

Written on Kim's Bones
2018

The Holy Longing

-Goethe, tr. Robert Bly / David Whyte

Tell a wise person or else keep silent
for those who do not understand
will mock it right away.
I praise what is truly alive
what longs to be burned to death.

In the calm waters of the love nights
where you were begotten, where you have begotten
a strange feeling creeps over you
as you watch the silent candle burning.

Now you are no longer caught
in the obsession with darkness
and a desire for higher lovemaking
sweeps you upwards.

Distance does not make you falter,
now, arriving in magic, flying
and finally insane for the light
you are the butterfly, and you are gone.

And so long as you have not experienced
this: to die and so to grow
you are only a troubled guest
on the dark earth.

Wild Geese

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes
across the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile, the wild geese, high in the clean blue air
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination
calls to you, like the wild geese, harsh and exciting,
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

The Journey

Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles,
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations--
and though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds
and there was a new voice,
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world
determined to do
the only thing
you could do
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Starfish

In the sea rocks,
in the stone pockets,
under the tide's lip
in water dense as blindness

they slid like sponges, like too many thumbs.
And what I wanted was to draw my hands
back from the water. What I wanted
was to be willing to be afraid.

But I stayed there, crouched
on the stone wall, while the sea
poured its harsh song through the sluices
while I waited for the gritty lightning

of their touch, while I stared down
through the tides leaving
where sometimes I could see them,
their stubborn flesh lounging on my knuckles.

What good does it do to lie
all day in the sun loving what is easy?

It never grew easy, but at last
I grew peaceful all summer
while they bloomed through the water
like flowers, like flecks of an uncertain dream

and I lay on the stone wall
reaching into the darkness
learning, little by little, to love
our only world.

The Man Watching

Rainer Maria Rilke

I can tell by the way the trees beat
after so many dull days, on my worried windowpanes
that a storm is coming,
and I hear the far off fields say things
I can't bear without a friend
I can't love without a sister.

The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
across the woods and across time,
and the world looks as if it has no age:
the landscape like a line from a psalm book
is seriousness, and weight and eternity.

What we choose to fight is so tiny!
And what fights with us is so great!
If only we could let ourselves be dominated
as things do, by some immense storm,
we would grow strong too, and not need names.

When we win it is with small things,
And the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not *want* to be bent by us.
I mean the Angel who appeared
to the wrestlers in the Old Testament.
When the wrestlers sinews
grew long like metal strings
he felt them under his fingers
like chords of deep music.

Whoever was beaten by this Angel
(who often simply declined the fight)
went away proud and strengthened
and great from that harsh hand,
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.
Winning does not tempt that man.
This is how he grows: by being defeated decisively
by constantly greater beings.

It is possible that I am pushing through solid rock
in flintlike layers, as the ore lies, alone;
I am such a long way in I see no way through
and no space: every thing is close to my face,
and everything close to my face is stone.

I don't have much knowledge yet in grief -
so this massive darkness makes me small.
You be the master, make yourself fierce, break in:
then your great transforming will happen to me
and my great grief cry will happen to you.

Rainer Maria Rilke

My life is not this steeply sloping hour
in which you see my hurrying.
Much stands behind me; I stand before it like a tree.
I am only one of many mouths,
and at that, the one that will be still the soonest.

I am the rest between two notes,
that are somehow always in discord
for Death's note wants to climb over -
but in the dark interval, reconciled,
they stay there trembling.
And the song goes on, beautiful.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Just as the winged energy of delight
carried you over many chasms early on,
now raise the daringly imagined arch
holding up the astounding bridges.

Miracle doesn't lie only in the amazing
living through and defeat of danger.
Miracles become miracles in the clear
achievement that is earned.

To work with things is not hubris
when building an association beyond words;
Denser and denser the pattern becomes -
being carried along is not enough.

Take your well disciplined strengths
and stretch them between two
opposing poles. Because inside human beings
is where God learns.

Rainer Maria Rilke, tr. Robert Bly

Only the man who has raised his strings
among the dark ghosts also
should feel his way toward
the endless praise.

Only he who has eaten poppy
with the dead, from their poppy
will not lose even
his most delicate sound.

Even though the images in the pool
seem so blurry:
grasp the main thing

Only in the double kingdom, there
alone, will voices become
undying and tender.

Rainer Maria Rilke

All of you undisturbed cities,
haven't you ever longed for the Enemy?
I would like to see you besieged by him
for ten endless and ground shaking years!

Until you were desperate and mad with suffering
finally in hunger you would feel his weight.
He lies outside the walls like a countryside
and he knows very well how to endure
longer than the ones he comes to visit.

Climb up on your roofs and look out;
His camp is there and his morale doesn't falter
and his numbers do not decrease; he will not grow weaker
and he sends no one into the city to threaten
or promise, and no one to negotiate.

He is the one who breaks down the walls
and when he works, he works in silence.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Sonnets to Orpheus I, 3

A god can do it. But, tell me, how can a man
follow his narrow road through the strings?
A man is split. And where two roads intersect
inside him, no one has built the Singer's Temple.

Writing poetry as we learn from you is not desiring
not wanting anything that can ever be achieved.
To write poetry is to be alive. For a god that's easy.
When, however, are we really alive? And when does he

turn the earth and the stars so they face us?
Yes, you are young and you love and the voice
forces your mouth open - that is lovely, but learn

to forget that breaking into song. It doesn't last.
Real singing is a different movement of air.
air moving around nothing. A breathing in a god. A wind.

Rainer Maria Rilke, translated by Robert Bly

I am too alone in the world, and not alone enough
to make every minute holy.
I am too tiny in this world, and not tiny enough
just to lie before you like a thing,
shrewd and secretive.
I want my own will, and I want simply to be with my will,
as it goes towards action.
And in the silent sometimes hardly moving times
when something is coming near,
I want to be with those who know secret things
or else alone.
I want to be a mirror for your whole body
and I never want to be blind or to be too old
to hold up your heavy and swaying picture.
I want to unfold.
I don't want to stay folded anywhere
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.
I want my grasp of things
true before you. I want to describe myself
like a painting that I looked at
closely for a long time,
like a saying that I finally understood,
like the pitcher that I use every day,
like the face of my mother,
like a ship
that took me safely
through the wildest storm of all.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Faith

I want to write about faith
 about the way the moon rises
 night after night over cold snow

faithful even in its fading from fullness
 slowly becoming that last curving
 and impossible slither of light

before the dark. But I have no faith
 myself. I do not give it the smallest entry.
 Let this then, my small poem,

be the first prayer that opens me to faith.

David Whyte

Tilicho Lake

In this high place it is as simple as this:
 Leave everything you know behind
 step towards the clear surface
 say the old prayer of rough love
 and open both arms.

Those who come with empty hands
 will stare into the lake astonished.
 There in the cold light
 reflecting pure snow -
 the true shape of your own face.

David Whyte

The Opening of Eyes

That day I saw beneath dark clouds
the passing light over the water
and I heard the voice of the world speak out.

I knew then as I had before that life
is no passing memory of what has been,
nor the remaining pages in a book waiting
to be read.
It is the opening of eyes long closed.
It is the vision of far off things seen for the silence they hold
It is the heart after years of secret conversing
speaking out loud in the clear air.
It is Moses in the desert, fallen to his knees
before the lit bush.
It is the man, throwing away his shoes as if to enter heaven
and finding himself astonished, opened at last,
fallen in love with solid ground.

David Whyte

The Well of Grief

Those who will not slip
below the still surface of the well of Grief
turning down through its black water
to the place we cannot breath
will never know the source from which we drink,
the secret water, cold and clear,
nor find in the darkness glimmering
the small round coins
thrown by those who wished for something else.

David Whyte

The Soul Lives Contented

The soul lives contented by listening.
If it wants to change
into the beauty of terrifying shapes
it tries to speak.

That is why you will not sing,
afraid as you are
of who might join with you.

The voice hesitant,
her hand trembling in the dark
for yours.

She touches your cheek
and says your name
at the same time.

The one you refused to say,
over and over,
the one you refused to say.

David Whyte

It is not enough to know.
It is not to follow the inward road
conversing in silence.
It is not enough to stare straight ahead
to gaze at the unborn thinking the silence
belongs to you.

It is not enough to hear
even the tiniest edge of rain.

You must go to the place
where everything waits.
There, when you finally rest,
even one word will do.
One word, or the palm
of your hand turning up
in a gesture of gift.

And now we are truly afraid.
To find the great silence
asking so little.

One word.
One word only.

David Whyte

Checkmate

Borrow the beloved's eyes.
 Look through them and you'll see the beloved's face
 everywhere. No tiredness, no jaded boredom.
 "I shall be your eyes and your hand and your loving."
 Let this happen and things you have hated
 will become helpers.

A certain preacher always pray long and with enthusiasm
 for thieves and muggers who attack people
 on the road. "Let your mercy, Oh, Lord,
 cover their insolence." He doesn't pray for the good
 only for the blatantly cruel.
Why is this? his congregation asks.

Because they have done me such generous favors.
 Every time I turn back toward the things they want
 I run into them. They beat me and leave me nearly dead
 in the road. Then I realize again that the things
 they want are not the things I want.
 They keep me on the spiritual path.
 That is why I honor them and pray for them.

Those that make you return, for whatever reason,
 to God's solitude, be grateful to them.
 Worry about the others
 who give you delicious comforts that keep you from prayer.
 Friends are enemies sometimes,
 and enemies friends.

There is an animal called an ushghur, a porcupine.
 When you beat it with a stick, it extends its quills
 and gets bigger.
 The soul is a porcupine, made strong by stick b eating.
 So a prophet's soul is especially afflicted
 because it has to become so powerful.

A hide is soaked in tanning liquor and becomes leather.
 If the tanner didn't rub in the acid
 the hide would become foul-smelling and rotten.

The soul is a newly skinned hide, bloody and gross.
 Work on it with manual discipline
 and the bitter tanning acid of grief
 and you will become lovely and very strong.

When you do things from your soul
you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

When actions come from another place
the feeling disappears.

Don't let others lead you. They may be blind,
or worse, vultures. Reach for the rope
of God. And what is that?

Putting aside self-will.

Because of willfulness people sit in jail.
From willfulness the trapped bird's wing is tied.
From willfulness the fish sizzles in the skillet.

The anger of police is willfulness. You've seen
a magistrate inflict visible punishment.
Now see the invisible.

If you could leave selfishness, you would see
how you have been tortured.

We are born and live inside black water in a well.
How could we know what an open field of sunlight is?

Don't insist on going where you think you want to go.
Ask the way to the Spring.

Your living pieces will form a harmony.

There is a moving palace that floats in the air,
with balconies and clear water running in every part of it,
infinity everywhere, yet contained under a single tent.

Rumi

"You must not do anything because it is right, but because it is your wish. Right is a word and wrong is a word but the sun shines in the morning and the dew falls in the dusk without thinking of these words, which have no meaning. The bee flies to the flower and the seed goes abroad and is happy. Is that right, Shepherd girl? It is wrong also...

I want you to forget right and wrong; to be as happy as the beasts, as careless as the flowers and the birds. To live to the depths of your soul as well as to the heights. Truly there are stars in the heights, and they will be a garland for your forehead. But the depths are equal to the heights. Wondrous deep are the depths, very fertile is the lowest deep. There are stars there also, brighter than the stars on high. The name of the heights is wisdom and the name of the depths is love. How shall they come together and be fruitful if you do not plunge deeply and fearlessly. Wisdom is the spirit and the wings of the spirit. Love is the shaggy beast that goes down. Gallantly he dives, below thought, beyond wisdom, to rise again as high above these as he had first descended. Wisdom is righteous and clean, but love is unclean and holy. I sing of the beast and of the descent: the great unclean purging itself in fire; the thought that is not born in the measure or the ice or the head, but in the feet and the hot blood and the pulse of fury. The crown of life is not lodged in the sun: the wise gods have buried it deeply where the thoughtful will not find it, not the good: but the Gay Ones, the Adventurous Ones, the Careless Plungers, they will bring it to the wise and astonish them. All things are seen in the light - how shall we value that which is easy to see? But the precious things which are hidden, they will be more precious for our search: they will be beautiful with our sorrow, they will be noble because of our desire for them. Come away with me, Shepherd Girl, through the fields and we will be careless and happy and we will leave thought to find us when it can, for that is the duty of thought and it is more anxious to discover us than we are to be found."

So Caitlin Ni Murrachu arose and went with him through the fields, and she did not go with him because of love, nor because his words had been understood by her, but only because he was naked and unashamed.

- from *The Crock of Gold*
by James Stephens

Practice [edited 5/2018]

Not the high mountain monastery
I had hoped for, the real
face of my spiritual practice
is this:
the flush of my cheek
when I tell you the truth, my
shriek in the night when I think
I'm alone, the trembling
I can't hide as I reach out
through the years of overcoming
to touch what I had hoped
I would never need again.

--Kim Rosen

In Impossible Darkness

Do you know how
the caterpillar
turns?

Do you remember
what happens
inside a cocoon?

You liquefy.

There in the thick black
of your self-spun womb,
void as the moon before waxing,

you melt

(as Christ did
for three days
in the tomb)

conceiving
in impossible darkness
the sheer
inevitability
of wings.

--Kim Rosen

I know the truth! All other truths are through!
People on earth don't have to fight one another.
Come, look at the evening. Come look! Soon it will be night.
What is the problem – poets, lovers, Generals?

Already the wind is quiet, already the earth is dressed in dew,
The storm of stars in the sky will soon be still,
And we'll all sleep together under the earth,
We who never let each other sleep above it.

Marina Tsvetaeva October 3, 1915
Translation by Sonja Franeta and Kim Rosen

FIRE IN THE EARTH

And we know, when Moses was told
in the way he was told,
"Take off your shoes", he grew pale from that simple

reminder of fire in the dusty earth.
He never recovered
his complicated way of loving again

and was free to love in the same way
the fire licking at his heels loved him.
As if the lion earth could roar

and take him in one movement.
Every step he took
from there was carefully placed.

Everything he said mattered as if he knew
the constant witness of the ground
and remembered his own face in the dust

the moment before revelation.
Since then thousands have felt
the same immobile tongue with which he tried to speak.

Like the moment you too saw, for the first time,
your own house turned to ashes.
Everything consumed so the road could open again.

Your entire presence in your eyes
and the world turning slowly
into a single branch of flame.

