

Lisa Bielawa

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Note

Premiere: August 19, 2016, Bay Chamber Concerts, Rockport, ME
Duration: 5'
Instrumentation: voice and violin, one performer

Written for violinist Becca Fischer on the occasion of her 40th birthday, as part of a set of gift commissions underwritten by her husband, video artist Anthony Hawley. Hawley and Fischer developed an evening-length program of all of the commissioned works entitled "Time Pieces," with video projections and other artwork that respond to each of the pieces. The project subsequently toured in the US and in Africa.

One Atom of Faith was a study for the larger choral-orchestral work *My Outstretched Hand*, which expands around excerpts from an arresting autobiography written by Mary MacLane, an extremely precocious 19-year-old girl living in Montana in 1902. Totally isolated from any literary community, in the copper-mining town of Butte, MacLane churned out writing that is bold, audacious, colorful, often funny and sometimes yearningly sad.

Here we find MacLane and her Soul in a heart-stoppingly tender Socratic dialogue:

My soul said to me: "I am sick."
I answered: "And I am sick."
"We may be well," said my soul. "why are we not well?"
"How may we be well?" I asked

"We may throw away all our vanity and false pride," said my soul. "We may take on a new life.
We may learn to wait and to possess ourselves in patience. We may labor and overcome."

"We can do none of these things," I cried. Have I not tried all of them some time in my short life?
And have I not waited and wanted until you have become faint with pain? Have I not looked and longed?
Dear soul. Why do you not resign yourself? Why can you not stay quiet and trouble yourself and me no more?
Why are you always straining and reaching? There isn't anything for you. You are wearing yourself out."

My soul made answer: "I may strain and reach until only one worn nerve of me is left.
And that one nerve may be scourged with whips and burned with fire.
But I will keep one atom of faith. I may go bad, but I will keep one atom of faith in Love and in the Truth that is Love.
I will keep one atom of faith."

– Mary MacLane, 19 years old, Butte, Montana, 1901

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