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A Christmas Story

Philip Legler

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PHILIP LEGLER

A CHRISTMAS STORY

We know he isn't real
Under that sky of branches whose needles will fall;
Nor are those other figures we have repaired, some chipped or broken,
Who cannot tell us at all
Why we have remembered him now, like a childhood tale
Long after it's spoken—

The kings almost as we found them
A year ago, and the stable we picked up at Sears
Along with the dazzled sheep and cows, still warm enough, still sturdy
After so many years,
As if that radiance could really astound them
And turn them giddy.

Leaving our winter weather
Outside, like separate trails a snow will swirl,
A few storm windows stacked like wood, to be washed and hammered in
Before the next cold spell,
We are strangers coming from all directions to gather
Together again.

Up from the cellar we bring
Old shoe- and hat-boxes, tinsel and glazed decorations,
Gay balls and fruits wrapped up in paper, spinners to circle and sound
All sorts of fancy creations,
And flickering lights we will test, replace and then string
Around and around

Like Christmas cards that shimmer
Their lanterns over the field or the village alone,
Or a delicate glass ballerina who hangs in the air, whose pirouette
Is hers but not her own.
Without such brilliance all would grow suddenly dimmer
And we'd forget

These ornaments and the caroling
Of Grandfather's Swedish birds like chanticleer
Suspended to fly, from cages spiraling skyward to sing at home
In perfect atmosphere,
Beyond the steps of the ladder we climb, that's whirling
Our living room.

High-spirited, turning to see
We are wise men knowing it goes against all reason—
That the light of fear or habit or hope has brought us where we are—
We are caught up in the season
To rise above ourselves who have fashioned a tree
And placed a star.

E. J. NEELY

TO A NIGHTHAWK

I heard you, lonely
bird of night. Your plaintive cry
cut a record. Dark
form, swept beyond the light, yet
etched, a brave silhouette.