-- David Whyte

SAY YES QUICKLY

Forget your life! Say, *God is great*. Get up.
You think you know what time it is. It's time to pray.
You've carved so many little figurines, too many!
Don't knock on any random door like a beggar.
Reach your long hand out to another door, beyond where you go
on the street, the street where everyone says, "How are you?"
And no one says, "How aren't you?"

Tomorrow you'll see what you've broken and torn tonight
thrashing in the dark. Inside you there is an artist
you don't know about, and she's not interested
in how things look different in moonlight.

If you are with us unfaithfully,
you are doing terrible damage.
If you've opened your love to God's love
you're helping people you don't know
and have never seen.

Is what I say true? Say yes quickly, if you know it,
if you've known it since before the beginning of the universe.

--Rumi

From "Dying"

by Rumi, tr. by Coleman Barks

...The prophet Muhammed was asked, "*How long*
does it take to be born again?"

He would answer without speaking,
with the eloquence of his inner state,
Die before you die.

Until you become a rebirth,
you won't know what that is.

It is the same with anything.
You don't understand until you are
what you are trying to understand.

Become reason and you'll know its perfectly.
Become love and be a burning wick
at the center of yourself.

...Everybody in the world is dying.
Everybody is in a death agony.

Listen to what anyone says
as though it were the last words
of a father to his son.

Listen with that much compassion,
and you'll never feel jealousy
or anger again.

They say, "Everything that's coming will come."
Understand, its here right now!

The friend you're talking to is speaking
through his death-rattle, this moment.

If you're too self-absorbed for this kind of listening,
remember there is a Great Incapacitator.

God gave you this inability for some reason.
Ask why. Say, "I have tried,
but I'm in a losing business.

I did what you warned me not to.
I claimed not to love the world's images,
but I've been worshipping them.

Should I think more about death
than about God?"

In autumn, the source of the dead leaves
is the buried, live root.

O Origin of Dead Leaves, for years
you've beat the drum to tell me.

Only now that I'm dying
do I realize that I'm going to die!

Death's throat is raw and exhausted
with shouting at me. The dead-drum
is split and broken from being struck
with such astounding force.

I've been so woven into the mesh
of my trivial errands, that only now
do I begin to hear the mystery
of dying everywhere.

I talk to my inner lover and I say why
 such a rush?
 We know there is some sort of spirit that loves
 the birds and the animals and the ants
 perhaps the same one that gave radiance to you
 in your mother's womb.
 Is it logical you should be walking around entirely
 orphaned now?
 The truth is you turned away yourself
 and decided to go into the dark alone.
 Now you are tangled up in others and have forgotten
 what you once knew.
 That is why everything you do has some weird failure in it.
 --Kabir, translated by Robert Bly

Are you looking for me? I am in the next seat.
 My shoulder is against yours.

You will not find me in stupas nor in indian shrine rooms,
 not in synagogues nor in cathedrals,
 not in kirtans, nor masses nor in winding your own legs around your neck nor in eating
 nothing but vegetables.
 When you really look for me, you will see me instantly.
 You will find me in the tiniest house of time.

Kabir says: Student, what is God?
 He is the breath inside the breath.
 --Kabir translated by Robert Bly

I don't know what sort of God we have been talking about.
 The caller calls out in a loud voice to the Holy One at dusk.
 Why? Surely the Holy one is not deaf!
 He hears the delicate anklets that ring on the feet of an insect as it walks.

Go over and over your beads.
 Paint weird designs on your forehead.
 Wear your hair matted, long and ostentatious.

But when deep inside you hide a loaded gun,
 how can you have God?

--Kabir translated by Robert Bly (tweaked by Kim)

I said to the wanting creature inside me, what is this river
you want to cross?

There is no one on the river road, and no road.

Do you see anyone moving about on that bank, or resting?

There is no river at all, and no boat and no boatman!

There is no tow rope and no one to pull it.

And there is no earth, no sky, no time, no bank and no ford!

And there is no body and no mind!

Do you really believe there is some place that will
make the soul less thirsty?

In that great absence, you will find nothing.

Be strong then and enter into your own body.

There you have a solid place

for your feet.

Think about it carefully!

Don't go off someplace else!

Kabir says this: Just throw away all thoughts

of imaginary things

and stand firm in that which you are.

--Kabir

Maybe

by Mary Oliver

Sweet Jesus, talking
his melancholy madness,
stood up in the boat
and the sea lay down,

silky and sorry.
So everybody was saved
that night.
But you know how it is

when something
different crosses
the threshold -- the uncles
mutter together,

the women walk away,
the young brother begins
to sharpen his knife.
Nobody knows what the soul is.

It comes and goes
like the wind over the water --
sometimes, for days,
you don't think of it.

Maybe, after the sermon,
after the multitude was fed,
one or two of them felt
the soul slip forth

like a tremor of pure sunlight
before exhaustion,
that wants to swallow everything,
gripped their bones and left them

miserable and sleepy,
as they are now, forgetting
how the wind tore at the sails
before he rose and talked to it --

tender and luminous and demanding
as he always was --
a thousand times more frightening
than the killer storm.

Love Dogs

One night a man was crying
 "Allah, Allah!"

His lips grew sweet with the praising
 until a cynic said,
 "So! I have heard you
 calling out, but have you ever
 gotten any response?"

The man had no answer to that.
 He quit praising and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,
 in a thick, green foliage.
 "Why did you stop praising?"
 "Because I've never heard anything back."
 "This longing
 you express *is* the return message."

The grief you cry out from
 draws you toward union.

Your pure sadness
 that wants help
 is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.
 That whining is the connection.

There are love-dogs
 no one knows the names of.

Give your life
 to be one of them.

--Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

There is a community of the Spirit.
Join it, and feel the delight
of walking in the noisy street,
and being the noise.

Drink all your passion
and be a disgrace.

Close both eyes
to see with the Other Eye.

Open your hands,
if you want to be held.

Consider what you've been doing!
Why do you stay
with such a mean-spirited
and dangerous partner?

For the security of having food, admit it!
Here's a better arrangement:
Give up this life,
and get a hundred new lives.

Quit acting like a wolf, and feel
the Shepherd's Love filling you.

At night, your Beloved wanders.
Don't take pain-killers.

Tonight, no consolations.
And don't eat.

Close your mouth against food.
Taste the Lover's mouth in yours.

You moan, "But she left me. He left me."
Twenty more will come.

Be empty of worrying.
Think of Who Created Thought!

Why do you stay in prison
when the door is so wide open?

Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.
Live in Silence.

Flow down and down in always
widening rings of Being.

--Rumi
translated by Coleman Barks

A Mouse and a Frog

A mouse and a Frog meet every morning on the riverbank.
They sit in a nook of the ground and talk.

Each morning, the second they see each other,
they open easily, telling stories and dreams and secrets,
empty of any fear or suspicious holding back.

To watch and listen to those two
is to understand how, as it's written,
sometimes when two beings come together,
Christ becomes visible.

The mouse starts laughing out a story he hasn't thought of
in five years, and the telling of it might take five years!
There's no blocking the speechflow-river-running-
all-carrying momentum that true intimacy is.

Bitterness doesn't have a chance
with those two.

The God-messenger, Khidr, touches a roasted fish.
It leaps off the grill back into the water.

Friend sits by Friend, and the tablets appear.
They read the mysteries
off each others foreheads.

But one day the mouse complains, "There are times
when I want sohbet, and you're out in the water,
jumping around where you can't hear me.

We meet at this appointed time,
but the text says, *Lovers pray constantly.*

Once a day, once a week, five times an hour
is not enough. Fish like we are
need the ocean around us!"

Do camel bell say, Let's meet back here Thursday night?
Reditulous. They jingle
together continuously
talking as the camel walks.

Do you pay regular visits to yourself?
Don't argue or answer rationally.

Let us die,
and dying, reply.
--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

Cry Out in Your Weakness

A dragon was pulling a bear into its terrible mouth.
 A courageous man went and rescued the bear.
 There are such helpers in the world, who rush to save
 anyone who creies out. Like Mercy itself,
 they run toward the screaming.

And they can't be bought off.
 If you were to say to one of those, "Why did you come
 so quickly?" he or she would say, "Because I heard
 your helplessness.

Where lowland is,
 that's where water goes. All medicine wants
 is pain to cure.

And don't just ask for one mercy.
 Let them flood in. Let the sky open under your feet.
 Take the cotton out of your ears, the cotton
 of consolations, so you can hear the sphere-music.

Push the hair out of your eyes.
 Blow the phlegm from you nose
 and from your brain.

Let the wind breeze through.
 Leave no residue in yourself from that bilious fever.
 Take the cure for impotence,
 that your manhood may shoot forth
 and a hundred new beings come of your coming.

Tear the binding from around the foot
 of your soul, and let it race around the track
 in front of the crowd. Loosen the know of greed
 so tight on your neck. Accept your new good luck.

Give your weakness
 to one who helps.

Crying out loud and weeping are great resources.
 A nursing mother, all she does
 is wait to hear her child.

Just a little beginning-whimper,
 and she's there.

God created the child, that is, your wanting,
So that it might cry out, so that milk might come.

Cry out! Don't be stolid and silent
with your pain. Lament! And let the milk
of loving flow into you.

The hard rain and wind
are the ways the cloud has
of taking care of us.

Be patient.
Respond to every call
that excites your spirit.

Ignore those that make you fearful
and sad, that degrade you
back toward disease and death.

--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

Birdwings

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror
up to wear you're bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead
here's the face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,
you would be paralysed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting
and expanding,
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated
as birdwings.

--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

Love after Love

The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door,
in your own mirror,
and each will smile at the other's welcome
and say, sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was your self.
Give wine. Give bread.
Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.

--Derek Walcott

Friend, please tell me what I can do about this world
I hold to, and keep spinning out!

I gave up sewn clothes, and wore a robe,
but I noticed on day the cloth was well woven.

So I bought some burlap, but I still
throw it elegantly over my left shoulder.

I pulled back my sexual longings,
and now I discover that I'm angry a lot.

I gave up rage, and now I notice
that I am greedy all day.

I worked hard at
dissolving the greed,
and now I am proud of myself.

When the mind wants to break its link with the world
it still holds on to one thing.

Kabir says: Listen my friend,
there are very few that find the path!

Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop

I met the bishop on the road
and much said he and I:
"Those breasts are flat and fallen now,
those veins will soon be dry --
live in a heavenly kingdom
not in some foul sty!"

"Fair and foul are near of kin
and fair needs foul," I cried.
"My friends are gone
but that's a truth that bed
nor grave denied,
learned in bodily lowliness
and in the heart's pride.

A woman can be proud and stiff
when on love intent
but love has pitched its mansion
in the place of excrement
for nothing can be whole or soul
that has not been rent."

--Yeats

Roses

The last dollar went, then the last dime. Then I went out into the dunes behind the harbor, where the roses cover the berms and also grow thickly and randomly on the slopes of pale sand, and are lively with bees, and a deep honey-smell, and I lay down.

I could see the ocean. Far out it was shaking with light, and boats with their white sails full of the invisible wind moved back and forth. All along the shore the water rolled and rolled its bales of silver.

After a while I got up, as from the dead -- it was that wonderful to be, at last, entirely poor, and happy.

I found some weeds I could eat. I found some wild washed boards, could they not make a simple house?

Some laughing gulls flew by, with their perfect black faces, their coral-colored legs.

In a sudden crease of hills there was a green place, like a salad. At its center a little freshwater pond, from which I drank.

The sun shone.

*

Oh Jesus, poor boy, when was it you saw, clearly and irrevocably, just where you were headed?

-- Mary Oliver--Mary Oliver

I have lived on the lip
of insanity, wanting to know reasons,
knocking on a door. It opens.
I've been knocking from the inside!
--Rumi

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

Listen to the story told by the reed
of being separated:
Since I was cut from the reed-bed
I have made this crying sound.
Anyone separated from someone he loves
understands what I say.
Anyone pulled from a source
longs to go back.
At any gathering I am there,
mingling in the laughing and the grieving
a friend to each.
But few will hear the secrets
hidden within the notes -
no ears for that.
Body flowing out of spirit,
spirit, flowing from body
No concealing that mixing.
But its not given us to see the soul.
The reed flute is fire
not wind.
Be that empty.
Hear the love-fire tangled in the notes
as bewilderment melts into wine.
The reed is a friend to all
who want the fabric torn
and drawn away.
The reed is hurt and salve
combining
intimacy and longing for intimacy
one song
a disastrous surrender
and a fine love
together.
The one who secretly hears this is senseless.
A tone has one customer:
the ear.
If a sugarcane flute had no effect
it would not have been able to make sugar
in the reed-bed.
Whatever sound it makes is for everyone.
Days full of wanting
let them go by
without worrying that they do.
Stay where you are
inside this pure hollow note.

--Rumi

Dance, when you're broken open.
 Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.
 Dance, in the middle of the fighting.
 Dance, in your blood.
 Dance, when you're perfectly free.

Struck, the dancers hear a tambourine inside them
 as a wave turns to foam at its very top.

Begin.

Maybe you don't hear that tambourine
 or the tree leaves clapping time.

Close the ears on your head
 that listen mostly to lies and cynical jokes.
 There are other things to see and hear.
 Dance music
 and a brilliant city inside the soul.

God said of Muhammed:
 He is an ear. He was wholly
 ear and eye. And we are refreshed
 and fed by that
 as an infant boy is
 at his mother's breast.

--Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

I called through your door,
 "The mystics are gathering
 in the street. Come out!"

"Leave me alone.
 I'm sick."

"I don't care if you're dead!
 Jesus is here and he wants
 to resurrect somebody!"

--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

The Core of Masculinity

The core of masculinity does not derive
from being male,
nor friendliness from those who console.

Your old grandmother says, "Maybe you shouldn't
go to school. You look a little pale."

Run when you hear that.
A father's stern slaps are better.

Your bodily soul wants comforting.
The severe father wants spiritual clarity.

He scolds but eventually
leads you into the open.

Pray for a tough instructor
to hear and act and stay within you.

We have been busy accumulating solace.
Make us afraid of how we were.

--Rumi (trans. Coleman Barks)

A Homecoming

One faith is bondage. Two
are free. In the trust
of old love cultivation shows
a dark and graceful wilderness
at it's heart. Wild
in that wilderness, we roam
the distance of our faith;
safe beyond the bounds
of what we know. O love
open. Show me
my country. Take me home.

