FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

The Day Before: New Poems
Dick Allen
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This poet pursues something more, less, or perhaps simply other than the ordinary. These poems are always attentive to memory and filled with brisk, fully realized physical description. What sets them apart is their intensity and ingenuity of language and invention. This magic makes poems like "A Boy Called Vanish" more than another nostalgic trip back into boyhood: "He was / watching himself vanish into me / and hated but accepted how I gave him books / to speed him on his way, / and my dog Buck to guard him from all harm."

Allen is equally adept at registering the strangeness of contemporary American life, where anyone who has lived long enough might have watched "Presidents go down on the sidewalks, ambulances / Traveling dark roads, and heard in the night wind / Wings beating." Such a man might well wonder what is required, or allowed, in this place and time, where ordinary citizens live among what would have once seemed incredible riches: "Often, your living room / Seems lighted by pitch-pine torches, the interior / Of an Egyptian burial chamber, all the things you love / At hand … Such richness would / Appall the ancient kings."

In poem after poem, Allen rings surprising new changes upon the familiar, offering a daily life renewed in its splendor, surprise, boredom, and terror. What might be easy irony or facile juxtaposition in the hands of a lesser poet becomes something deeper in his sure hands- Allen has published five earlier books over the last thirty years, received numerous grants and awards, and appeared four times during the nineties in the yearly Best American Poetry anthologies. Not many poets could so seamlessly weave together television, Chevrolets, snipers, a cardinal's wing, a martyr's leaflets, and a jukebox, to name just some of the particulars of "After a Proverb by William Blake."

Somehow Allen makes his combinations and correlations seem inevitable and at the same time mysterious: "Every day of your life, / remember that it's all impossible, / hideous, lovely …" Formally assured, complex, lucid, refusing both easy simplifications and glib mystifications, these are poems of a striking, hard-won maturity.

Jeff Gundy