

GODDESSES
incognito

SUSAN MEEHAN

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This book is dedicated to the feisty, funny, original, creative, and caring women (goddesses all) of my family, and that of my husband. You have always been there to give your opinions (truly wanted if occasionally unheeded), always prepared to offer a loving arm when needed, and always ready to relish life at its fullest. You are a true source of joy and inspiration to me — so keep it up!

— Susan Meehan, May 2018

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GODDESSES INCOGNITO

UNDERNEATH

the drab,
the daily,
we are passionate goddesses parading in
spangles
glinting jewels
shimmering cloth
that mirror our enticing hips.

Underneath ragged watchcaps,
we are tender goddesses
crowned in
headwraps
tiaras
mantillas
bandanas
that accentuate our nobility.

Underneath blowsy t-shirts,
blazing ads in giant orange letters scrawled across our chests,
we are opulent goddesses wrapped in a splendor of
plaids
kente
batik —
rich in colors that males
don't even know the names
much less the significance of.

Behind plastic face masks that claim to guard us from infection,
we are amusing goddesses
roaring out the music of joy
harmonies of silver giggles
cymbal crashes of belly laughs
organ peal guffaws
in happy certainty of our right to
pleasure given,
pleasure taken.

We are hidden where you expect us least.
Show us due homage
and we may flash you a glimpse
into our hidden realm.
Or we may not.
The unexpected entices goddesses
most of all.

I HOPE THAT GOD WILL
CHERISH THE GATHERER

I AM HOPING

that along with those who proudly, publicly
live lives of downsized superiority,
of devotion to the purity of emptiness,
a gathering soul may claim its own validity.

I am hoping for
a God who knows that
a void promises little
to the heart, and that
the hollow emptiness
of a vacuum
allows no echoes
to be cherished, remembered.

I am hoping for
a life of exuberant variety,
of relishing the melding
of common links
into a lush beauty
never before imagined by
one who sees surprise as worthy,
and values fun's complexity.

I am hoping that complexity
and order, conjoined,
may be as deserving, as holy
as the devout lives of
those who hate,
the rebellious challenge of heaps
equal to those lead lives
dedicated to removal and elimination.

I am hoping that
a God who has filled an entire universe
with stars — each different —
is a God who can accept
complexity with gusto,
who cherishes
the collector.

REACHING TO HEAVEN

SOMETIMES AT QUAKER meeting,
while straining to catch a thought
I pluck at it
and it drifts
feather-light
to the floor.

Some First Days
I end up ankle-deep in thought feathers
which I try
quite unsuccessfully
to kick under the bench
before
someone
weighty
notices.

I HAVE NO SHADOW

SOME DAYS I just don't make it –
today I must not be here.
I have no shadow.
I checked this out
and it wasn't there
so it seems I'm not real today.
How should I change this?
What should I do?
Should I get panicky,
run to a surgeon
and beg him to operate
to bring my shadow back?
But how do you bring back what's not there?
Or should I play it cool
and pretend I don't notice,
that you don't notice either,
that everything is fine,
that I shouldn't mind
that I don't seem to be here today
anywhere
at all.
If I seem invisible
is it ok for you
to ignore me
jiggle your foot
shrug and sigh
and turn away?

WHAT REMAINS TO BE DISCOVERED

SWEET LOVE, IT seems such a short time since we married
forty-six years have passed so quickly
only an eye-blink ago
our fleece barely warmed
crooking angles still waiting
to discover love's geometry
so many fine tunes to try out
frolicking in a velvet evening's numbered phases
candle-lit and ruby-shod.

Still within our laughing chamber
let us look forward to a new ceremony, to the launch of
many journeys to enjoy
that we have not even thought of yet
believing in hand-held certainty that we will share
all the hope and love we will ever need
for whatever awaits the two of us —
and a smile to pass it on.

RELINQUISHMENTS

THEY SAY THAT if you struggle
you live longer.

But I see a gentle art
in the gracious shedding
of ideas, manners, things
that once were precious
that once defined me in
my glad high noon.

Now, I seek a soft equilibrium,
for my life changes daily
with new forfeits to be paid
each time I awaken.

I try acting bravely
with a shrug that has taken
a lifetime to learn.

Achieving counterbalance
is no minor art
and so, as I relinquish the old high notes
I can no longer reach
the pirouettes my toes no longer twirl,
I am amazed that what I had once thought
was so central, so beloved
that I could not bear its loss,
has been dismissed simply,
completely wiped out.

As I proceed through my striptease
I struggle to retain an urbane smile
despite some tune-whistling lines
new-etched around my lips,
but still and yet I remain
quintessentially me,
for one more day.
And so I smile and say,
who could ask for more?

JACOB'S ANGEL APPEARS AT QUAKER MEETING

As I SETTLE into quiet
I sense the breath of those around me
rising steadily upwards, flight by flight.
Jacob's angel steps down that pathway.

We wrestle silently in fear and wonder
across the meeting room floor.
Other worshippers join in,
struggling to pin down slippery wings
trying to grab the burning halo.

We lose strength,
our lungs now heaving in defeat,
and Jacob's angel departs in silence.

Our thoughts ease as
we sink back onto our wooden benches,
worship closes.

We sink,
only a feather remains.

ON AN OFF-WHITE SPECKLED LIFE

Does life have a color?
If so, what is mine?
How can I tell if mine changes — and why??

Some days mine must come from a different universe,
unlike those nearby,
with a color set that prickles my sensibilities.

None of my heavenly friends have been stirred
from the same pot as mine,
but there is welcoming joy in blending,
in which friendship's magnifiers
make their colors flash brilliantly together,
glowing in speckled showers before slowly fading apart.

Today I think in turquoise and nightshade,
as comets cross in powerful splendor,
certain of their splendid path
and clearly unaffected by the uncertain direction
of some far distant planets — o pallid unfortunates! —
solely seen in black and white before they disappear
forevermore.

Tomorrow I shall think in plaid.

ABOUT

THE MISSION OF Day Eight is to empower individuals and communities to participate in the arts through the production, publication, and promotion of creative projects. Through a grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, Day Eight supported poet Susan Meehan in creation of a series of poetry workshops for seniors that additionally included poets E. Ethelbert Miller, Jonathan Katz, Anne Becker, Abdul Ali, and Grace Cavalieri.

SUSAN MEEHAN was the winner of the 2017 DC Poet Project, an open-to-all poetry competition created by Day Eight to surface under-represented voices. A resident of Dupont Circle for more than 50 years, Susan became active in local politics after the DC riots caused by Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968. At that time she was elected to a police community relations board, along with Marion Barry and Dave Clarke, and later served first as Barry's Ward 2 Community Relations director, and then as the city's Patient Advocate for persons in drug or alcohol treatment. Now retired from civil service, she continues to serve DC residents as a volunteer, including as Vice President of the DC Council of Churches, representing a Quaker point of view. Mother of two, she is godmother to three generations of a DC family formerly on her block, now numbering more than fifty members.

To learn more about Day Eight, Susan Meehan, and the DC Poet Project, visit www.DayEight.org.