-Wendell Berry

Creation started -- if it ever started, and of course it never started; so when I say started, it is again squeezing a concept into human language for which there is no other word. Try to feel this truth! Creation "started" with the Divine Spark. The Spark may have been tiny in an immense vacuum. Yet in this tiny Spark was the utmost of Divine Reality, comprising everything of consciousness, the most powerful creative energy, the most incredible wisdom and love. The infinite goodness of the Divine Creator made it his aim or plan to gradually fill this vacuum, a vacuum of nothingness, the Spark being the All. Gradually the Spark began to spread and slowly interpenetrated the vacuum: the vacuum in its darkness and nothingness; the Spark in its incredible light, its glowing aliveness and allness; the vacuum an infinity in the outer regions, the Spark an infinity of the inner regions...

The Eternal Spark, its inner infinite regions, spreads and spreads inexorably. Perhaps you can visualize a form, a picture: a thick golden sparkling "liquid", teeming with energy and glorious creative potentials, all seeds contained it, brilliant, effervescent, alive, intensely conscious endowed with every conceivable and inconceivable power to create worlds, beings -- slowly spreading and spreading, aiming to fill the apparently infinite nothingness. Yet this is the All, in its infinity and eternity, filling this vacuum inexorably.

Since the All is such vibrant consciousness and powerful energy and aliveness, it must be the ultimate that cannot help but penetrate the entire vacuum, until there is no longer a vacuum. The outer region will be entirely filled with the inner world of light and life... (p. 2-3, lecture #203)

i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any - lifted from the no
of all nothing - human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
the eyes of my eyes are opened)

- e.e. cummings

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing
the day turns, the trees move.

from Sabbaths by Wendell Berry

King of the River

by Stanley Kunitz

If the water were clear enough,
if the water were still,
but the water is not clear,
the water is not still,
you would see yourself,
slipped out of your skin,
nosing upstream,
slapping, thrashing,
tumbling over the rocks
till you paint them
with your belly's blood:
Finned Ego,
yard of muscle that coils,
uncoils.

If the knowledge were given you,
but it is not given,
for the membrane is clouded
with self-deceptions
and the iridescent image swims
through a mirror that flows,
you would surprise yourself
in that other flesh,
heavy with milt,
bruised, battering toward the dam
that lips the orgiastic pool.

*Come. Bathe in these waters.
Increase and die.*

If the power were granted you
to break out of your cells,
but the imagination fails
and the doors of the senses close
on the child within,
you would dare to be changed,
as you are changing now,
into the shape you dread
beyond the merely human.
A dry fire eats you.
Fat drips from your bones.
The flutes of your gills discolor.
You have become a ship for parasites.

The great clock of your life
is slowing down,
and the small clocks run wild.
For this you were born.
You have cried to the wind
and heard the wind's reply:
"I did not choose the way,
the way chose me."
You have tasted the fire on your tongue
till it is swollen black
with a prophetic joy:
"Burn with me!
The only music is time,
The only dance is love."

If the heart were pure enough,
but it is not pure,
you would admit
that nothing compels you
any more, nothing
at all abides,
but nostalgia and desire,
that two way ladder
between heaven and hell.
On the threshold
of the last mystery,
at the brute absolute hour,
you have looked into the eyes
of your creature self,
which are glazed with madness,
and you say
he is not broken but endures,
limber and firm
in the state of his shining,
forever inheriting his salt kingdom,
from which he is banished
forever.

One Art

by Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master:
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is not disaster.

Lose something everyday. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

--Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) a disaster.

The First Elegy

from *Duino Elegies* by Rilke, trans. Stephen Mitchell

Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
hierarchies? And even if one of them pressed me
suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence. For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.

And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note
of my dark sobbing. Ah, whom can we ever turn to
in our need? Not angels, not humans,
and already the knowing animals are aware
that we are not really at home in
our interpreted world. Perhaps there remains for us
some tree on a hillside, which every day we can't take
into our vision; there remains for us yesterday's street
and the loyalty of a habit so much at ease
when it stayed with us that it moved in and never left.

Oh and night. There is night when a wind full of infinite space
gnaws at our faces. Whom would it not remain for -- that longed-after
mildly disillusioning presence, which the solitary heart
meets so painfully. Is it any less difficult for lovers?
But they keep on using each other to hide their fate.

Don't you know *yet*? Fling the emptiness out of your arms
into the spaces we breathe; perhaps the birds
will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.

Yes -- the springtimes needed you. Often a star
was waiting for you to notice it. A wave rolled towards you
out of the distant past, or as you walked
under an open window, a violin
yielded itself to your hearing. All this was mission.
But could you accomplish it? Weren't you always
distracted by expectation, as if every event
announced a beloved? (Where can you find a place
to keep her, with all the huge strange thoughts inside you
coming and going and often staying all night.)

But when you feel longing, sing of women in love;
for their famous passion is still not immortal.
Sing of women abandoned and desolate (you envy them, almost)
who could love so much more purely than those who were gratified.
Begin again and again with the never-attainable praising;
remember: the hero lives on; even his downfall was
merely a pretext for achieving his final birth.
But Nature, spent and exhausted, takes lovers back

into herself, as if there were not enough strength
to create them a second time. Have you imagined
Gaspara Stampa intensely enough so that any girl
deserted by her lover might be inspired
by that fierce example of soaring, objectless love
and might say to herself, "Perhaps I can be like her"?
Shouldn't this most ancient of sufferings finally grow
fruitful for us? Isn't it time we lovingly
freed ourselves of the beloved and, quivering, endured:
as the arrow endures the bowstring's tension, so that
gathered in the snap of release, it can be more than
itself. For there is no place we can remain.

Voices. Voices. Listen, my soul, as only
the saints have listened: until the gigantic call lifted them
off the ground; yet they kept on, impossibly,
kneeling and didn't notice at all:
so complete was their listening. Not that you could endure
God's voice -- far from it. But listen to the voice of the wind
and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence.
It is murmuring towards you now from those who died young.
Didn't their fate, whenever you stepped into a church
in Naples or Rome, quietly come to address you?
Or high up, some eulogy entrusted you with a mission,
as, last year, on the plaque in Santa Maria Formosa.
What they ask of me is that I gently remove the appearance
of injustice about their death -- which at times
slightly hinders their souls from proceeding onward.

Of course it is strange to inhabit the earth no longer,
to give up customs one barely had time to learn,
not to see roses and other promising Things
in terms of a human future; no longer to be
who one was in infinitely anxious hands; to leave
even one's own first name behind, forgetting it
as easily as a child abandons a broken toy.
Strange to no longer desire one's desires. Strange
to see meanings that clung together once, floating away
in every direction. And being dead is hard work
and full of retrieval before one can gradually feel
a trace of eternity. -- Though the living are wrong to believe
in the too-sharp distinctions which they themselves have created.
Angels (they say) do not know whether it is the living
they are moving among, or the dead. The eternal torrent
whirls all ages along in it, through both realms,
forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.

In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:

they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys, as gently as children
outgrow the soft breasts of their mothers. But we, who do need
such great mysteries, we for whom grief is so often
the source of our spirit's growth--: could we exist without *them*?
Is the legend meaningless that tells how, in the lament for Linus,
the daring first notes of song pierced through the barren numbness;
and then in the startled space which a youth as lovely as a god
had suddenly left forever, the Void felt for the first time
that harmony which now enraptures and comforts and helps us.

Prayer

by Marie Howe

Someone or something is leaning close to me now
trying to tell me the one true story of my life:

one note,
low as a bass drum, beaten over and over:

It's beginning summer,
and the man I love has forgotten my smell

the cries I made when he touched me, and my laughter
when he picked me up

and carried me, still laughing, and laid me down,
among the scattered daffodils on the dining room table.

And Jane is dead,
and I want to go where she went,
where my brother went,

and whoever it is that whispered to me

when I was a child in my father's bed is come back now:
and I can't stop hearing:

This is the way it is,
the way it always was and will be --

beaten over and over -- panicking on street corners,
or crouched in the back of taxicabs,

afraid I'll cry out in jammed traffic, and no one will know me or
know where to bring me.

There is, I almost remember,
another story:

It runs alongside this one like a brook beside a train.
The sparrows know it; the grass rises with it.

The wind moves through the highest tree branches without
seeming to hurt them.

Tell me.
Who was I when I used to call your name?

The Sonnets to Orpheus I,3

A god can do it. But, tell me, how can a human
follow him through the lyre's narrow strings?
Our mind is split. And where two roads
intersect inside us, there stands no temple for contemplation.

Singing, as we learn from you, is not desiring,
not striving towards something that can be achieved.
Singing is being. Simple for a god.
But when do we simply *be*? And when does *he*

pour through us the earth and the stars?
It is *not* in your passion, young one, though the voice
in your mouth is unstoppable -- learn

to forget that outbreak of song. It doesn't last.
Real singing is a different breath.
A breath out of nothing. The air inside a god. A wind.

--Rainer Maria Rilke, version by Kim Rosen

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean --
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down --
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

--Mary Oliver

Oceans

I have a feeling that my boat
has struck, down there in the depths,
against a great thing.

And nothing
happens! Nothing . . . Silence . . . Waves . . .

--- Nothing happens? Or has everything happened,
and are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?

--- Juan R. Jiminez
translated by Robert Bly

The Gate

I had no idea that the gate I would step through
to finally enter this world

would be the space my brother's body made. He was
a little taller than me: a young man

but grown, himself by then,
done at twenty-eight, having folded every sheet,

rinsed every glass he would ever rinse under the cold
and running water.

This is what you have been waiting for, he used to say to me.
And I'd say, What?

And he'd say, This -- holding up my cheese and mustard sandwich.
And I'd say, What?

And he'd say, This, sort of looking around.

---Marie Howe

Undressing

Learn the alchemy
true human beings know.
The moment you accept what troubles you've been given,
the door will open.

Welcome difficulty as a familiar comrad.
Joke with torment brought by the Friend.
Sorrows are the rags of old clothes and jackets
that serve to cover, then are taken off.

That undressing
and the beautiful naked body underneath,
is the sweetness that comes after grief.
The hurt you embrace
becomes joy.
Call it to your arms where it can change.

--Rumi/Coleman Barks

The Silkworm

A silk worm eating leaves makes a cocoon.
Each of us weaves a chamber of leaves and sticks.
Silk worms begin to truly exist
as they disappear inside that room.

Without legs we fly.

When I stop speaking,
this poem will close
and open its silent wings.

--Rumi/Coleman Barks

The Idea of Order at Key West

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
 The water never formed to mind or voice,
 Like a body wholly body, fluttering
 Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
 Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
 That was not ours although we understood,
 Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

The sea was not a mask. No more was she.
 The song and water were not medleyed sound
 Even if what she sang was what she heard,
 Since what she sang was uttered word by word.
 It may be that in all her phrases stirred
 The grinding water and the gasping wind;
 But it was she and not the sea we heard.

For she was the maker of the song she sang.
 The ever-hooded tragic gestured sea
 Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
 Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
 It was the spirit that we sought and knew
 That we should ask this often as she sang.

If it was only the dark voice of the sea
 That rose, or even colored by many waves;
 If it was only the outer voice of sky
 And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
 However clear, it would have been deep air,
 The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
 Repeated in a summer without end
 And sound alone. But it was more than that,
 More even than her voice, and ours, among
 The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
 Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
 On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
 Of sky and sea.

It was her voice that made
 The sky acutest at its vanishing.
 She measured to the hour its solitude.
 She was the single artificer of the world
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,
 Whatever self it had, became the self
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,
 As we beheld her striding there alone,
 Knew that there never was a world for her
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.

Ramon Fernandez, tell me, if you know,
Why, when the singing ended and we turned
Toward the town, tell why the glassy lights,
The lights in the fishing boats at anchor there,
As the night descended, tilting in the air,
Mastered the night and portioned out the sea,
Fixing emblazoned zones and fiery poles
Arranging, deepening, enchanting night.

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

--Wallace Stevens

For who in his own back yard
Has not seen a smiling secret
He cannot quote. For the bard
Was sober when he wrote:
This world of fact we love
Is unsubstantial stuff.
All the rest is silence
On the other side of the wall.
And the silence, ripeness.
And the ripeness, all.

Shakespeare????

Psalm 1

Blessed are the man and women
who have grown beyond their greed
and have found a way through their hatred
and no longer nourish illusions.

But they delight in the way things are
so their hearts are open day and night.

They are like trees planted near flowing rivers,
which bear fruit when they are ready.

Their leaves will not fall or wither.
Everything they do will succeed.

from The Enlightened Heart
translated by Stephen Mitchell
(with a little help from Kim)

Dark August

So much rain, so much life like the swollen sky
on this black August. My sister, the sun,
broods in her yellow room and won't come out.

Everything goes to hell; the mountains fume
like a kettle, rivers overrun; still,
she will not rise and turn off the rain.

She's in her room, fondling old things,
my poems, turning her album. Even if thunder falls
like a crash of plates from the sky,

she does not come out.

Don't you know I love you but am hopeless
at fixing the rain? But I am learning slowly

to love the dark days, the steaming hills,
the air with gossiping mosquitoes,
and to sip the medicine of bitterness,

so that when you emerge, my sister,
parting the beads of the rain,
with your forehead of flowers and eyes of forgiveness,

all will not be as it was, but it will be true
(you see they will not let me love
as I want), because, my sister, then

I would have learnt to love black days like bright ones,
the black rain, the white hills, when once
I loved only my happiness and you.

--Derek Walcott

Through the gateway of feeling your weakness lies your strength;
Through the gateway of feeling your pain lies your pleasure and joy;
Through the gateway of feeling your fear lies your security and safety;
Through the gateway of feeling your loneliness lies
your capacity to have fulfillment, love and companionship;
Through the gateway of feeling your hate lies your capacity to love;
Through the gateway of feeling your hopelessness lies
your true and justified hope;
Through the gateway of accepting the lacks of your childhood
lies your fulfillment now.

- Pathwork Lecture # 190

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;

As tumbled over rim in roundy wells

Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's

Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:

Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;

Selves -- goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,

Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

I say more: the just man justices;

Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;

Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is --

Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,

Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his

To the Father through the features of men's faces.

--Gerard Manley Hopkins

God's Grandeur
Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like a shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not wreck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs --
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Quietness

Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

Inside this new love, die.
Your way begins on the other side.
Become the sky.
Take an ax to the prison wall.
Escape.
Walk out like somebody suddenly born
into color .
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side. Die,
and be quiet. Quietness is the surest sign
that you've died.
Your old life was a frantic running
from silence.

