

Pilgrimage

1.

Before leaving I was joined
By two others who also wished
To make the journey. I remember
Being glad to have the company
And I must have liked them
For we laughed a lot and they knew songs.
The three of us were together
For the whole trip and grew very close.
I don't remember their names now,
Or what they looked like.
On the day we left a man
Was taking photographs and took
The three of us by our horses.
We all laughed a lot. He said
He'd give us copies when we got back,
But we didn't see him again.

2.

When we met Vanessa we were reminded
Of what our guide had said
Before he disappeared, he had spoken
Of a witch in the mountains and although
There were no mountains when we met Vanessa,
It occurred to us she still might be
The person of whom he spoke. Not
That she appeared to be a witch or acted
Like one in any way, but, then,
We had been told she could
Become whatever she wished,
Take on any shape.
For that matter, if she were a witch
She could keep us from seeing the mountains.
When we left her with the few coins
That we had, we felt ourselves fortunate
That nothing had happened, that we had gotten away
So easily, although she had been with us
Until dark. But even then
We never saw her mountains, and when, after days
Of traveling, we finally reached some mountains,
They were bare and colorless,
And there was no one to be seen.

3.

At night when the others were asleep
There was always the sound of something moving
Just inside the darkness, circling

And recircling the camp. I never
Saw what it was, and the others,
When I told them, never believed me.
It always waited until they were asleep
Before it began circling and recircling
The camp, as if it were important that I alone
Should hear it, although I never saw it.
Sometimes I can still hear it.
It's been many years since I've come back.

4.

I am not sure now
Of my original reasons for leaving
And making the journey. I remember
That it seemed important, that
It was something I should do.
I am sure there were also
Other reasons, important reasons,
Although I don't know what they might have been.
Originally there must have been many reasons,
Although, now, I don't know
What they might have been.

5.

Another thing of interest
Is the obelisk. This we found standing
In the center of a flat plain. At least
It seemed to be the center,
But we were probably mistaken.
We didn't know its importance or
What it meant. But it woke within us
Some memory that we couldn't grasp
Or even understand. At the time
We were only conscious of our fear and awe
And that there was something we should know
But didn't. When we passed on
And it was finally out of sight,
We felt relieved, but as we continued
We grew aware of a sense of loss
Not to be described.

6.

At one point we heard news
Of three people in trouble a few miles away.
We thought it might be one of the parties
That had left before us and hurried on
To see if we could help. But on our way
We were stopped by a series of objects

That appeared, and surrounded us,
Kept us from going on. We remained
There for some time, forgetting about these others
Apparently in need of help.

7.

We later found
That these objects only gave
The appearance of danger, whereas actually
They were perfectly safe.
But at that time each thing
Seemed to deserve the fear we gave it,
As a token of our debt or
Perhaps of our esteem.
In any case, when we found ourselves
Encircled, we stopped, frozen,
And remained for a time
That we later lost track of,
Not realizing there was no cause for alarm.
When we began again and finally arrived
We were much too late to be of any use.
There was nothing there, although we had originally
Heard news of three people in trouble
A few miles away.

8.

It was raining when we reached the final pass
And almost dark. In the dim light we could see
That the way would be difficult;
Rocks had fallen, covering the path.
We decided to stop and leave in the morning,
But in the morning it was still raining.
We stayed in our tents. It rained for five days.
When it stopped we learned that the rain
Had washed down more rocks, that the pass was blocked.
For a while we talked of finding some other way,
But decided that the wolves, always a danger,
Would now be even worse, that we
Would quickly lose our way on the mountain.
For days we stayed in our tents while other pilgrims,
Braver than we, sought other paths.
We never learned if they got through.

9.

In our frustration we thought of our plans,
Of the distance we had come. The weeks
Spent on the way meant nothing now,
And we would have to return

With no sign of what we had achieved.
We sat in our tents and thought
It more than we should have to bear,
Seeing the problems already solved,
The distance come, and the distance
We would have to travel
To reach home.

10.

A few days later we decided to leave
The entrance of the pass and make our way
To a village some miles to the east.
We had heard there was a shrine there,
Similar to the one on the other side of the pass,
But smaller, much smaller. After that
We would begin our journey home.
The destination made little difference;
Our only wish was to leave
The shadow of the mountain which pressed upon us,
Reminded us of things better forgotten.

11.

Our journey home passed without incident,
And we saw no person or thing that seemed
Of significance. The people we did see,
Natives and tribesmen, avoided us,
As if we were the danger,
Not the land itself.
And finally, when we reached home,
Nothing was changed. Buildings and people
Were all as they had been before,
While few knew that we had been gone,
Knew of our troubles, or the difficulties
We had passed through.

-- Stephen Dobyns

Iowa City, Iowa.

Orgy

Tommy's back yard smelled
of grapes as I stepped off
the cindered alley & crept
through the log grass
beside the garage
carefully