



The Unwatched Space, by Mark Nepo

> _ I tried so hard to please

> that I never realized

> no one is watching. _

I imagined, like everyone else at school, that my parents were sitting just out of view like those quiet doctors behind clean mirrors, watching and reprimanding my every move. As I reached adulthood, the habit continued. I walked around constantly troubled by what others must be thinking of what I was or was not doing. In this, we are burdened with the seeds of self-consciousness. From this we trouble our spontaneity and the possibility of joy by watching ourselves too closely, nervously unsure if this or that is a mistake. It is from the burden of others watching in judging that the need to achieve gets exaggerated into the want for fame. I remember at different times fantasizing the future gathering like an audience, ready to marvel at how much I'd done with so little. It didn't even matter for what this attention might come. Just let some form of watchfulness be approving, and I would know relief. It wasn't till I woke bleeding after surgery, with all those moth-like angels breathing against me, that I realized that audience was gone. I cried way inside, not because I just had a rib removed and not because I was in the midst of battling cancer. I cried because I had not only been physically open, but also open beneath my sense of being watched. Somehow the unwatched space was given air. Though I could explain it to know one, my sobs were sobs of relief, the water of a de-shell spirit soaking ground. Years have passed, and I wait long hours in the sun to see the birch fall of its own weight into the lake, and it seems to punctuate God's mime. Nothing sad about it. Now the audience

of watchers is gone and I can feel life happen in its quiet, vibrant way without anything interfering. Now, sometimes at night, when the dog is asleep and the owl is beginning to stare into what no one ever sees, I stand on the deck and feel the honey of night spill off the stars, feel it coat the earth, the trees, the minds of children half asleep, feel the stillness evaporate all oceans of fame into the unwatched space that waits for light. In this undistorted silence [...], in this unwatched space that peace begins. -- Mark Nepo