

# The Back Gate

L I S T E N I N G  
M A Y 2 8 2 0 0 7  
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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 civil-  
ized 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 nec-  
essarily 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 incon-  
gruities 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 atmo-  
sphere, the light of His new earth, and new  
Jerusalem, will carry in itself all the unimagi-  
nable 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 cry-  
ing, 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.