

# The Back Gate

L I S T E N I N G  
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*What if earth  
Be but the shadow  
of heaven,  
and things therein  
Each to other like,  
more than on earth  
is thought?*

John Milton,  
*Paradise Lost*

**F**ROM OUT OF THE DEEP-GREEN mysteries of the woods the deer emerge. They could just as easily, without noticeable effort, leap the fence. But often they amble through, nice as you please, the old sagging gate that hangs from one hinge at the back of the pond.

I sit in the ill-tempered grass that covers the gentle slope leading down to our equally ill-tempered pond. A soft breeze moves past, cooling my skin. Chickadees and woodpeckers flutter and peck at the birdfeeder overhead. All is quiet, serene. Even so, the old gate stares at me from across the water, its odd, drunken angle a sarcastic leer toward how a more civilized gate would behave.

What is in there? What lies beyond the moldering back gate, deep in the shadowy gloom beneath the wooded canopy? Here in the sunlight all is peaceful and calm, normal. But what transpires back in the shadows? What lies in those places I cannot see?

There are shadows all around. Here and there, tucked away in closets and alleyways, secreted beneath piles of rotting trees and old clothes, shadows are the germ and substance of our fevered nights—and uneasy awakenings.

In this time and place, shadows are not necessarily evil. They can also be a necessity. They are the texture of our living—the temporal woof added into the eternal warp of our time here. For fallen flesh, they are the lateral incongruities that help define the vertical radiance of heaven. Heaven's light, as filtered through the unclean atmosphere of earth, is grossly dimmed, stripped of much of its boundless spectrum. Here and now, earth's shadows must be mixed in for the human eye.

Ask a photographer: It is shadow that defines and molds the lighted subject. Without

shadow, the image is flat, featureless, bland. With it, the image has character, personality, depth. Fallen eyes require earth's shadows.

What lies in the dark mysteries beyond the back gate? God's wondrous, often baffling idea of what life in His present earthly kingdom is to be.

There will come a day, far, far into eternity, when His earthly kingdom will be bathed in glorious, unshadowed light. Then there will be no need of shadows, for the light will be not of the sun, but of Him. God's light requires no molding shadow to sculpt its beauty. When no longer filtered by this earth's grimy atmosphere, the light of His new earth, and new Jerusalem, will carry in itself all the unimagined glory of His being.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

*Revelation 21:1-4,22-24*

For now we dwell with the shadows. But in this checkered landscape we enjoy the hope and promise that one day we will dwell in the pure, unshadowed glory of the living, radiant God.