



Long Struggle and Float

A. F. Moritz

Each man or woman exists one day. Next morning, rising up, is gone. Is a sense of having come across an air of dimness from another one. It takes that one's place, wakes in that one's bed with that one's things and has to grasp them on the riddling evidence, the skeletal scattered records lying mute around it.

But
why? They lie

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inside me, too—unless
the fits there
are my own. But what is
“my own”? What is
this place I live in with all
this,
should I pick it up, where
else is there? By noon,
no longer newborn, this
one has moved around
and learned the space’s
furniture and width
and now night is coming.
Little’s been thrown
away yet
or put in order, when a
memory flickers.

Before waking—weren’t
there shreds
and patterns in the dark
thickness,
pictures brighter than

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day? Cities grew there,
and untouched forests.
There were smothering
passages
deep underground, a
crumbling of sand, the
creep
of mud along someone's
ribs and into his throat.
Was that me? In streets
of mildewed towers,
palaces and huge stores,
narrow-fronted,
thousands
of stories high—streets
always turning
into other streets, down
which something walked
naked, searching for a
way back, coming out
onto airy cliffs over
regions of that city
unknown before. Lost,

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someone pressed
forward,
face to the cool moist
sun, drenched in
splendor,
vaguely ashamed. It
vanished and there was
me.

But what was that? A
well or a mine you own
but never use—where is
it? Or maybe a shadow
shining through the night
from yesterday
of who was here or what
you were.

And so each person has
thirty thousand lives
and each one scrabbles
for a purchase
in the flotsam of images:

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a long struggle and float
of a day's length. Then
night comes and a little
civilization ends, its
collapse almost unnoted,
though later some of its
crumbs
turn up again and
astonish like a dream.

A. F. Moritz has written more than twenty books of poetry, most recently *The Sparrow* and *As Far As You Know*. His many honours include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Griffin Poetry Prize, the Bess Hokin Prize, and an Ingram Merrill Fellowship. He currently serves as the sixth poet laureate of the City of Toronto, and as the Goldring Professor of the Arts and Society at Victoria College, University of Toronto.

[Read A. F. Moritz interviewed by Lauren Peat.](#)

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