The speechless full moon
comes out now.

WHY CLING*Rumi*

Why cling to one life
till it is soiled and ragged?

The sun dies and dies
squandering a hundred lives
every instant

God has decreed life for you
and He will give
another and another and another.

The Panther

From seeing and seeing the seeing has become so exhausted
it no longer sees anything anymore.

The world is made of bars, a hundred thousand
bars, and behind the bars, nothing.

The lithe swinging of that rhythmical easy stride
that slowly circles down to a single point
is like a dance of energy around a hub,
in which a great will stands stunned and numbed.

At times the curtains of the eye lift
without a sound -- then a shape enters,
slips through the tightened silence of the shoulders,
reaches the heart and dies.

Rilke, tr. Robert Bly

With the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree
Not seen because not looked for
But heard, half-heard in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always --
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything).
And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

-- T.S. Eliot
from "Little Gidding"

All your anxiety comes from your desire for harmony.
Seek disharmony and you will gain peace.
--Rumi

Don't surrender your loneliness so quickly
Let it cut more deep
Let it ferment and season you as few human
or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight
has made my eyes so soft, my voice so tender,
my need for God absolutely clear.

Hafiz/Landinski

Which is worth more, a crowd of thousands,
or your own genuine solitude?
Freedom, or power over an entire nation?

A little while alone in your room
will prove more valuable than anything else
that could ever be given you.

Rumi/Barks

Zero Circle

Be helpless, dumbfounded,
unable to say yes or no.

Then a stretcher will come from Grace
to gather us up.

We are too dull-eyed to see that beauty.
If we say we can, we're lying.

If we say No, we don't see it,
that No will behead us
and shut tight our window onto spirit.

So let us rather not be sure of anything,
beside ourselves, and only that, so
miraculous beings come running to help.

Crazed, lying in a zero circle, mute,
we shall be saying finally,
with tremendous eloquence, Lead us.

When we have totally surrendered to that beauty,
we shall be a mighty kindness.

Rumi/Barks

This We Have Now

This we have now
is not imagination.

This is not
grief or joy.

Not a judging state,
or an elation,
or sadness.

Those come
and go.

This is the presence
that doesn't.

It's dawn, Husam,
here in the splendor of coral,
inside the Friend, the simple truth
of what Hallaj said.

What else could human beings want?

When grapes turn to wine,
they're wanting
this.

When the night sky pours by,
it's really a crowd of beggars
and they all want some of this!

This that we are now
created the body, cell by cell,
like bees building a honeycomb.

The human body and the universe
grew from this, not this
from the universe and the human body.

No Flag

I used to want buyers for my words.
Now I wish someone would buy me away from words.

I've made alot of charmingly profound images,
scenes with Abraham and Abraham's father, Azar,
who was also famous for icons.

I'm so tired of what I've been doing.

Then one image without form came,
and I quit.

Look for someone else to tend the shop.
I'm out of the image making business.

Finally I know the freedom
of madness.

A random image arrives. I scream,
"Get out!" It disintegrates.

Only love.
Only the holder the flag fits into,
and wind. No flag.

Rumi/Barks

from Proverbs and Tiny Songs

by Antonio Machado / tr. Robert Bly

1

Why should we call
these accidental furrows roads?...
Everyone who moves on, walks
like Jesus on the sea.

6

You walking, your footsteps *are*
the road, and nothing else;
there is no road, walker,
you make the road by walking.
By walking you make the road,
and when you look backward,
you see the path that you
never will step on again.
Walker, there is no road.
Only wind trails in the sea.

7

I love Jesus who to us said
Heaven and earth will pass away.
When Heaven and earth have passed away,
my word will still remain.
What was your word, Jesus?
Love? Forgiveness? Affection?
All your words were
one word: wakeup.

11

All things die and all things live forever;
But our task is to die,
to die making roads,
roads over the sea.

12

To die... To fall like a drop
of sea-water into the immense sea?
Or to be what I have never been:
one man without shadow, without dream,
a man all alone, walking
with no road, with no mirror?

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you -- Nobody -- Too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise -- you know!

How dreary -- to be -- Somebody!
How public -- like a Frog --
To tell one's name -- the livelong June --
To an admiring Bog!

--Emily Dickinson

Birth

When they were wild,
when they were not yet human,
when they could have been anything --
I was on the other side, ready with milk to lure them,
and their father, too, each name a net in his hands.

---Louise Erdich

St. Francis and the Sow

The bud
 stands for all things,
 even for those things that don't flower,
 because everything flowers, from within, of self blessing,
 though sometimes it is necessary
 to reteach a thing its loveliness
 to put a hand on its brow
 of the flower
 and retell it in words and in touch
 it is lovely
 until it flowers again
 from within of self-blessing
 as St. Francis
 put his hand on the creased forehead
 of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
 blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
 began remembering all down her thick length,
 from the earthen snout all the way
 through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
 from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
 down through the great broken heart
 through the sheer blue milken dreaminess spirting and shuttering
 from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath
 beneath them:
 the long perfect loveliness of sow.

--Galway Kinnell

Between

But its the cave I want to know.
Not how He left, rose, became a something
again. But what happens in the cave?

Not blood, not flesh, not wine stamped with the memory
of blood, but the space between breath
and breath where we are nowhere

to be found.
Someone weeps outside. Someone tugs at the boulder.
Someone clings to a torn lock of His hair.

And inside, in the still, lightless air
the turning back
into everything.

--Kim Rosen

All the Fruit

All the fruit is ripe, plunged in fire, cooked,
And they have passed their test on earth, and one law is this:
That everything curls inward, like snakes,
Prophetic, dreaming on
The hills of heaven. And many things
Have to stay on the shoulders like a load
of failure. However the roads
Are bad. For the chained elements,
Like horses, are going off to the side
And the old
Laws of the earth. And a longing
For disintegration constantly comes. Many things however
Have to stay on the shoulders. Steadiness is essential.
Forwards, however, or backwards we will
Not look. Let us learn to live swaying
As in a rocking boat on the sea.

--FRIEDRICH HODERLIN

I am not I

I am not I.

I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.

--JUAN RAMON JIMENEZ

The Taste of Morning

Time's knife slides from the sheath,
as a fish from where it swims.

Being closer and closer is the desire
of the body. Don't wish for union!

There's a closeness beyond that. Why
would God want a second God? Fall in

love in such a way that it frees you
from any connecting. Love is the soul's

light, the taste of morning, no *me*, no
we, no claim of *being*. These words

are the smoke the fire gives off as it
absolves its defects, as eyes in silence,

tears, face. Love cannot be said.

--Rumi/Barks

Listening

What is the deep listening? *Sama* is
a greeting from the secret ones

inside the heart, a letter. The branches of
your intelligence grow new leaves in

the wind of this listening. The body
reaches a peace. Rooster sound comes,

reminding you of your love for dawn.
The reed flute and the singers lips:

The knack of how spirit breathes into
us becomes as simple and ordinary as

eating and drinking. The dead rise with
the pleasure of listening. If someone

can't hear a trumpet melody, sprinkle
dirt on his head and declare him dead.

Listen, and feel the beauty of your
separation, the unsayable absence.

There's a moon inside every human being.
Learn to be companions with it. Give

more of your life to this listening. As
brightness is to time, so you are to

the one who talks to the deep ear in
your chest. I should sell my tongue

and buy a thousand ears when that
one steps near and begins to speak.

Rumi/Barks

It doesn't matter now if the golden wine
floats abundantly in your crystal cup,
or if the bitter juice clouds the pure glass...

You know the secret passageways
of the soul, the roads that dreams take,
and the calm evening
where they go to die... There the good and silent spirits

of life are waiting for you,
and someday they will carry you
to a garden of eternal spring.

Machado/Bly

A Smile and A Gentleness

There is a smile and a gentleness
inside. When I learned the name

and address of that, I went to where
you sell perfume. I begged you not

to trouble me so with longing. Come
out and play! Flirt more naturally.

Teach me how to kiss. On the ground
a spread blanket, flame that's caught

and burning well, cumin seeds browning.
I am inside all this with my soul.

Rumi/Barks

A Voice through the Door

Sometimes you hear a voice through
the door calling you, as fish out of

water hear the waves or a hunting
falcon hears the drum's *come back*.

This turning toward what you deeply
love saves you. Children fill their

shirts with rocks and carry them
around. We're not children anymore.

Read the book of your life which has
been given you. A voice comes to

your soul saying, *Lift your foot;
cross over; move into the emptiness*

of question and answer and question.

Rumi/Barks

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine trees crusted in snow,

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun, and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

Wallace Stevens

Only Breath

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu,
Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion

or cultural system. I am not from the East
or the West, not out of the ocean or up

from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not
composed of elements at all. I do not exist,

am not an entity in this world or the next
did not descend from Adam and Eve or any

origin story. My place is the placeless, a trace
of the traceless. Neither body or soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two
worlds as one and that one call to and know,

first, last, outer, inner, only that
breath breathing human being.

Rumi/Barks

Journey of the Magi -- T.S. Eliot

"A cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter."
 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
 Lying down in the melting snow.
 There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
 A hard time we had of it.
 At the end we preferred to travel all night,
 Sleeping in snatches,
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying
 That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation:
 With a running stream and a water-mill beating the darkness,
 And three trees on a low sky,
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly;
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

From East Coker, III

by T. S. Eliot

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
 The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
 The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
 Generous patrons of art, the rulers and the statesmen,
 Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,
 Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark.
 And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha,
 And the Stock Exchange gazette, and the Directory of Directors,
 And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.
 And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
 Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.
 I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
 Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
 The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
 With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,
 And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
 And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away --
 Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations
 And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
 And you see behind each face the mental emptiness deepen
 Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;
 Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing --
 I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
 For hope would be for the wrong thing; wait without love
 For love would be of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
 But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
 Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
 So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
 Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.
 The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
 The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
 Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
 Of death and birth.

You say I am repeating
 Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
 Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
 To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
 And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own
 And where you are is where you are not.

East Coker, IV

The wounded surgeon plies the steel
 That questions the distempered part;
 Beneath the bleeding hand we feel
 The sharp compassion of the healer's art
 Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.

Our only health is the disease
 If we obey the dying nurse
 Whose constant care is not to please
 But to remind us of our, and Adam's curse,
 And that, to be restored our sickness must get worse.

The whole earth is our hospital
 Endowed by the ruined millionaire
 Wherein, if we do well, we shall
 Die of the absolute paternal care
 That will not leave us, but prevents us everywhere.

The chill ascends from feet to knees,
 The fever sings in mental wires.
 If to be warmed, then I must freeze
 And quake in frigid purgatorial fires
 Of which the flame is roses, and the smoke is briars.

The dripping blood our only drink,
 The bloody flesh our only food'
 In spite of which we like to think
 That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood...
 Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

From Little Gidding, I

by T. S. Eliot

If you came this way,
 Taking the route you would be likely to take
 From the place you would be likely to come from,
 If you came this way in may time, you would find the hedges
 White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.
 It would be the same at the end of the journey,
 If you came at night like a broken king,
 If you came by day not knowing what you came for,
 It would be the same, when you leave the rough road
 And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull facade
 And the tombstone. And what you thought you came for
 Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
 From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
 If at all. Either you had no purpose
 Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
 And is altered in fulfillment. There are other places
 Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
 Or over a dark lake, in a desert or city --
 But this is the nearest, in place and time,
 Now and in England.

If you came this way,
 Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
 At any time or at any season,
 It would always be the same: you would have to put off
 Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
 Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
 Or carry report. You are here to kneel
 Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
 Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
 Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
 And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
 They can tell you, being dead: the communication
 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.
 Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
 Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

No Man Believes

No man believes who, when a star falls shot,
Cries not aloud blind as a bat,
Cries not in terror when a bird is drawn
Into the quicksand, feathers down,
Who does not make a wound in faith
When any light goes out and life is death.

No man believes who cries not, God is not,
Who feels not coldness in the heat,
In the breasted summer lings not for spring,
No breasted girl, no man who, young
And green, sneers not at the old sky.
No man believes who does not wonder why.

Believe and be saved. No man believes
Who cursed not what makes and saves,
No man upon this cyst of earth
Believes who does not lance his faith,
No man, no man, no man.

And this is true. No man can live
Who does not bury God in a deep grave
And then raise up the skeleton again,
No man who dares not break and make
Who in the bones finds not new faith,
Lends not flesh to ribs and neck
Who does not break and make his final faith.

Dylan Thomas

You darkness that I come from
I love you more than the flame
that confines the world.
For flame only shines a circle
so those inside are blind beyond the light.

But the darkness welcomes everything.
Shapes and flames, animals and me,
how it swallows them,
people and powers –

And I have the feeling some vast presence
is stirring all around me.

I have faith in nights.

R. M. Rilke, translation by Kim Rosen and Maria Krekeler

from **The Thunder: Perfect Mind**

Gnostic Gospel: Nag Hammadi Library, version by Jane Hirschfield

Sent from the Power,
 I have come
 to those who reflect upon me,
 and I have been found among those who seek me.
 Look upon me,
 you who meditate,
 and hearers, hear.
 Whoever is waiting for me,
 take me into yourselves.
 Do not drive me
 out of your eyes,
 or out of your voice,
 or out of your ears.
 Observe. Do not forget who I am.

For I am the first, and the last.
 I am the honored one, and the scorned.
 I am the whore and the holy one.
 I am the wife and the virgin.
 I am the mother, the daughter
 and every part of both.
 I am the barren one who has borne many sons.
 I am she whose wedding is great
 and I have not accepted a husband.
 I am the midwife and the childless one,
 the easing of my own labor.
 I am the bride and the bridegroom
 and my husband is my father.
 I am the mother of my father,
 the sister of my husband;
 my husband is my child.
 My offspring are my own birth,
 the source of my power,
 what happens to me is their wish.

I am the incomprehensible silence
 and the memory that will not be forgotten.
 I am the voice whose sound is everywhere
 and the speech that appears in many forms.
 I am the utterance of my own name.

Why, you who hate me, do you love me,
 and hate those who love me?
 You who tell the truth about me, lie,
 and you who have lied, now tell the truth.

You who know me, be ignorant,
and you who have not known me, know.

For I am knowledge and ignorance.
I am modesty and boldness.
I am shameless, I am ashamed.
I am strength and I am fear.
I am peace and all war comes from me.

