



The Nightlife

POEMS BY

Elise Paschen

In *The Nightlife*, Elise Paschen explores the nocturnal world and what happens in that interval between “dorveille” and daybreak. She reveals, through dream lyrics and fractured narratives, the inevitability of unrecognized desire and the drama between the life lived and the life imagined.

Of Elise Paschen’s prize-winning poetry collection *Infidelities*, Richard Wilbur wrote that the poems “. . . draw upon a dream life which can deeply tincture the waking world.” In her third poetry book, *The Nightlife*, Paschen once again taps into dream states, creating a narrative which balances between the lived and the imagined life. Probing the tension between “The Elevated” and the “Falls,” she explores troubled love and relationships, the danger of accident and emotional volatility. At the heart of the book is a dream triptych which retells the same encounter from different perspectives, the drama between the narrative described and the sexual tension created there.

The Nightlife demonstrates Paschen’s versatility and formal mastery as she experiments with forms such as the pantoum, the villanelle and the tritina, as well as concrete poems and poems in free verse. Throughout this poetry collection, she interweaves lyric and narrative threads, creating a contrapuntal story-line. The book begins with a dive into deep water and ends with an opening into sky.

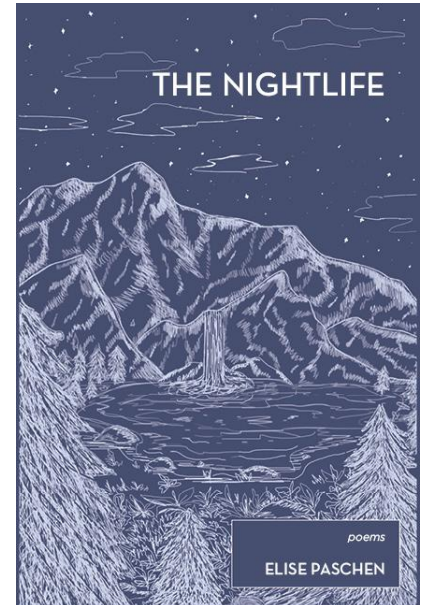
ADVANCE PRAISE

“*The Nightlife* is not only a beautiful and inventive collection, it’s an important contribution to this period in American poetry. Paschen’s voice shows us how—given all the choices in form, voice, subject, and vision—a poet might make the art her own through the force of her personal brilliance, and a generous and idiosyncratic sensibility. In this work it is as if ‘. . . she unhinged every / window . . .’ These are poems you return to not only for the music and the detail—equally powerful through her wide-angle lens as under her magnifying glass—but to puzzle out how she managed it. So much craft in work that reads so freely, seems to have issued forth so effortlessly, but also from some supernatural source, poems that read as if the poet were ‘. . . trying to put back / the wild fury she had released.’ This is poetry that reminds us of all the power and possibilities of poetry itself.”

—Laura Kasischke, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Space, in Chains*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elise Paschen is the author of *Bestiary*, *Infidelities* (winner of the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize), and *Houses: Coasts*. As an undergraduate at Harvard, she received the Garrison Medal for poetry. She holds M.Phil. and D.Phil. degrees from Oxford University. Her poems have been published in *The New Yorker* and *Poetry*, among other magazines, and in numerous anthologies. She is the editor of *The New York Times* best-selling anthology, *Poetry Speaks to Children*, and co-editor of *Poetry Speaks* and *Poetry in Motion*, among other anthologies. She is a member of the Osage Nation. Former Executive Director of the Poetry Society of America, she is a co-founder of *Poetry in Motion*, a nationwide program which places poetry posters in subway cars and buses. Paschen teaches in the MFA Writing Program at the School of the Art Institute and lives in Chicago with her family.



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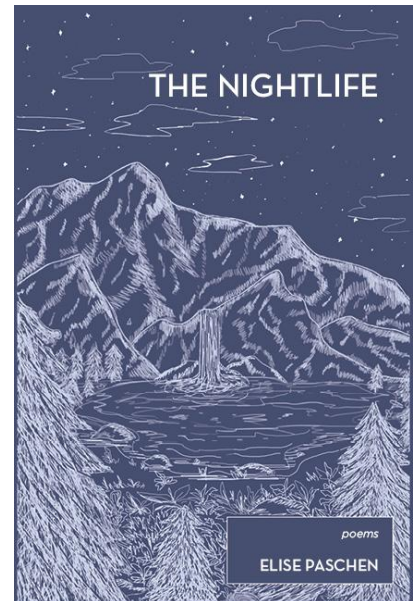
MORE PRAISE FOR *THE NIGHTLIFE*

“These poems are finely crafted boxes that are only opened at night when the family is asleep. They are hidden under the bed. One contains dreams that were lost then found. Within another are the oceans of all summers past. . . . This collection, which is graced by the moon and stars, is Paschen’s best. As she says in a haiku: ‘I entered the room / of this life to discover / time had come to move.’ And we are here, being moved.”

—Joy Harjo, winner of the Academy of American Poets’
Wallace Stevens Award and author of *How We Became Human*

“Scrupulously crafted and deeply affecting, the poems in Elise Paschen’s investigate certain varieties of persistence right at the root of what it means to be human: the persistence of reality into dream, of dream into waking life, of the dead among the living, and of the living through time, precarity, and loss. The sturdiness of Paschen’s sentence structure, her almost architectural sense of musicality, and a gorgeous, Neo-Imagist attentiveness to sensory detail (‘Cattails flat against dirt: an impression of deer’) often belie, but just barely, the huge sorrow and uncertainty that haunt the work, functioning the way the banister and reliably regular dimensions of steps on a darkened stairway do—leading us, in the end, to ‘a surprise of light.’ *The Nightlife* is the most profound and consummate book yet from one of today’s most formally astute poets, and one for whom to give lasting shape to experience feels not only like part of the meaning of what she makes, but much of the motive to make it in the first place.”

—Timothy Donnelly, winner of the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award
for *The Cloud Corporation*



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FROM *THE NIGHTLIFE*

Falls

Rooted to outcrop of volcanic	drowned canyon walls, covered the dining
rock, <i>penstemon</i> , <i>saskatoon</i> , <i>stone</i>	hall, burying the far-flung bridge
<i>crop</i> , <i>ocean spray</i> , upstarts anchored	to the scout’s camp beneath a cabin
to accident of dirt where seeds	a limestone grave quickens the heart
scattered then buried, but now bed down,	the kitchen clatter red-winged blackbirds
while beneath ragged garden, cascade	the flux from glacier lakes emptying
of faith pummels the slate decades	deliver now what’s not to name
ago, spring flood, then mud-slide	and strands of cotton skitter in air