

## SECOND LIFE

~by David Whyte, from *Pilgrim*

My uncourageous life  
doesn't want to go,  
doesn't want to speak,  
doesn't want to carry on,  
wants to make its way  
through stealth,  
wants to assume  
the strange and dubious honor  
of not being heard.

My uncourageous life  
doesn't want to move  
doesn't even want to stir,  
wants to inhabit  
a difficult form  
of stillness,  
to pull everything  
into the silence  
where the throat strains  
but gives no voice.

My uncourageous life  
wants to stop  
the whole world  
and keep it stopped  
not only for itself  
but for everyone  
and everything it knows,  
refusing to stir even a single inch  
until given an exact  
and final destination.

This uncourageous  
second life wants to win

some undeserved lottery  
so that it can finally  
bestow a just and final  
reward upon itself.

No, this second life  
never wants to write  
or speak, or cook  
or set the table  
or welcome guests  
or sit up talking  
with a stranger  
who might accidentally  
set us traveling again.

This second life  
doesn't want  
to leave the door,  
doesn't want  
to take any path  
that works its own  
sweet way  
through mountains,  
doesn't want  
to follow  
the beckoning flow  
of a distant river  
nor meet  
the chance weather  
where a pass  
takes us  
from one discovered  
world  
to another.

This second life  
just wants to lie down;

close its eyes  
and tell God  
it has a headache.

But my other life  
my first life,  
the life I admire  
and want to follow  
looks on and listens  
with some wonder,  
and even extends  
a reassuring hand  
for the one holding back,  
knowing there can be  
no real confrontation  
without the need  
to turn away  
and go back  
away from it all,  
to have things  
be different,  
and to close our eyes  
until they  
are different.

No,  
this hidden life,  
this first courageous life,  
seems to speak  
from silence  
and in the language  
of a knowing,  
beautiful heartbreak,  
above all  
it seems to know  
well enough  
it will have  
to give back

everything received  
in any form  
and even, sometimes,  
as it tells the story  
of the way ahead,  
laughs out loud  
in the knowledge.

This first life seems  
sure and steadfast  
in knowing  
it will come across  
the help it needs  
at every crucial place  
and thus continually  
sharpens my sense  
of impending  
revelation.

This first  
courageous life  
in fact, has already  
gone ahead  
has nowhere to go  
except  
out the door  
into the clear air  
of morning  
taking me with it,  
nothing to do  
except to breathe  
while it can,  
no way to travel  
but with that familiar  
pilgrim  
movement in the body,  
nothing to teach except  
to show me

on the long road  
how we sometimes  
like to walk alone,  
open to the silent revelation,  
and then stop and gather  
and share everything  
as dark comes in,  
telling the story  
of a day's accidental  
beauty.

And perhaps  
most intriguingly  
and most poignantly  
and most fearfully of all  
and at the very end  
of the long road  
it has travelled,  
it wants to take me  
to a high place  
from which to see,  
with a view looking back  
on the way we took  
to get there,  
so it can have me  
understand myself  
as witness  
and thus  
bequeath me  
the way ahead,  
so it can teach me  
how to invent  
my own disappearance  
so it can lie down at the end  
and show me,  
even against my will,  
how to undo myself,  
how to surpass myself:  
how to find

a way  
to die  
of generosity.