

# Lights Out

I climb these stairs, hand on the oak rail  
shaped by a skilled craftsman, polished  
by generations of other hands, the wood  
rounded and solid as a sculpted arm  
but always warm under the palm:  
behind me doors locked, lights out, the downstairs rooms  
in darkness indistinguishable from what they were  
a hundred years ago, their forms as constant  
as the bricks and stone that frame them.  
Only the human clutter changes, the soft tissue of existence;  
and when the lights go out another step towards the dark,  
another notch is marked along the palmer's staff.  
Each room shut foreshadows age's deprivations:  
the countries unattainable, consigned  
to memory or never known; the mountains only seen,  
no longer trodden, the slow but still perceptible  
reduction of horizons, as one's own garden  
becomes an alien territory, and then the outer rooms,  
these stairs and handrail, until all senses  
are confined, as birth, within the limits of a bed.

## **Roger Adams**

Hilly Cansdale Local Prize Winner in the Open Poetry Category

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