

*Before we go further, assuming you want to go further, and I hope you do, let me suggest that the common notion of poetry reading as a task to perform before Miss Fidditch's next English test has not been good to us poets. Frankly, in the last century and for the first time since poets have been entertaining and teasing people for all these thousands of confusing years, we are just a bit lonely, just a bit frustrated. Without the Folly as genius loci, I would be despondent.*

*So listen. You do not want to read a poem the way you would read a newspaper article or the instructions for the new kayak rudder (a source of despair I have been pouring over lately), or the testament of the latest perfect stranger who has decided to "friend" you. Poems deserve to be read slowly. True, poems, especially worthy ones, tend to be a bit difficult and a bit confusing. But poems are written to reflect life, and life is a bit difficult and a bit confusing. I know a poet and teacher who claims that he writes and teaches "out of confusion and into it, the way teaching should be done, the way poetry should be done, the way life should be lived." Here's a pretty simple poem and one that is, like its subject, dear to me.*



## Carol's World

In August the road is clear, paved in green,  
Framed in green aspen, birch, pine, spruce,  
An unnameable glory of undergrowth  
That restricts our focus to the only clearing  
In the wood, that green tunnel of old road.  
I cannot see Carol's face when she looks  
Back into the green, but I see *from* Carol's  
Face, because I see what Carol sees. We  
Share the enveloping light of it all.

If I could see her face, my photograph  
Would have been of her face, but my soul  
Reaches Carol as it reaches Carol's world,  
The one we share, the world she nourishes  
Day by living day. So in a way, I left  
The life out of the picture. I did that  
For the small sake of my soul, our soul,  
Mine, Carol's, the soul of what we see  
Down the old road, all that we don't see  
Outside, her guide for looking inside.

*It's not a difficult poem, I think, but still, it shouldn't be read fast, and maybe, if you want to live a few minutes in the poem, you might read it again, and maybe read it aloud. No one is looking over your shoulder with a stop-watch, and no one cares whether you get the questions right or not. In fact, the only questions are the ones you may ask yourself, and that is the best of what reading poems is all about, entering the correspondence that poets have with one another and with anyone who chooses to join.*

*Hey, and you don't even have to be alive to play a part. Homer and I correspond regularly. Geoffrey Chaucer and I have been good friends for almost 50 years. Robert Frost and I have been trying to confuse each other since 1958. And it is always a happy challenge to try to figure out what dear Emily Dickinson has been up to just this 60 years or so. Join us —*

## Where the Light Is Better

Mostly I stay where the light is good,  
Where life is comfortable, safe, well lit,  
Sometimes even interesting, secure.

But now and then something shuffles  
In the shadow, and I shake my head  
From under wing to discover some light,

And I blink, only sometimes with passion,  
And mostly, when I cast my light  
On my shuffling soul, I am only shadow —

Wiping dishes, untangling fish hooks,  
Typing something in the bad light  
Of my palsied memory, half created —

But maybe the shadow is Ergo Bear,  
Or Pooh and Babe or the baby Jackpine  
Outside the warp of this wrinkled window,

Or the Folly itself, that pops out of time  
And shadow, full of conversation,  
Timeless energy looking for words –

“This isn’t orderly,” my window argues,  
The old man’s head is barely attached  
To language at all! His way is folly!”

And my Old and Wise Ones whisper back,  
“But if you think it will work . . . ,”  
And I taste, and breathe, and work.

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