

Broken Promises

By David Kirby

I have met them in dark alleys, limping and one-armed;
I have seen them playing cards under a single light-bulb
and tried to join in, but they refused me rudely,
knowing I would only let them win.
I have seen them in the foyers of theaters,
coming back late from the interval

long after the others have taken their seats,
and in deserted shopping malls late at night,
peering at things they can never buy,
and I have found them wandering
in a wood where I too have wandered.

This morning I caught one;
small and stupid, too slow to get away,
it was only a promise I had made to myself once
and then forgot, but it screamed and kicked at me
and ran to join the others, who looked at me with reproach
in their long, sad faces.

When I drew near them, they scurried away,
even though they will sleep in my yard tonight.
I hate them for their ingratitude,
I who have kept countless promises,
as dead now as Shakespeare's children.
"You bastards," I scream,
"you have to love me—I gave you life!"

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David Kirby was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He received his B.A. from Louisiana State University, and earned his Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University. He has taught all over America and at international programs in Italy, England, France, and Spain. He is now the Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English at Florida State University. Influenced by artists as diverse as John

Keats and Little Richard, Kirby writes distinctive long-lined narrative poems that braid together high and popular culture, personal memory, philosophy, and humor.

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