As it shudders into the heliosphere?
Perhaps those countless baby spiders,
sucked aloft and circling the world, like those lost Russian astronauts.

"Can I hope the great ear of the universe / is pressed to the wall of space and hears me, / its own chick, peeping?" Stone's work is rife with question marks as she tirelessly examines the vagaries of life on earth, and strangely, her willingness to dwell in ambiguity leads her closer to the truth of things than an insistence on certainties ever could. At almost ninety, Stone is losing her eyesight. *In the Dark* refers to the difficulty of seeing what is before us; to our perpetual condition, no matter our number of years on earth, of not knowing; to all that has vanished from our sight or somehow evaded our understanding. But Stone is so dedicated to trying to discern and preserve from extinction the moments of a life, the days of one human being (that "etched lineage, / ball of twine, fractal of lost feathers") that her book itself becomes a mighty stop against the loss of light it chronicles.

— Ann Stapleton