

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

The Second Shadow

By Ken Woodley

The weight is so heavy.

Too burdensome.

I don't see how I can go any further.

No way.

It has been so hard for so long.

Years and years, it seems, so another single step feels impossible.

The valley of this shadow seems to stretch forever and the slopes that surround me look and feel too steep.

Each time I try to climb up and out of this, I slip and slide and stumble and fall. I am cut and bleeding and still this burden refuses to fall from my shoulders, fall away from my heart, or from my soul. Its weeds are everywhere and there are days when I cannot see my flowers. Can't even smell them.

Today is one of those days.

The weeds of this burden blind me to even a single petal of one solitary flower.

And all around me are people on the same journey.

Carrying their own burdens that are too burdensome.

They don't see how they can go any further.

No way.

It has been so hard for them, too, for so long.

Years and years, it seems, even if it has been a few days, weeks or months, so another step feels impossible to them.

The valley of the shadow surrounding them seems to stretch forever and the slopes surrounding them look and feel too steep.

Weeds surround them. Their flowers are nowhere to be seen. They can't even smell them.

All of us have stumbled and fallen and the weeds seem certain to take every one of our blossoms away.

But, on our bruised and bleeding knees we pray.

Unable to gaze skyward any longer, we look down and see our bent and humbled shadow in prayer.

Prayer is all we have left, hopeless words searching for hope.

And that—yes, that—is when we see the second shadow.

A second shadow beside us.

Beside every one of us.

The shadow of someone carrying a yoke across his shoulders.

This shadow of the man and his yoke look just like the shadow of a cross, a crucified man somehow journeying right by our side.

Has he been there all along?

Did we mistake our burden for his?

Or his burden for ours?

None of that matters, we realize, as the flowers of this moment bloom, the sudden petals painting even the weeds into some kind of rainbow pasture where we rest and feel our burdens lifted. Our heads are anointed with oil.

In a moment, we shall all journey on.

Our burden won't be gone but it will feel lighter because we do not carry it alone.

Jesus knows all about crosses.

That is why he can help us carry our own.