

THE
SPOON
RIVER Poetry Review

Elizabeth Crowell

Night Light

Surprised, they would shimmer out of love,
bodies bare as ghosts,
let the children fold
their bad dreams into their bellies.

Now they read books till late,
histories of ideas, cut into centuries,
reason, romance, decadence,
until they fall asleep.

Once asleep, they wake to
incomplete, unreasoned dreams
the night's slowness, all the time,
they get up and walk the house.

So when she saw her husband
aching against the wall,
covered with darkness,
swearing he could have been killed,

her first step was unsteady,
her limbs no longer knowing
what they had always known,
their own length, how long they could hold.

What could they say to each other?
That the night had gotten darker?
When he bought the nightlight,
she only said it was a good idea.

Like anything needed that was
not needed before, it was hard to use.
It kept them awake,
a single bulb glowing bald,
pink like a child's face,
reminding them of the fear that woke them up,
dreams of falling off the world,
monsters snatching, emptiness under a bed.

The rule had always been
if you couldn't see it it wasn't there,
but now they can see for sure
the darkness growing beyond the light.