Give heed to me,
the one who has been everywhere hated
and the one who is everywhere loved.
I am the one they call Life,
the one you call Death.
I am the one they call Law,
the one you call Lawless.
I am the one you have scattered,
and you have gathered me together.
I am godless, and I am the one
whose God is great.
I am the one whom you have reflected upon
and the one you have scorned.
I am unlearned,
and from me all people learn.
I am the one from whom you have hidden
and the one to whom you reveal yourself.
Yet wherever you hide, I appear,
And wherever you reveal yourself,
there I will vanish.

Those who are close to me
have failed to know me,
and those who are far from me know me.
On the day when I am close to you,
that day you are far from me;
on the day when I am far from you,
that day I am close.

I am the joining and the dissolving.
I am what lasts and what goes.
I am the one going down,
and the one toward whom they ascend.
I am the condemnation and the acquittal.
For myself, I am sinless,
and the roots of sin grow in my being.
I am the desire of the outer
and control of the inner.
I am the hearing in everyone's ears,

I am the speech which cannot be heard.
I am the mute who is speechless,
great are the multitudes of my words.

Hear me in softness,
and learn me in roughness.
I am she who cries out,
and I am cast forth upon the face of the earth.
I prepare the bread and my mind within.
I am called truth.

You praise me and you whisper against me.
You who have been defeated
judge before you are judged:
the judge and all judging exist inside you.
For what is inside you is what is outside you,
and the one who formed you on the outside
is the one who shaped you within.

And what you see outside you, you see within.
It is visible and it is your garment.

Give heed then, you hearers,
and you also, angels and those who have been sent,
and you spirits risen now from the dead.
I am the one who alone exists,
there is no one to judge me.
For though there is much sweetness
in passionate life, in transient pleasure,
finally soberness comes
and people flee to their place of rest.
There they will find me,
and live, and not die again.

untitled 1

no evil, no other
so name this small boat goodness
and put any why you want
in the bow
and tell any tale at all
of the waves and their swingings
towards you, against you

Kim Rosen

somewhere i have never traveled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclothe me
though I have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skillfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colors of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

ee cummings

Fearful, always-moving mind
the One who has no beginning
is thinking of how hunger
may fall away from you.

No ritual,
no religion
is needed.

Just cry out one
unobstructed cry.

Lalla, tr. Barks

Invocation

Some of us spend our lifetimes
searching our bodies
for the letters of flame.

When they arise
some of us burn
and some of us set fires.

Deena Metzger

Again and again some people in the crowd wake up.
They have no ground in the crowd
and they emerge according to much broader laws.
They carry strange customs with them
and demand room for bold gestures.

The future speaks ruthlessly
through them.

Rilke

Hummingbird Pauses at the Trumpet Vine

Mary Oliver

Who doesn't love
roses, and who
doesn't love the lilies
of the black ponds

floating like flocks
of tiny swans,
and of course the flaming
trumpet vine

where the hummingbird comes
like a small green angel, to soak
his dark tongue
in happiness --

and who doesn't want
to live with the brisk
motor of his heart
singing

like a Schubert
and his eyes
working and working like those days of rapture,
by van Gogh, in Arles?

Look! for most of the world
is waiting
or remembering --
most of the world is time

when we're not here,
not born yet, or died --
a slow fire
under the earth with all

our dumb wild blind cousins
who also
can't even remember anymore
their own happiness --

Look! and then we will be
like the pale cool
stones, that last almost
forever.

Autumn Rose Elegy

You've gone to the secret world.
Which way is it? You broke the cage
and flew. You heard the drum that
calls you home. You left this hu-
miliating shelf, this disorienting
desert where we're given wrong
directions. What use now a crown?
You've become the sun. Not need for
a belt: You've slipped out of your
waist! I have heard that near the
end you were eyes looking at soul.
No looking now. You live inside
the soul. You're the strange autumn
rose that led the winter wind in
by withering. You're rain soaking
everywhere from cloud to ground. No
bother of talking. Flowing silence
and sweet sleep beside the Friend.

--Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks

Don't worry about saving these songs!
And if one of our instruments breaks,
it doesn't matter.

We have fallen into the place
where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes
rise into the atmosphere,
and even if the whole world's harp
should burn up, there will still be
hidden instruments playing.

So the candle flickers and goes out.
We have a piece of flint and a spark.

This singing-art is sea foam.
The graceful movements come from a pearl
somewhere on the ocean floor.

Poems reach up like the edge of driftwood
along the beach, wanting and wanting!

They derive
from a slow and powerful root
that we can't see.

Stop the words now.
Open the window in the center of your chest,
and let the spirits fly in and out.

Rumi/Barks

If you are lucky in this life . . .

A window will appear between two armies on a battlefield. Instead of seeing their enemies in the window they see themselves as children. They stop fighting and go home and sleep. When they wake up, the land is well again.

--Cameron C. Penny, 4th Grade
Written the week before 9/11/01
(teacher: John Rybicki, jjrybick@yahoo.com)

"In the fearful years of the Yezhov Terror I spent seventeen months in prison queues in Leningrad. One day somebody 'identified' me. Beside me, in the queue, there was a woman with blue lips. She had, of course, never heard of me; but she suddenly came out of that trance so common to us all and whispered in my ear (everybody spoke in whispers there): 'Can you describe this?' And I said: 'Yes, I can.' and then something like the shadow of a smile crossed what had once been her face."

--Anna Akhmatova
trans. by D.M. Thomas

I have faith in all that is not yet spoken.
I want to set free my innermost feelings.
What no one has dared to long for
will spring through me spontaneously.

Is that too arrogant? then, my God, forgive me.
But I want to say just this to you:
my true power should come like a sprout, a force of nature,
no pushing, no holding back;
the way the children love you.

With this tide, these mouths
opening their deltas into the open sea,
these waves of return,
I want to reveal you, I want to announce you,
as no one else has.

And if that is arrogant, then let me be arrogant
for this, my prayer
that stands, so earnest and alone,
before the clouds that shroud your shining face.

.

--R. M. Rilke, Translation by Kim Rosen and Karin Aarons

You see, I want a lot.
Perhaps I want everything:
the darkness that comes with every infinite fall
and the shivering blaze of every step up.

So many live on and want nothing,
and are raised to the rank of prince
by the slippery ease of their light judgements.

But what truly thrills you is each face
That works and thirsts.

And most of all those who need you
like they need a crowbar.

You are not cold yet and it is not too late
to dive into your increasing depths
where life calmly gives out its own secret.

Rilke

Tr. Rosen, Aarons, Bly

A Song on the End of the World

On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A fisherman mends a glimmering net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing
And the snake is gold skinned as it should always be.

On the day the world ends
Women walk through the fields under their umbrellas,
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street
And a yellow sailed boat comes nearer the island,
The voice of a violin lasts in the air
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder
Are disappointed.
And those who expected signs and archangel's trumps
Do not believe it is happening now.
As long as the sun and the moon are above,
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose,
As long as rosy infants are born
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:
There will be no other end of the world,
There will be no other end of the world.

Czeslaw Milosz, tr by A.M. from Selected Poems, Ecco Press

Poetry by Pablo Neruda

And it was at that age ... Poetry arrived
in search of me. I don't know, I don't know where
it came from, from winter or a river.

I don't know how or when,
no, they were not voices, they were not
words, nor silence,
but from a street I was summoned,
from the branches of night,
abruptly from others,
among violent fires
or returning alone,
there I was without a face
and it touched me.

I did not know what to say, my mouth
had no way
with names,
my eyes were blind,
and something started in my soul,
fever or forgotten wings,
and I made my own way,
deciphering
that fire,
and I wrote the first faint line,
faint, without substance, pure
nonsense,
pure wisdom
of someone who knows nothing,
and suddenly I saw
the heavens
unfastened
and open,
planets,
palpitating plantations,
shadow perforated,
riddled
with arrows, fire and flowers,
the winding night, the universe.

And I, infitesimal being,
drunk with the great starry
void,
likeness, image of
mystery,
felt myself a pure part of the abyss,
I wheeled with the stars,
my heart broke loose on the wind. (Translated from the Spanish by Alastair Reid)

Old friend, you may kneel as you read this. For now I come to the sweet burden of my argument. I did not know what I had to tell you, but now I know. I did not know what I wanted to proclaim, but now I am sure. All my speeches were but preface to this. All my exercises but a clearing of my throat. I confess I tortured you, but only to draw your attention to this. I confess I betrayed you, but only to tap your shoulder. In our kisses and sucks, this, ancient darling, I meant to whisper.

God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is alive. Magic is afoot. God is afoot. Magic is alive. Alive is afoot. Magic never died. God never sickened. Many poor men lied. Many sick men lied. Magic never weakened. Magic never hid. Magic always ruled. God is afoot. God never died. God was ruler, though his funeral lengthened. Though his mourners thickened, magic never fled. Though his shrouds were hoisted, the naked god did live. Though his words were twisted, the naked magic thrived. Though his death was published round and round the world, the heard would not believe. Many hurt men wondered. Many struck men bled. Magic never faltered. Magic always led. Many stones were rolled, but god would not lie down. Many wild men lied. Many fat men listened. Though they offered stones, magic still was fed. Though they locked their coffers, god was always served. Magic is afoot. God rules. Alive is afoot. Alive is in command. Many weak men hungered. Many strong men thrived. Though they boasted solitude, god was at their side. Nor the dreamer in his cell, nor the captain on the hill. Magic is alive. Though his death was pardoned round and round the world, the heart would not believe. Though laws were carved in marble, they could not shelter men. Though altars built in parliaments, they could not order men. Police arrested magic and magic went with them. For magic loves the hungry. But magic would not tarry. It moves from arm to arm. Magic is afoot. It cannot come to harm. It rests in an empty palm. It spawns in an empty mind. But magic is no instrument. Magic is the end. Many men drove magic but magic stayed behind. Many strong men lied. They only passed through magic and out the other side. Many weak men lied. They came to god in secret and though they left him nourished they would not say who healed. Though mountains danced before them they said that god was dead. Though his shrouds were hoisted, the naked god did live. This I mean to whisper to my mind. This I mean to laugh with in my mind. This I mean my mind to serve till service is but magic moving through the world. And mind itself is magic coursing through the flesh. And flesh itself is magic dancing on a clock. And time itself the magic length of god.

Leonard Cohen

Call and Answer
by Robert Bly.

Tell me why it is we don't lift our voices these days
And cry over what is happening. Have you noticed
The plans are made for Iraq and the ice cap is melting?

I say to myself: "Go on, cry. What's the sense
Of being an adult and having no voice? Cry out!
See who will answer! This is Call and Answer!"

We will have to call especially loud to reach
Our angels, who are hard of hearing; they are hiding
In the jugs of silence filled during our wars.

Have we agreed to so many wars that we can't
Escape from silence? If we don't lift our voices, we allow
Others (who are ourselves) to rob the house.

How come we've listened to the great criers-Neruda,
Akhmatova, Thoreau, Frederick Douglas-and now
We're silent as sparrows in the little bushes?

Some masters say our life lasts only seven days.
Where are we in the week? Is it Thursday yet?
Hurry, cry now! Soon Sunday night will come.

Quiet friend, who has come so far,
feel how your breathing widens the space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower,
and you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the cup tastes bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night, be the mystery
at the crossroads of your senses.
Be the meaning revealed there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,lea
say to the silent Earth, I flow.
To the rushing water speak, I am.

--Rilke, *translated by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows*

Wait

Wait, for now.
Distrust everything if you have to.
But trust the hours. Haven't they
carried you everywhere, up to now?
Personal events will become interesting again.
Hair will become interesting.
Pain will become interesting.
Buds that open out of season will become interesting.
Second-hand gloves will become lovely again;
their memories are what give them
the need for other hands. And the desolation
of lovers is the same: that enormous emptiness
carved out of such tiny beings as we are
asks to be filled; the need
for the new love is faithfulness to the old.

Wait.
Don't go too early.
You're tired. But everyone's tired.
But no one is tired enough.
Only wait a little and listen:
music of hair,
music of pain,
music of looms weaving all our loves again.
Be there to hear it, it will be the only time,
most of all to hear
the flute of your whole existence,
rehearsed by the sorrows, play itself into total exhaustion.

--Galway Kinnell, from Selected Poems

from **The Leaf and The Cloud**
by Mary Oliver

4.
Nothing is so delicate or so finely hinged as the wings
of the green moth
against the lantern
against its heat
against the beak of the crow
in the early morning.

Yet the moth has trim, and feistiness, and not a drop
of self-pity.

Not in this world.

5.
My mother
was the blue wisteria,
my mother
was the mossy stream out behind the house,
my mother, alas, alas,
did not always love her life,
heavier than iron it was
as she carried it in her arms, from room to room,
oh, unforgettable!

I bury her
in a box
in the earth
and turn away.

My father
was a demon of frustrated dreams,
was a breaker of trust,
was a poor, thin boy with bad luck.
He followed God, there being no one else
he could talk to;
he swaggered before God, there being no one else
who would listen.

Listen,
this was his life.
I bury it in the earth.
I sweep the closets.
I leave the house.

6.

I mention them now,
I will not mention them again.

It is not lack of love
nor lack of sorrow.
But the iron thing they carried, I will not carry.

I give them -- one, two, three, four -- the kiss of courtesy,
of sweet thanks,
of anger, of good luck in the deep earth.
May they sleep well. May they soften.

But I will not give them the kiss of complicity.
I will not give them the responsibility for my life.

12.
When loneliness comes stalking, go into the fields, consider
the orderliness of the world. Notice
something you have never noticed before,

like the tambourine sound of the snow-cricket
whose pale green body is no longer than your thumb.

Stare hard at the hummingbird, in the summer rain,
shaking the water-sparks from its wings.

Let grief be your sister, she will whether or no.
Rise up from the stump of sorrow, and be green also,
like the diligent leaves.

A lifetime isn't long enough for the beauty of this world
and the responsibilities of your life.

Scatter your flowers over the graves, and walk away.
Be good-natured and untidy in your exuberance.

In the glare of your mind, be modest.
And beholden to what is tactile, and thrilling.
Live with the beetle, and the wind.

This is the dark bread of the poem.
This is the dark and nourishing bread of the poem.

