

# Dark Angels

Just a few years ago.  
life was good,  
before the fear began.  
But then they came.  
The Dark Angels.  
Now?  
The villagers.  
All of us.  
Always, the fear.  
We fear to go outside,  
although remaining inside  
is no guarantee of safety.  
My father no longer allows me  
to attend school,  
because to get there,  
I must walk  
from our village  
to the nearby town,  
and it is no longer safe to do so.

They say  
a Dark Lord watches our village  
day and night.  
Even on the darkest nights,  
when there is no moon,  
he watches us.

They say he sees us  
through the eyes of his Dark Angels,  
that they come and go and destroy  
at his command.  
It is the Dark Lord  
who decides who is to die.  
No one knows  
how he comes to this decision,  
or why he does this.  
We have done nothing to him.  
Yet no one is safe from his wrath.  
Why does he hate us so?

It happens like this, suddenly:  
It was last month,  
on the 9<sup>th</sup> day,  
Market Day.  
Earlier that morning,  
my father had taken a goat from our herd  
to sell at the market.  
My sisters and I eagerly awaited his return.  
He always brought us back small gifts  
on Market Day.  
I was walking to the well,  
where my mother had sent me for water,  
so I did not see  
my father's arrival  
back to our home.  
But I recognized at once  
his loud voice,  
calling out to me.  
I looked back.  
Father was standing outside our door.  
He yelled again, "*Dark Angel!*"  
and pointed his rifle to the sky.  
I looked up to see it  
coming up over the valley ridge  
behind our house.  
My father yelled,  
"*Run to the orchard!*"  
before going inside.

The house was too far away,  
the Dark Angel too close.  
I did as my father said,  
and began running toward our orchard,  
to hide under its branches and leaves  
from the eyes of the Dark Angel.

I heard a crack like thunder,  
and the ground shook.  
I stopped and looked back,  
but I could no longer see our house,

only a great cloud of dust.  
Stones and other things  
rained down around me.  
Forgotten was my fear of the Dark Angel,  
my only fear now for my family.  
I ran back,  
stumbling blindly  
over rocks and other things  
as I entered the cloud of choking dust,  
my eyes now burning  
from the dust and my own tears.

Through that dust I could see  
only one wall standing  
where once our house had stood.  
What I saw next...  
It is too soon.  
I cannot say the words.  
I cannot say the words yet,  
how they were...  
what they were now.  
I can only say in briefest words  
what I saw.

The first I came upon  
was my younger sister.  
Then the rest.  
My father,  
his body half-covering my mother.  
My baby brother in her arms.  
My other sister.  
What was left of them.  
I became aware  
that I was walking in a circle around them.  
I could go no closer.  
I was afraid to see more.  
I tasted blood  
and then I felt the pain.  
I took my hand from my mouth.  
It dripped blood now,  
but the pain was not enough.

I screamed.  
But I did not cry!

Later, they told me,  
I cried for several days.  
Perhaps.  
I do not remember.

I saw my father's rifle near  
where once stood our doorway.  
I picked it up.  
It was not damaged.  
I thought,  
*"Rifles are stronger than people!"*  
I raised my father's rifle to the sky.  
*"Kill me!"* I screamed.  
*"Kill me!"*  
But I screamed to an empty sky.  
The Dark Angel was gone.  
I hunched down,  
and rocked back and forth on my heels.  
Time passed.

My father's brother came,  
with another man,  
a neighbor.  
My uncle lives over the ridge,  
in the next valley.  
He pulled me up to my feet  
and embraced me.  
My uncle was crying,  
but still I did not cry.  
My uncle said to the other man,  
*"Take my brother's son to my home."*  
I was gently led away.  
I took my father's rifle with me,  
nothing else.

Other relatives and neighbors came  
to help my uncle.  
They took the bodies of my family

to my uncle's house.

I was kept away,  
in another room,  
while they washed them,  
prepared them for burial.  
Then they brought me in  
to see my family  
one last time.

I was allowed to remain there until evening,  
when my grandmother finally insisted  
I go to the bed  
which had been prepared for me,  
in my cousins' room.

For a long time,  
I lay on my back,  
staring up,  
but seeing nothing.  
Finally, I must have fallen asleep.

When I woke,  
I could eat nothing.  
We buried my family that day.  
Most of the village was there,  
But only some relatives and friends  
came from the other villages and town.  
Many did not come,  
fearing the return of Dark Angels.  
Almost everyone was watching the sky.  
I heard angry voices among the men.  
Quiet out of respect for the dead,  
but angry.  
I was given a few things of my family's  
that had been found,  
all that remained of my home.

