

HE DREAMS OF WATERS

POEMS BY

BILL KUSHNER

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BIKE

I was born on a busy Saturday night
In the big red sky. I rode out on my bike
Miles & miles, it was one of those nights
When the rain stops & the pavements glisten
& the avenues stretch endless & I could ride
As if for forever, I was born a busy city
In the middle of a thirsty island, I'm forever
Stopping, for a light, or for love, that light
Where's the fire? Sometimes I burn all afire
Hot evenings & these visions before me & I simply
Must follow, I hop on my bike & I race into night
I converse with shadows, scary, delightful. Times
(But there I go again) but there's so many voices
& I always do listen until at last silence. All paths
Are beautiful, blinding. I once asked the wind
& it whispered, not sure. Then I asked the wise gypsy
"You will find good fortune after next full moon."

HE

Communes with shadows, some are sweet
& they take me home with them, & they
Tell me their stories, all shadows have
Stories they simply must tell out before
Night is gone, & I try hard to listen
But sometimes they speak so fast, they in
Awful hurries & sometimes they speak
Too low many shadows shy & their fogs
Of voices of whispers, & I try awful hard
But O sometimes one or two use such big
Words for a little boy to figure, & also I
Usually quite sleepy besides, hope they
Understand & don't burst out in tearsdrops
Yes, shadows doncha know, they can cry
It's the funniest sound & I really don't mind
Or at least can the sweet ones, I've tasted
Their tears drops, they're as sweetest as teas
With maybe 5 spoons full of sugars & 6
Of honeys, & their tears so delicious, & their
Lives so brief, here I must say the lives of all
My shadows so brief, & of their shattered
Stories who sing me off to sleep & off to
My own tiny shadowy dreams, & when I
Awake, O my shadows, you're gone
& I alone, I guess to live here, wherever
Here is, where do shadows go, do I ever
Wonder, when their story is told, their
Night on earth gone & they hear the dawn
sing their final song?

PALM

Do you read palms? My answer
To everything today is Huh? My dear Pops
& I on his knee: Son, all I knows
January follows February, & then its
A new year, new hits, new runs
New errors. I step out, old coot
Watch for the cracks, old sneakers
New morning, welcome aboard. Brown
Leaves dying beautifully doorway, is
There a war on? no don't think so
Old inside wars, long fought, long lost
I surrender, take me, who am only a dream
& all out of bullets, anyway. I walk, slow
As a float, ducking, quack quack, the
Raindrops, wondering what, if anything, I
Can bring you, hello mighty tiny sparrow
Don't fly, so long. I see myself, ridiculous
In a passing mirror, hardly there in air
Lampshade for a hat, how very art deco
My handsome young face in its usual pout
But where were you going? O nowhere, just out

ROOF

My dad was not Queen of Roumania.
A thin man whose roof always needed repair.
A lot of deep stuff to think about, maybe
Too much. He just loved the weather
So he moved out out there. Packed up
Us kids, I was always naked, picked me up
Like Scratchy the Cat by the scruff
Of my neck & away went we, merrily
Merrily, life is but a dream. I've
Often wondered, light years later, if
I had to invent this family, or they
Well, me. Or do we all grow up, more
Or less, in the same family, only different
Shades of seriously crazy? I loved them 2
Purple mountains who loomed in the distance
& gave 'em names. Bud & Lou. & every night
As I slept in their strong arms, dreaming of you.

SNOW

The windows steamy as dreams where
Inside them I walk down these mean
Streets of mumbling shadows I'm lost a
Dumb kid & all these guys are convicted
Convicts a burly guy blocks he gives me
A flower bridal white & I smell it & it
Reminds me I tell him of something he
Demands me what & I say don't hit me I
Can't remember & he lets out a growl &
Says smell it again! I wake up screaming

& I smell it again. It reminds me of something
Lovely, actually, Daddy. First snow a snow
That changed everything as I tottered out into it
Amazed & wondering where my world had went

