

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## **Eight Movements in a Life by Robert K. Johnson**

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Still too young, I could not grasp  
any meaning—what could it be?—  
for the sadness in my throat

besides that it was the end  
of another summer day  
when encroaching shadows made

the hiding playmates I sought  
impossible to find,  
made the ball I tried to hit

or catch too grey to see,  
forced me to shout,  
“Goodbye,”

and, all alone, walk toward  
a house, silent and box-shaped,  
waiting in darkness for me.

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As if my mind were a lake  
stroked by a quiet breeze,  
a memory smooth as a sailboat  
glides in sight again,

again in my freshman year  
I watch a senior stroll  
through a high school hallway empty  
except for the two of us

while he sings in an echoed voice  
“A Kiss to Build a Dream On.”  
and again, I feel so young,  
so ready to live the day.

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The three guys on my block I went  
to grammar school and high school with  
stared silently a whole minute  
when I happened to say I loved to read books  
on rainy days.

So my breath quickened  
when I heard two teachers disapprove  
of a freshman they spotted reading Steinbeck's  
"dirty books." I tracked him down, and soon  
we were swapping novels. Then one day

his older brother took both of us  
to see *Swan Lake*.

While the three guys  
that I no longer went anywhere with  
now pointed me out as "a kike lover."

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When sorrow and pain  
lodged tight inside you,  
you lost  
    that little  
bird of joy

that lifted you  
into the air  
on its wings  
    every day.  
And I lost you.

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Helpless not to,  
you said "Goodbye"  
and slowly turned away from me—

your ash pale face  
like a ghost ship  
that has never floated out of sight.

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I'm mad  
because I realize now  
that my latest revisions badly

misdirect my new poem,  
spoil, not enhance the fresh promise  
contained in my first drafts,

mad that I'll have to go back  
to where I veered off course,  
and build from there again,

mad—until I remember  
how many mistakes I've made  
I can never go back and correct.

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High quality or none—  
what I write does not matter,  
what matters is that the words—  
one right after another—

are planks  
that make a narrow bridge  
my plodding legs can cross  
over the bottomless ravine.

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One night I walked into  
an eighth grade dance with a girl  
my daydreams never dreamed  
would say “yes,”

and a classmate—  
as cocky as I was shy—  
cut in almost as soon  
as she and I started dancing;  
and before the evening ended,  
left with the girl on his arm

while my skin burned so hot  
I was soaked in sweat.  
Even so,

I'd rather live every worst moment  
in my life over again  
than die.