***Happiness***, by Jane Kenyon

There’s just no accounting for happiness,

or the way it turns up like a prodigal

who comes back to the dust at your feet

having squandered a fortune away.

And how can you not forgive?

You make a feast in honour of what

was lost, and take from its place the finest

garment, which you saved for an occasion

you could not imagine, and you weep night and day

to know that you were not abandoned,

that happiness saved its most extreme form

for you alone.

No, happiness is the uncle you never

knew about, who flies a single-engine plane

onto the grassy landing strip, hitchhikes

into town, and inquires at every door

until he finds you asleep midafternoon

as you so often are during the unmerciful

hours of your despair.

It comes to the monk in his cell.

It comes to the woman sweeping the street

with a birch broom, to the child

whose mother has passed out from drink.

It comes to the lover, to the dog chewing

a sock, to the pusher, to the basket maker,

and to the clerk stacking cans of carrots

in the night.

It even comes to the boulder

in the perpetual shade of pines barrens,

to rain falling on the open sea,

to the wineglass, weary of holding wine.

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