From Rain
by Mary Oliver

7. The Forest

At night
under the trees
the black snake
jellies forth
rubbing
roughly
the stems of the bloodroot,
the yellow leaves,
little boulders of bark,
to take off
the old life.
I don't know
if he knows
what is happening.
I don't know
if he knows
it will work.
In the distance
the moon and the stars
give a little light.
In the distance
the owl cries out.

In the distance
the owl cries out.
The snake knows
these are the owl's woods.
these are the woods of death,
these are the woods of hardship
where you crawl and crawl
where you live in the husks of trees,
where you lie on the wild twigs
and they cannot bear your weight,
where life has no purpose
and is neither civil nor intelligent.

Where life has no purpose
and is neither civil nor intelligent
it begins
to rain,
it begins
to smell like the bodies
of flowers.

At the back of the neck
the old skin splits.
The snake shivers
but does not hesitate.
He inches forward.
He begins to bleed through
like satin.

"A world without violence is what lives after the pain has left, and we sit in the utter emptiness, and we stop creeping around the hole but fall into it – and it is not what we thought. It is the opposite." Eve Ensler

Keeping Quiet by Pablo Neruda

Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still
for once on the face of the earth,
let's not speak in any language;
let's stop for a second,
and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment
without rush, without engines;
we would all be together
in a sudden strangeness.

Fishermen in the cold sea
would not harm whales
and the man gathering salt
would not look at his hurt hands.

Those who prepare green wars,
wars with gas, wars with fire,
victories with no survivors,
would put on clean clothes
and walk about with their brothers
in the shade, doing nothing.

What I want should not be confused
with total inactivity.

Life is what it is about
I want no truck with death!

If we were not so single-minded
about keeping our lives moving,
and for once could do nothing,
perhaps a huge silence
might interrupt this sadness
of never understanding ourselves
and of threatening ourselves with
death. Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead in winter
and later proves to be alive.
Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

A Blessing

by James Wright

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies
Darken with kindness.
They have come gladly out of the willows
To welcome my friend and me.
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness
That we have come.
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.
There is no loneliness like theirs.
At home once more,
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,
For she has walked over to me
And nuzzled my left hand.
She is black and white,
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.
Suddenly I realize
That if I stepped out of my body I would break
into blossom.

Today I Was Happy So I Made This Poem
by James Wright

As the plump squirrel scampers
Across the roof of the corncrib,
The moon suddenly stands up in the darkness,
And I know it is impossible to die.
Each moment of time is a mountain.
An eagle rejoices in the oak trees of heaven
Crying
This is what I wanted.

The Greatest Love
by Anna Swir

She is sixty. She lives
the greatest love of her life.

She walks arm-in-arm with her dear one,
her hair streams in the wind.
Her dear one says:
"You have hair like pearls."

Her children say:
"Old fool."

--translated by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan

Holy Spirit
by Hildegard of Bingen

Holy Spirit,
giving life to all life,
moving all creatures
root of all things,
washing them clean,
wiping out their mistakes,
healing their wounds,
you are our true life,
luminous, wonderful,
awakening the heart
from its ancient sleep.

-- translated by Stephen Mitchell

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do
To you and me; so take the lively air,
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go.

--Theodore Roethke

Song of Wandering Aengus

W. B. Yeats

I went out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire aflame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And some one called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
??And walk through long and dappled grass
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

V-World is in the center of us. It is longing, and it is remembering. V-World is what it smells like when they let you go, when you're not waiting to be hit, when you perspire from the sun instead of from worry.

V-World is the 20 year old suicide bomber who turns back. It is the video camera the Afghan woman in the stadium hides under her burqa to document the execution of a woman accused of flirting.

V-World is the utter gentleness I see on the aged faces of those who had been "comfort women" during World War II, when they were forced into sexual slavery and raped repeatedly by Japanese soldiers. It's the one egg the starving Bosnian woman gives me as a present as I am leaving.

It's the lives our mothers never got to live.

V-World is unfolding between your legs. It is urgent and slow. It's the joke the woman tells the soldier that makes him laugh and lower the gun he was pointing in her face and the dresses the young girls from Srebrenica wear, and the way they fix their hair to go to hear about their men, even though they know they have all been murdered.

V-World is the lipstick a woman wears during the shelling of Sarajevo, the high heels she refuses to take off even though the snipers are firing on her city from above. V-World is the empty breasts she keeps offering the baby who sucks and sucks, knee deep in mud in the Afghan refugee camp.

V-World is a state of mind. It is the place you could never touch in me, no matter how many times you banged my head or whipped my legs. V-World is the garden where the missing girls appear, their mothers and fathers waiting for them. V-World is the clitoral cut that doesn't happen.

V-World is what lives after the pain has left, and we sit in the utter emptiness, and we stop creeping around the hole but fall into it and it is not what we thought. It is the opposite.

V-World is borderless and groundless. It is the armor we finally take off. There is nothing to defend.

--eve ensler
from an article in Marie Claire

Take the matter of being born. What does being born mean to most people?
 Catastrophe unmitigated. Social revolution. The cultured aristocrat yanked out of his
 hyperexclusively ultravoluptuous super palazzo, and dumped into an incredibly vulgar
 detention camp swarming with every conceivable species of undesirable organism.
 Most people fancy a guaranteed birthproof safety suit of nondestructible selflessness. If
 most people were to be born twice they'd improbably call it dying --

you and I are not snobs. We can never be born enough. We are human beings; for
 whom birth is a supremely welcome mystery, the mystery of growing: the mystery
 which happens only and whenever we are faithful to ourselves. You and I wear the
 dangerous looseness of doom and find it becoming. Life, for eternal us, is now; and now
 is much too busy being a little more than everything to seem anything, catastrophic
 included...

Miracles are to come. With you I leave a remembrance of miracles: they are by
 somebody who can love and who shall be continually reborn, a human being; someone
 who said to those near him, when his fingers would not hold a brush "tie it into my
 hand" --

nothing proving or sick or partial. Nothing false, nothing difficult or easy or small or
 colossal. Nothing ordinary or extraordinary, nothing emptied or filled, real or
 unreal; nothing feeble and known or clumsy and guessed. Everywhere tints
 childrening, innocent spontaneous, true. Nowhere possibly what flesh and impossibly
 such a garden, but actually flowers which breasts are among the very mouths of light.
 Nothing believed or doubted; brain over heart, surface: nowhere hating or to
 fear; shadow, mind without soul. Only how measureless cool flames of making; only
 each other building always distinct selves of mutual entirely opening: only alive. Never
 the murdered finalities of where when and yes no, impotent non games of wrong right
 and right wrong; never to gain or pause, never the soft adventure of undoom, greedy
 anguishes and cringing ecstasies of inexistence; never to rest and never to have: only to
 grow.

Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question

—e.e. cummings, from the introduction to *Collected Poems*

Dare you see a Soul at the White Heat?
Then crouch within the door –
Re – is the Fire's common tint –
But when the vivid Ore
Has vanquished Flame's conditions,
It quivers from the Forge
Without a color, but the light
Of unanointed Blaze.
Least Village has its Blacksmith
Whose Anvil's even ring
Stands symbol for the finer Forge
That soundless tugs – within –
Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the Designated Light
Repudiate the Forge –

Emily Dickinson

There are those who want to set fire to the world.
We are in danger.
There is time only to work slowly.
There is no time not to love.

Deena Metzger

The Art of Disappearing
Naomi Shihab Nye

When they say Don't I know you?
say no.

When they invite you to the party
remember what parties are like
before answering.

Someone telling you in a loud voice
they once wrote a poem.
Greasy sausages on a paper plate.
Then reply.

If they say We should get together
say Why?

It's not that you don't love them anymore.
You're trying to remember something
too important to forget.
Trees. The monastery bell at twilight.
Tell them you have a new project.
It will never be finished.

When someone recognizes you in a grocery store
nod briefly and become a cabbage.
When someone you haven't seen in ten years
appears at the door,
don't start singing him all your new songs.
You will never catch up.

Walk around feeling like a leaf.
Know you could tumble any second.
Then decide what to do with your time.

We awaken in Christ's body
as Christ awakens our bodies,
and my poor hand is Christ, He enters
my foot, and is infinitely me.

I move my hand, and wonderfully
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him
(for God is indivisibly
whole, seamless in His Godhood).

I move my foot, and at once
He appears like a flash of lightning.
Do my words seem blasphemous? - Then
open your heart to Him

and let yourself receive the one
who is opening to you so deeply.
For if we genuinely love Him,
we wake up inside Christ's body

where all our body, all over,
every most hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him,
and He makes us, utterly, real,

and everything that is hurt, everything
that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,
maimed, ugly, irreparably
damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognised as whole, as lovely,
and radiant in His light
we awaken as the Beloved
in every last part of our body.

-Symeon the New Theologian

Your Voice

Swelling over the rolling tip of your tongue,
between tooth and lip through air
on breath still moist with the scent under your skin,
your voice pours

from the inside of your body
into the inside of mine.

The shape of what is open within you
trembles on invisible strings:
presses with fingers of sound
into the soft clay of me

and I know you
from the inside out:

your bloodrush and heartpound,
your marrow and bone;
your quiver of first touch and echo of last,
your hungry unspeakables hidden in stone

where the fingers
of your breath cannot go.

And so I float without skin
on long slivers of sound:
eyes closed, hands outstretched before me,
clutching the braille of your voice

like a letter from home.

--Kim Rosen

SONG OF A MAN WHO HAS COME THROUGH

By D. H. Lawrence (The Complete Poems of DH Lawrence. Ed. V.de Sola Pinto and F. Warren Roberts. Viking Press NY 1964)

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!
If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind that takes its course through the
 chaos of the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of a wedge
Driven by invisible blows,
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder, we shall
 find the Hesperides.

Oh, for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression.

What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels.
Admit them, admit them.

Renascence

Edna St. Vincent Millay

All I could see from where I stood
 Was three long mountains and a wood;
 I turned and looked another way
 And saw three islands and a bay.
 So with my eyes I traced the line
 Of the horizon, thin and fine,
 Straight around till I had come
 Back to where I started from;
 And all I saw from where I stood
 Was three long mountains and a wood.

Over these things I could not see:
 These were the things that bounded me.
 And I could touch them with my hand,
 Almost, I thought, from where I stand!
 And all at once things seemed so small
 My breath came short and scarce at all.
 But, sure, the sky is big, I said:
 Miles and miles above my head.
 So here upon my back I'll lie
 And look my fill into the sky.
 And so I looked and after all
 The sky was not so very tall.
 The sky, I said, must somewhere stop...
 And – sure enough! – I see the top!
 The sky, I thought, is not so grand;
 I 'most could touch it with my hand!
 And reaching up my hand to try,
 I screamed, to feel it touch the sky!

I screamed, and – lo! – Infinity
 Came down and settled over me;
 Forced back my scream into my chest;
 Bent back my arm upon my breast;
 And, pressing of the Undefined
 The definition on my mind,
 Held up before my eyes a glass
 Through which my shrinking sight did pass
 Until it seemed I must behold
 Immensity made manifold;
 Whispered to me a word whose sound
 Deafened the air for worlds around,
 And brought unmuffled to my ears
 The gossiping of friendly spheres,
 The creaking of the tented sky,

The ticking of Eternity.

I saw and heard and knew at last
 The How and Why of all things past
 And present and forevermore.
 The universe, cleft to the core,
 Lay open to my probing sense,
 That, sickening, I would fain pluck thence
 But could not, -- nay! but needs must suck
 At the great wound, and could not pluck
 My lips away till I had drawn
 All venom out. -- Ah, fearful pawn:
 For my omniscience paid I toll
 In infinite remorse of soul.

All sin was of my sinning, all
 Atoning mine, and mine the gall
 Of all regret. Mine was the weight
 Of every brooded wrong, the hate
 That stood behind each envious thrust,
 Mine every greed, mine every lust.

And all the while, for every grief,
 Each suffering, I craved relief
 With individual desire;
 Craved all in vain! And felt fierce fire
 About a thousand people crawl,
 Perished with each, -- then mourned for all!

A man was starving in Capri;
 He moved his eyes and looked at me;
 I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,
 And knew his hunger as my own.
 I saw at sea a great cloud bank
 Between two ships which struck and sank;
 A thousand screams the heavens smote;
 And every scream tore through my throat.

No hurt I did not feel, no death
 That was not mine, mine each last breath
 That, crying, met an answering cry
 From the compassion that was I.
 All suffering mine, and mine its rod;
 Mine, pity like the pity of God.
 Ah, awful weight! Infinity
 Pressed down upon the finite Me!
 My anguished spirit, like a bird,
 Beating against my lips I heard;

Yet lay the weight so close about
 There was no room for it without.
 And so beneath the weight lay I
 And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death,
 When quietly the earth beneath
 Gave way, and inch by inch, so great
 At last had grown the crushing weight,
 Into the earth I sank till I
 Full six feet under ground did lie,
 And sank no more, -- there is not weight
 Can follow here, however great.
 From off my breast I felt it roll,
 And as it went my tortured soul
 Burst forth and fled in such a gust
 That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now.
 Cool is its hand upon the brow
 And soft its breast beneath the head
 Of one who is so gladly dead.
 And all at once, and over all
 The pitying rain began to fall;
 I lay and heard each pattering hoof
 Upon my lowly, thatched roof,
 And seemed to love the sound far more
 Than ever I had done before.
 For rain it hath a friendly sound
 To one who's six feet under ground;
 And scarce the friendly voice or face,
 A grave is such a quiet place.
 The rain, I said, is kind to come
 And speak to me in my new home.
 I would I were alive again
 To kiss the fingers of the rain,
 To drink into my eyes the shine
 Of every slanting silver line,
 To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze
 From drenched and dripping apple-trees.
 For soon the shower will be done
 And then the broad face of the sun
 Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth
 Until the world with answering mirth
 Shakes joyously, and each round drop
 Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.
 How can I bear it buried here,
 While overhead the sky grows clear

And blue again after the storm?
 O, multi-colored, multi-form,
 Beloved beauty over me,

That I shall never, never see
 Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,
 That I shall never more behold! –
 Sleeping your myriad magic through,
 Close-sepulchred away from you!
 O God, I cried, give me new birth,
 And put me back upon the earth!
 Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd
 And let the heavy rain, down-poured
 In one big torrent, set me free,
 Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased and through the breathless hush
 That answered me, the far-off rush
 Of angel's wings came whispering
 Like music down the vibrant string
 Of my ascending prayer, and – crash!
 Before the wild wind's whistling lash
 The startled storm clouds reared on high
 And plunged in terror down the sky!
 And the big rain in one black wave
 Fell from the sky and struck my grave.