It has been a month, I think.  
I have no family, no home.  
But the orchard and goats are mine.  
For now,  
I stay with my uncle.  
Each day,  
I climb over the ridge  
to tend my herd and orchard.  
I no longer fear the Dark Angels.  
What more can they do?  
They have already taken my family.

Not long ago,  
my heart was filled with love.  
But now the ones I loved are gone.  
Because the Dark Lord willed it so,  
And sent his Dark Angel.  
There is no room in my heart for love now.  
My heart is filled with hate.

Next year, I will be 13, a man,  
old enough to carry my father's rifle.  
I will leave my goats and orchard  
in my uncle's keeping.  
I will join those who fight.  
They say  
no one can destroy the Dark Angels.  
Many have tried.  
But I will find a way.  
And the Dark Lord?  
I am told  
he lives in a distant land.  
Somehow, I will go there.  
He is well-guarded, they say.  
We shall see.

*Gordon Gilbert*  
*February 25, 2013*  
*revised*  
*March 19, 2013*  
*NYC*

# All Good Works Are Acts of Faith

## The Zen of Giving

1

What is given freely  
With no expectations  
Has a pleasure in the very act

Like that of dalliance  
The brush of lips  
Light strokes and scratches  
And gentle touches

With all the respect and love  
Of the fisherman for the fish  
The gentle release

2

To give and make no show  
Of taking credit  
Transcending all youthful need  
Of recognition  
Comes with the wisdom of years

Still better  
 To make the gift  
 With no one the wiser  
 Leaving no residue  
 Of gratitude  
 Or worse yet  
 Future expectation  
 Of repetition  
 Both can change  
 The quality of friendship  
 Introducing inequalities

Scales are easily tipped  
 By the weight of obligation  
 Unalleviated  
 Unbalanced  
 When there is no way  
 To pay it back  
 Or forward  
 However well-intentioned  
 The gift becomes a burden  
 Devaluing self-worth  
 An affront  
 To dignity and honor

Gordon Gilbert  
 November 2011  
 Naples, NY

and NYC  
In Praise of an Older Woman

In her green youth  
Spring was in her step  
The fragrant scent of flowers bright  
Enchanted and seduced all men  
As her beauty blossomed

Past spring's green age of folly now  
Before leaves fall  
As fall leaves us  
To winter's stark bare limbs  
And memories of younger seasons  
Her fall foliage commands our admiration  
Imperiously demands appreciation  
Of a wiser, seasoned season

As fall nips the air  
And her green leaves  
Oh, the colors wonderful  
Of red and purple, orange and rust  
That always lay beneath  
And come to light  
Exposed now  
In her fall!

*Gordon Gilbert*  
*February 17, 2012*  
*enroute to the fingerlakes*  
*from NYC*

**Please note:**

**Dark Angels** and **All Good Works Are Acts of Faith** have never been submitted for publication before.

**In Praise of an Older Woman** was forwarded by a friend to an online magazine, Women's Voices for Change, and when they contacted me and asked to publish it, I gave them permission to do so.

Here is a link to their website:

<http://womensvoicesforchange.org/tribute-to-older-women.htm>

**Gordon Gilbert** has collaborated for years with Peruvian photographer and filmmaker Lorry Salcedo, doing English translations from Spanish for his photography books, and English subtitles for Sr. Salcedo's documentary, The Fire Within, Jews of the Amazon.

Their most recent collaboration: Discovering Roots, a trilingual book for young adults for which Gordon wrote the text. The book gives a brief history of the African diaspora, and then compares two communities --- one, African/Peruvian; the other, African/Brazilian.

Gordon is also a poet, lyricist, fiction writer and playwright. Currently he is producing & directing his play, *Monologues from the Old Folks Home*, and also hosting monthly beat generation writer celebrations at the Yippie Museum Café in NYC. An amateur photographer, he often photographs poets in performance.

Gordon is too busy writing and enjoying life to seriously seek publication, although he will submit his work when asked. Gordon has resided in the West Village since 1975.

He may be contacted at [gordonagilbertjr@usa.net](mailto:gordonagilbertjr@usa.net)

Some performances of Gordon Gilbert:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UID-NkColGs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvRYf4xikH4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFbJhA7D0Vs>