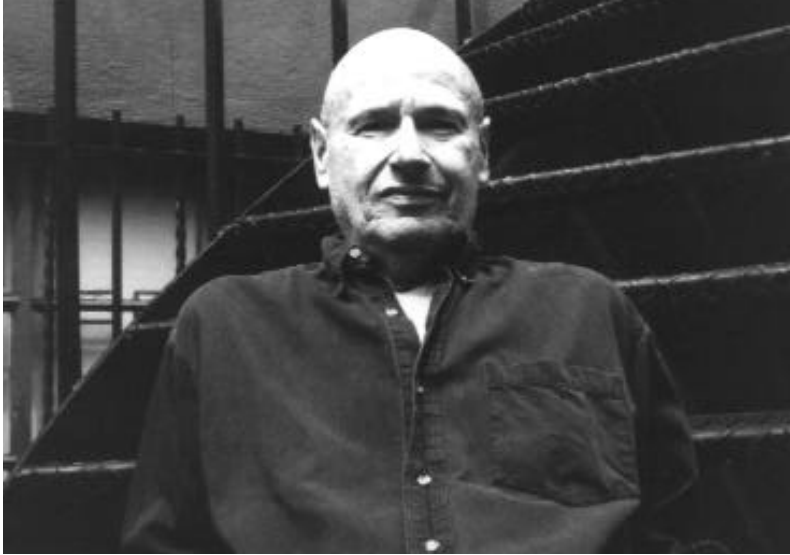
UFO's

They come from outer space
dressed in cornfields. These guys
they always land in cornfields
& they wrap themselves around in
The New York Times so they almost
look human, with glasses & all, so
they almost look wise. "Don't go
into the cornfield tonight!" my Daddy
would shout every time I left the
house, shoot I was only going down
to the highway to see what I could
stop, just to goof around. One big
alien sticks his big thing in my
mouth as we goof around. He
shoots UFO bullets laughing down
my throat as we fly high off the
ground, well, just for a second
then it's back to old earth again
the commandos to the rescue, one
commando holds me down & he goes
to town. Oh fuck tell me your name
I almost want to ask him, my giant
monster! he likes to wave his many
many arms & forget his legs what a
big goof this one is, I could almost
love him, I could almost take him home
why to meet the family & settle down
but first he got no face & second like
he's of another species, too bad, two
strikes. Later, when I finally crawl
home, Pop calls out "I hope you didn't

go near that cornfield.” “No, Daddy
I didn’t.” “Have you been a good boy
tonight?” “Yes, Daddy, I been.” “That’s
good. Now come to bed, boy. Daddy’s
feeling lonely.” “Okay, Daddy, I’m coming.”

WALK

I'm not normal. He seems like
a man out of snow, more snow
after rain, more rain, don't come
not yet, I feel out of control
who stands by his window, come in
I whisper to no one, did I ever know
you? no answer, no answer, stares up
wet with tears, hopes, fears, etcetera
as 3 foggy men in a steam in a row
I blow them all quickly, their moans
& then I leave there, will I ever return
who dreams to sleep, who sleeps to dream
& in this dream he goes out for a walk
& snow covers him over, then nothing, a bark



Bill Kushner is a 1999 recipient of a Poetry Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts. He also received the Dylan Thomas Prize for Poetry given by The New School for Social Research. He is the author of three poetry collections: *Night Fishing* (1980) by Midnight Sun Press, *Head* (1986) and *Love Uncut* (1990) both published by United Artists Books. His poems have appeared in *In Our Time: The Gay and Lesbian Anthology* (St. Martin's Press, 1989), the *Out of This World* anthology (Crown, 1991) and the *Up Late* anthology, among others.

Poet Anne Waldman has called his work "sheer gravy heaven." Gerard Malanga has written of him: "It's amazing what you can achieve by simply being yourself and true to your art! Kushner extends the range of sentiment and of the conversational mode first established by John Wieners but with one difference: where Wieners is almost always tragic, Kushner's is an optimistic and playful vision." *The Poetry Project Newsletter* has written of him: "Kushner's poetry is a written conversation like Shakespeare or Catullus, totally modern, offhand yet observed, his caesuras well placed with the casualness of natural breath, everyday words beautifully said."