I know not how such things can be;
 I only know there came to me
 A fragrance such as never clings
 To ought but happy, living things;
 A sound as of some joyous elf
 Singing sweet songs to please himself,
 And, through and over everything,
 A sense of glad awakening.
 The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,
 Whispering to me I could hear;
 I felt the rain's cool finger-tips
 Brushed tenderly across my lips,
 Laid gently on my sealed sight,
 And all at once the heavy night
 Fell from my eyes and I could see! –
 A drenched and dripping apple tree,
 A last long line of silver rain,
 A sky grown clear and blue again.
 And as I looked a quickening gust
 Of wind blew up to me and thrust
 Into my face a miracle

Of orchard breath, and with the smell, --
 I know not how such things can be! –
 I breathed my soul back into me.

Ah! Up then from the ground sprang I
 And hailed the earth with such a cry
 As is not heard save from a man
 Who has been dead, and lives again.
 About the trees my arms I wound;
 Like one gone mad I kissed the ground;
 I raised my quivering arms on high;
 I laughed and laughed into the sky;
 Till at my throat a strangling sob
 Caught fiercely and a great heart-throb
 Sent instant tears into my eyes:
 Oh God, I cried, no dark disguise
 Will e'er hereafter hide from me
 Thy radiant identity!
 Thou canst not move across the grass
 But my quick eyes will see thee pass,
 Nor speak, however silently,
 But my hushed voice will answer Thee.
 I know the path that tells Thy way
 Through the cool eve of every day;
 God, I can push the grass apart
 And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side
 No wider than the heart is wide;
 Above the earth is stretched the sky, --
 No higher than the soul is high.
 The heart can push the sea and land
 Farther apart on either hand;
 The soul can split the sky in two,
 And let the face of God shine through.
 But east and west will pinch the heart
 That cannot keep them pressed apart;
 And he whose soul is flat – the sky
 Will cave in on him by and by.

When Death Comes
Mary Oliver

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
ending, as all music does, towards silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When its over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom taking the world into my arms.

When its over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

SELF PORTRAIT

by David Whyte

It doesn't interest me if there is one God
or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel
abandoned.
If you know despair or can see it in others.
I want to know
if you are prepared to live in the world
with its harsh need
to change you. If you can look back
with firm eyes
saying this is where I stand. I want to know
if you know
how to melt into that fierce heat of living
falling toward
the center of your longing. I want to know
if you are willing
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love
and the bitter
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard, in *that* fierce embrace, even
The gods speak of God.

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,
 Not that only, but the co-existence,
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
 And the end and the beginning were always there
 Before the beginning and after the end.
 And all is always now. Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,
 Always assail them. The Word in the desert
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance,
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

The detail of the pattern is movement,
 As in the figure of the ten stairs.
 Desire itself is movement
 Not in itself desirable;
 Love is itself unmoving,
 Only the cause and end of movement,
 Timeless, and undesiring
 Except in the aspect of time
 Caught in the form of limitation
 Between un-being and being.
 Sudden in a shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage
 Quick now, here, now, always –
 Ridiculous the waste sad time
 Stretching before and after.

T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", V

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years –
 Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*
 Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
 Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
 Because one has only learnt to get the better of words

For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate – but there is no competition –
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seep unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated
Of dead and living. Not the intense moment
Isolated, with no before and after,
But a lifetime burning in every moment
And not the lifetime of one man only
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.
There is a time for the evening under starlight,
A time for the evening under lamplight
(The evening with the photograph album).
Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter.

Old men ought to be explorers
Here and there does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

T.S. Eliot, from "East Coker", V

Happy Birthday to You

Dr. Seuss

I wish we could do what they do in Katroo.
They sure know how to say "Happy Birthday to You!"

In Katroo, every year, on the day you were born They start the day right in the bright
early morn When the Birthday Honk-Honker hikes high up Mount Zorn And lets loose
a big blast on the big Birthday Horn.

And the voice of the Horn calls out loud as it plays:
"Wake up! For today is your Day of all Days!"

Then, the moment the Horn's happy honk-honk is heard
Comes a fluttering flap-flap! And then comes THE BIRD!

The Great Birthday Bird! And, so far as I know,
Katroo is the only place Birthday Birds grow.
This bird has a brain. He's most beautifully brained
With the brainiest bird brain that's ever been trained.
He was trained by the most famous club in this nation,
The Katroo Gappy Birthday Assoseeeyeatation.
And, whether your name is Pete, Polly or Paul,
When your birthday comes round, he's in charge of it all!
And whether your name is Nate, Nelly or ned,
He knows your address, and he heads for your bed.
You hear a soft swoosh in the brightening sky.
You're not all awake but you open one eye.
Then over the housetops and trees of Katroo,
You see that bird coming! To you. Just to you!

That bird pops right in! You are up on your feet!
You jump to the window! You meet and you greet
With the Secret Katroo Birthday Hi-Sign-And-Shake
That only good people with birthdays may make.
You do it just so. With each finger and toe.
Then the Bird says, "Come on! Brush your teeth and let's go!
It's your Day of all Days! It's the Best of the Best!
So don't waste a minute! Hop to it! Get dressed!

And five minutes later, you're having a snack
On your way out of town on a Smorasbord's back.
"Today," laughs the Bird, "eat whatever you want.
Today no one tells you you cawnt and you shawnt.
And, today, you don't have to be tidy or neat.
If you wish, you may eat with both hands and both feet.
So get in there and munch. Have a big muncheroo!
Today is your birthday! Today you are you!

If we didn't have birthdays, you wouldn't be you.
 If you'd never been born, well then what would you do?
 If you'd never been born, well then what would you be?
 You might be a fish! Or a toad in a tree!
 You might be a doorknob! Or three baked potatoes!
 You might be a bag full of hard green tomatoes!
 Or worse than all that... Why you might be a WASN'T!
 A Wasn't has no fun at all. No, he doesn't.
 A Wasn't just isn't. He just isn't present.
 But you... you ARE YOU! And, now isn't that pleasant!

So we'll go to the top of the toppest blue space,
 The Official Katroo Birthday Sounding-Off Place!
 Come on! Open your mouth and sound off at the sky!
 Shout loud at the top of your voice, "I AM I!
 ME! I am I! And I may not know why
 But I know that I like it. Three cheers! I AM I!"

And now, on this day of all days in Katroo,
 The assoseeeyeatation has built just for you
 A railway with very particular boats
 That are pulled through the air by Funicular Goats.
 These goats never trip, never slip, never bungle.
 They'll take you down fast to the Birthday Flower Jungle.
 The best-sniffing flowers that anyone grows
 We have grown to be sniffed by your own private nose.

They smell like licorice! And cheese!
 Send forty Who-Bubs up the trees
 To snip with snippers! Nip with nippers!
 Clip and clop with clapping clippers.
 Nip and snip with clipping cloppers!
 Snip and snop with snipping snoppers!
 All for you the Who-Bubs clip!
 Happy Birthday! Nop and nip!

Then pile the wondrous smelling stacks
 On fifty Hippo-Heimers' backs!
 They'll take these flowers all home for you.
 You can keep the Hippo-Heimers too.

While this is done, I've got a hunch
 It's time to eat our Birthday Lunch...

For Birthday Lunches as a rule
 We serve hot dogs rolled on a spool.
 So stuff and stuff and stuff and stuff
 And stuff until you've had enough.

Now, of course, we're all mustard, so, one of the rules
 Is to wash it all of in the Mustard-Off Pools
 Which are very fine warm-water mountaintop tubs
 Which were built, just for this, by the Mustard-Off Clubs.

The, out of the water! Sing loud while you dry!
 Sing loud, "I am lucky!" Sing loud, "I am I!"

If you'd never been born, then you might be an isn't.
 An isn't has no fun at all. No he isn't.
 He never has birthdays, and that isn't pleasant.
 You have to be born, or you don't get a present.

A present! Aha! Now what kind shall I give?
 Why the kind you'll remember as long as you live!

Would you like a fine pet? Well, that's just what you'll get.
 I'll get you the fanciest pet ever yet!

As you see we have here in the heart of our nation
 The Official Katroo Birthday Pet Reservation.
 From east of the eastest to west of the westest
 We've searched the whole world just to bring you the bestest.
 They come in all sizes... small, medium, tall.
 If you wish, I will find you the tallest of all!

To find who's the tallest, we start with the smallest...
 We start with the smallest. Then what do we do?
 We line them up. Back to back. Two by two.
 Taller and taller. And, when we are through,
 We finally will find one who's taller than who.

But you have to be smart and keep watching their feet.
 Because sometimes they stand on their tiptoes and cheat.

And so, from the smaller, we stack them up taller
 And taller and taller and taller and taller.
 And now! Here's the one who is taller than all-er!
 He's yours! He's all yours. He's the very top tallest.
 I know you'll enjoy him, the tallest of allest.

I'll have him shipped home to you Birthday Express.
 That costs quite a lot but I couldn't care less.
 Today is your birthday! Today You are You!
 So what if it costs me a thousand or two.

Today is your birthday. You get what you wish.

You might also like a nice Time-Telling Fish.

So I'll send Diver Getz and I'll send Diver Gitz
 Deep under the sea with their undersea kits.
 In all the wide world there are no better pets
 Than the Time-Telling Fish that Gitz gits and Getz gets.

But speaking of time... Why good gracious alive!
 That Time-Telling Fish says it's quarter to five!
 I had no idea it was getting so late!
 We've got to get going! We have a big date!

And so as the sunset burns red in the west,
 Comes the night of the Day-of-the-Best-of-the-Best!
 The Night-of-all-Nights-of-all-Nights in Katroo!
 So, according to rule, what we usually do
 Is saddle up two Hooded Klopfers named Alice
 And gallop like mad to the Birthday Pal-alace.
 Your Big Birthday Party soon starts to begin
 In the finest Pal-alace you've ever been in!

Now this Birthday Pal-alace, as soon you will see,
 Has exactly nine thousand four hundred and three
 Rooms to play games in! Twelve halls for brass bands!
 Not counting the fifty-three hamburger stands.
 And besides all of that, there are sixty-five rooms
 Just for keeping the Sweeping-Up-Afterwards-Brooms.
 Because, after your party, as well you may guess,
 It will take twenty days just to sweep up the mess.

First, we're greeted by Drummers who drum as they come.
 And next come the Strummers who strum as they come.
 And the Drummers who drum and the Strummers who strum
 Are followed by Zummers who come as the zum.
 Just look at those Zummers! They're sort of like Plumbers.
 They come along humming, with heads in their plumbing
 And that makes the music that Zummers call zumming!

And all of this beautiful zumming and humming
 And strumming and drumming and coming...
 All of it, all of it, all is for you!

LOOK! Dr. Derring's Singing Herrings!
 Derring's Singing, Spelling Herrings!
 See what Derring's Herrings do!
 They sing and spell it! All for you!

And here comes your cake, cooked by Snookers and Snookers,

The Official Katroo Happy Birthday Cake Cookers.
 And Snookers and Snookers, I'm happy to say,
 Are the only cake cookers who cook cakes today
 Made of guaranteed, certified, strictly Grade A
 Peppermint cucumber sausage-paste butter!
 And the world's finest cake slicers, Dutter and Dutter
 And Dutter and Dutter, with hatchets a-flutter,
 High up on the poop deck, stand ready to cut her.

Today you are you! That is truer than true!
 There is no one alive who is you-er than you!
 Shout loud, "I am lucky to be what I am!
 Thank goodness I'm not just a clam or a ham
 Or a dusty old jar of sour gooseberry jam!
 I am what I am! That's a great thing to be!
 If I say so myself, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME!"

Now, by Horseback and Bird-back and Hiffer-back, too,
 Come your friends! All your friends! From all over Katroo!
 And the Birthday Pal-alace heats up with hot friends
 And your party goes on! On and on till it ends.

And when it all ends you're much happier, richer and fatter.
 And the Bird flies you home on a very soft platter.

So that's
 what the Birthday Bird
 does in Katroo.

And I wish
 I could do
 all these great things for you!

Ask Me

William Stafford

Some time when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help
or to hurt – ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and going from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

I'm ceded – I've stopped being Theirs –
the name They dropped upon my face
With water, in the ocuntry church
Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threading – too –

Baptized, before, without the choice,
But this time, consciously, of Grace –
Unto supremest name –
Called to my Full – The Crescent dropped –
Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
With one small Diadem.

My second Rank – too small the first –
Crowned – Crowing – on my Father's breast –
A half unconscious Queen –
But this time – Adequate – Erect,
With Will to choose, or to reject,
And I choose, just a Crown –

Emily Dickinson (c. 1862)

And the speck of my heart, in my shed of flesh
and bone, began to sing out, the way the sun
would sing if the sun could sing, if light had a
mouth and a tongue, if the sky had a throat, if
god wasn't just an idea but shoulders and a spine,
gathered from everywhere, event the most distant
planets, blazing up. Where am I? Even the rough
words com to me now, quick as thistles. Who
made your tyrant's body, your thirst, your delv-
ing, your gladness? Oh tiger, oh bone-breaker,
oh tree on fire! Get away from me. Come closer.

Mary Oliver

Poem for the Anniversary

I said the field needs burning.
 I said I hunger for the taste of fallow soil.
 I said no new seeds, please.
 No seeds. No water. Nothing
 that might make green.
 Just sun and the silence of a seared landscape.

I said she was a kite, all soar
 and plummet and I the foot
 that held the ground that rooted the string she flew on.
 I said I loved that soar and dive,
 the curl of my fingers and the string cutting
 into them, the way gratitude shimmered
 down the cord for her big ride.

I said night comes in between the vacancies
 in lace. I said her black curls on my nipple
 swarm like ants. I said it was over. I said my cells danced
 in that shimmer, wetting themselves,
 turning everything taut and upward
 and full of direction. I said it was over.
 I said if she was ever homeless --
 I said she could come in through the holes
 in the lace canopy, come
 into the bed my mother slept in, the bed
 I sleep in now where my arms open on their own
 to receive the one who cannot sleep
 without my arms. I said it was over. I said
 the turning faces of every surface, like petals,
 to her smell was something like love;
 and the way the hound goes
 for the deep woods new felled carcass,
 was the way my body was unswervable.

I said I would hold that string for a year
 while she dove and thrilled to Pluto's symphony.
 I said that was love.
 I said I was water clear and empty,
 I would go where the tides called.

I said the madness was mine.
 I had an appointment with it anyway.
 I said I would hold the string no matter what --

In Blackwater Woods

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned

in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world

you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

Mary Oliver

Navajo Chant

House made of dawn.
 House made of evening light.
 House made of the dark cloud.
 House made of male rain.
 House made of dark mist.
 House made of female rain.
 House made of pollen.
 House made of grasshoppers.

Dark cloud is at the door.
 The trail out of it is dark cloud.
 The zigzag lightening stands high upon it.
 An offering I make.
 Restore my feet for me.
 Restore my legs for me.
 Restore my body for me.
 Restore my mind for me.
 Restore my voice for me.
 This very day take out your spell for me.

Happily I recover.
 Happily my interior becomes cool.
 Happily I go forth.
 My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
 Nor longer sore, may I walk.
 Impervious to pain, may I walk.
 With lively feelings may I walk.
 As it used to be long ago, may I walk.

Happily may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
 Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
 Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
 Happily may I walk.
 Being as it used to be long ago, may I walk.

May it be beautiful before me.
 May it be beautiful behind me.
 May it be beautiful below me.
 May it be beautiful above me.
 May it be beautiful all around me.
 In beauty it is finished.
 In beauty it is finished.

The Light Wraps You

The light wraps you in its mortal flame.
Abstracted pale mourner, standing that way
against the old propellers of the twilight
that revolves around you.

Speechless, my friend.
Alone in the loneliness of this hour of the dead
and filled with the lives of fire,
pure heir to the ruined day.

A bough of fruit falls from the sun on your dark garment.
The great roots of night
grow suddenly from your soul
and the things that hide in you come out again
so that a blue and pallid people,
your newly born, takes nourishment.

Oh magnificent and fecund and magnetic slave
of the circle that moves in turn through black and gold:
rise, lead and possess a creation
so rich in life that its flowers perish
and it is full of sadness.

--Pablo Neruda, tr. WS Merwin

Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour

Light the first light of evening, as in a room
In which we sit and, for small reason, think
The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.
It is in that thought that we collect ourselves
Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl
Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,
A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one...
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

Wallace Stevens

How Everything Adores Being Alive

What
if you were
a beetle
and a soft wind

and a certain allowance of time
had summoned you
out of your wrappings,
and there you were,

so many legs
hardening
maybe even
more than one pair of eyes

and the whole world
in front of you?
And what if you had wings
and flew

into the garden,
then fell
into the uptipped
face

of a white flower,
and what if you had
a sort of mouth,
a lip

to place close
to the skim
of honey
that kept offering itself –

what would you think then
of the world
as, night and day,
you were kept there –

oh happy prisoner –
sighing, humming,
roaming
that deep cup?

Mary Oliver

Thanks

Listen

with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water thanking it
smiling by the windows looking out
in our directions

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks we are saying thank you
in the faces of the officials and the rich
and of all who will never change
we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us
our lost feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you
with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying thank you and waving
dark though it is

-W.S. Merwin

The Memory of Her Face

I. Baghdad

When she woke up
Her face was on fire
Bombs had fallen from the sky
And her face was in flames
She couldn't scream
The burning encircled her throat
Like a falling tower
Just as the flames were entering her eyes
She pressed her torn blanket
And it put out the flames
but stuck to the melted skin
when she pulled it off
she lost most of her cheeks,
most of her forehead and chin.
This was not a dream
There was nowhere to go
There was nothing to say
As they wandered the streets
Of Baghdad
Her father
Unable to look at his only daughter
Oozing through
The bandages he made of white rags
Hated her looking like that
Hated whoever she had become
No longer a relative
No longer someone he knew
No longer a woman he could marry off
But still something he was responsible for
He hated the planes that dropped
Fire from the sky
Who promised
Freedom and instead destroyed
He hated those planes
But right now he hated his bandaged melted
needy daughter more.

II. Islamabad

First time
He grabbed the closest thing
He grabbed a pot
He smashed her head
He smashed her right eye hard

The next time
 He thought about it a little
 And paused
 Took off his belt
 She had gashes inside her thighs
 The third time he needed to be more
 Involved in hurting her
 So he beat her with his fists
 He broke her nose

Don't ask what she had done
 It was just her face that pissed him off
 Just her needy face waiting for more
 The last time he
 Had enough of her
 He planned it out
 He got the acid in advance
 He poured it in a jar
 She said she needed money for food for them
 She looked like that.
 Like that. Like that. Like that.
 Her face is gone
 Totally melted off
 Just eyes that all you see
 That's all
 Just eyes encased in gooey flesh
 I tell you this because
 She's there inside this mess
 She's there, I swear
 I heard her wheeze
 I heard her sigh
 I heard her babble something
 With what was once her mouth
 I heard her. I swear
 She lives in there.

III. Juarez

Each woman is dark, particular, young.
 Each woman has brown eyes. Each woman is gone.
 There is one girl missing for 10 months.
 She was 17 when they took her away
 She worked in the Maquilladora
 Four dollars a day
 They paid her and bused her to the desert
 to sleep in freezing shit
 It must have been on the way to the bus
 They took her

It must have been dark outside
 It must have lasted until morning
 What ever they did to her
 It went on and on
 You can tell from the others
 who showed up without hands or nipples
 It must have gone on and on.

When she finally reappeared
 She was bone
 Bone bone
 No cute mole above her right eye,
 No naughty smile, no wavy black hair.

Bone she came back as bone.
 She and the others
 All beautiful
 All beginning
 All faces
 All gone
 300 faces gone
 300 noses
 300 chins
 300 dark penetrating eyes
 300 smiles
 300 Mulatto colored cheeks
 300 hungry mouths about
 to speak
 about to tell
 about to scream
 gone now bone.

I tried to turn away
 When she took off the bandages
 To prove to the soldiers how bad it was
 When she lifted her chador
 In the restaurant
 When they raised the plastic cloth that concealed
 the bone out line of her head in the morgue
 I tried to turn away.

Eve Ensler

*-----women were burned or killed in the Iraqi war. The United States
 government call s it collateral damage and will not be prosecuted.*

*5000 women have been acid burned by their families in Islamabad, Pakistan.
90 per cent of them have died. Not one person has been prosecuted.*

*300 women have disappeared in Juarez Mexico.
90 have turned up dead in ditches, most were mutilated and raped. Not one man has
been prosecuted.*

Leaning into the afternoons, I cast my sad nets
towards your ocean eyes.

There my loneliness stretches and burns
On the tallest bonfire, arms twisting like a drowning man's.

I cast red signals over your absent eyes
That lap like the sea at the lighthouse shore.

You guard only darkness, my distant female.
Sometimes a coast of dread emerges from your stare.

Leaning into the afternoons, I toss my sad nets
To the sea that moves in your ocean eyes.

The night bird peck at the first stars
That twinkle like my soul as I love you.

Night gallops on her shadowy mare
Scattering blue wheat stalks over the fields.

--Neruda, tr.?

I want to know if you come with me
 toward not walking and not speaking, I want
 to know if we finally will reach
 no communication: finally
 going with someone to see pure air,
 rays of light over the daily sea
 or a land bound object
 and finally having nothing
 to trade, without goods to furnish
 as the colonizers had,
 exchanging coupons for silence.
 Here, I purchase your silence.
 I agree, I give you mine
 with one provision: that we do not understand each other.

--Pablo Neruda, tr. William O'Daly

The Poet with his Face in his Hands

You want to cry aloud for your
 mistakes. But to tell the truth the world
 doesn't need any more of that sound.

So if you're going to do it and can't
 stop yourself, if your pretty mouth can't
 hold it in, at least go by yourself across

the forty fields and the forty dark inclines
 of rocks and water to the place where
 the falls are flinging out their white sheets

like crazy, and there is a cave behind all that
 jubilation and water fun and you can
 stand there, under it, and roar all you

want and nothing will be disturbed; you can
 drip with despair all afternoon and still,
 on a green branch, its wings just lightly touched

by the passing foil of the water, the thrush,
 puffing out its spotted breast, will sing
 of the perfect, stone-hard beauty of everything.

Mary Oliver

WHAT I'M DOING HERE

I do not know if the world has lied
I have lied
I do not know if the world has conspired against love
I have conspired against love
The atmosphere of torture is no comfort
I have tortured
Even without the mushroom cloud
still I would have hated
Listen
I would have done the same things
even if there were no death
I will not be held like a drunkard
under the cold tap of facts
I refuse the universal alibi
Like an empty telephone booth passed at night
and remembered
like mirrors in a movie palace lobby consulted
only on the way out
like a nymphomaniac who binds a thousand
into strange brotherhood
I wait
for each one of you to confess

Leonard Cohen

Shadows

Everyone knows the great energies running amok cast
terrible shadows, that each of the so-called
senseless acts has its thread looping
back through the world and into a human heart.

And meanwhile
the gold-trimmed thunder
wanders the sky; the river
may be filling the cellars of the sleeping town.
Cyclone, fire, and their merry cousins

bring us to grief – but these are the hours
with the old wooden-god faces;
we lift them to our shoulders like so many
black coffins, we continue walking
into the future. I don't mean

there are no bodies in the river,
or bones broken by the wind. I mean
everyone who has heard the lethal train-roar
of the tornado swears there was no mention ever
of any person, or reason – I mean

the waters rise without any plot upon
history, or even geography. Whatever
power of the earth rampages, we turn to it
dazed but anonymous eyes; whatever
the name of the catastrophe, it is never
the opposite of love.

—Mary Oliver

It is I who must begin...

Once I begin, once I try—
here and now
right where I am,
not excusing myself
by saying that things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
—to live in harmony
with the "voice of Being" as I
understand it within myself
—as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
 upon that road...

Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost...

Vaclav Havel

Sunrise

You can
die for it--
an idea,
or the world. People

have done so,
brilliantly,
letting
their small bodies be bound

to the stake,
creating
an unforgettable
fury of light. But

this morning,
climbing the familiar hills
in the familiar
fabric of dawn, I thought

of China,
and India
and Europe, and I thought
how the sun

blazes
for everyone just
so joyfully
as it rises

under the lashes
of my own eyes, and I thought
I am so many!
What is my name?

What is the name
of the deep breath I would take
over and over
for all of us? Call it

whatever you want, it is
happiness, and it is another one
of the ways to enter
fire.

—Mary Oliver

Lead

Here is a story
to break your heart.
Are you willing?
This winter
the loons came to our harbor
and died, one by one,
of nothing we could see.
A friend told
of one on the shore
that lifted its head and opened
the strong, elegant beak
and cried out
in the long, sweet savoring of its life
which, if you have ever heard it,
you know is a sacred thing
and for which, if you have not heard it,
you had better hurry to where
they still sing.
And believe me, tell no one
just where that is.
The next morning
this loon – speckled
iridescent, with a plan
to fly home
to some hidden lake –
was dead on the shore.
I tell you this
to break your heart –
by which I mean only
that it break open
and never close again
to the rest of the world.

—Mary Oliver

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;
I hear my echo in the echoing wood –
A lord of nature weeping to a tree,
I live between the heron and the wren,
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What is madness but nobility of soul
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!
I know the purity of pure despair,
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall,
That place among the rocks – is it a cave,
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,
And in broad day the midnight come again!
A man goes far to find out what he is –
Death of the soul in a long, tearless night,
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.
The mind enters itself, and God the mind
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.

— Theodore Roethke

I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer House than Prose—
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—for Doors—
Of Chambers as the Cedars—
Impregnable of Eye—
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky—
Of Visitors—the fairest—
For Occupation—This—
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise—

—Emily Dickinson

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in

i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)

i fear

no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

ee cummings

Just Now

In the morning as the storm begins to blow away
the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me
that there has been something simpler than I could ever believe
simpler than I could have begun to find words for
not patient not even waiting no more hidden
than the air itself that became part of me for a while
with every breath and remained with me unnoticed
something that was here unnamed unknown in the days
and the nights not separate from them
not separate from them as they came and were gone
it must have been here neither early nor late then
by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks

WS Merwin

Waiting for the Fire

Not just the temples, lifting
 lotuses out of the tangled trees,
 not the moon on cool canals,
 the profound smell of the paddies,
 evening fires in open doorways,
 fish and rice the perfect end of wisdom;
 but the small bones, the grace, the voices like
 clay bells in the wind, all wasted.
 If we ever thought of the wreckage
 of our unnatural acts,
 we would never sleep again
 without dreaming a rain of fire:
 somewhere God is bargaining for Sodom,
 a few good men could save the city; but
 in that dirty corner of the mind
 we call the soul
 the only wash that purifies is tears,
 and after all our body counts,
 our rape, our mutilations,
 nobody here is crying; people who would weep
 at the death of a dog
 stroll these unburned streets dry-eyed.
 But forgetfulness will never walk
 with innocence; we save our faces
 at the risk of our lives, needing
 the wisdom of losses, the gift of despair,
 or we could kill again.
 Somewhere God is haggling over Sodom:
for the sake of ten good people
I will spare the land.
 Where are all those volunteers
 to hold back the fire? Look:
 when the moon rises over the sea,
 no matter where you stand,
 the path of the light comes to you.

— by Philip Appleman from *New and Selected Poems, 1956-1996* (University of Arkansas Press)

God speaks to each of us as we are made
then walks with us silently out of the night.
These are the words, the numinous words,
we hear before we begin:

You, called forth by your senses,
Reach to the edge of your Longing:
Become my body.

Grow like a fire behind things
so their shadows spread out
and cover me completely

Let everything into you: Beauty and Terror.
Keep going: remember, no feeling is forever.

Don't lose touch with me.

Nearby is the land
they call Life.
You will recognize it
by its intensity.

Give me your hand.

R. M. Rilke, Translated by Kim Rosen and Maria Krekeler

It Was Like This: You Were Happy

It was like this:
you were happy, then you were sad,
then happy again, then not.

It went on.
You were innocent or you were guilty.
Actions were taken, or not.

At times you spoke, at other times you were silent.
Mostly, it seems you were silent—what could you say?

Now it is almost over.

Like a lover, your life bends down and kisses your life.

It does this not in forgiveness—
between you, there is nothing to forgive—
but with the simple nod of a baker at the moment
he sees the bread is finished with transformation.

Eating, too, is a thing now only for others.

It doesn't matter what they will make of you
or your days: they will be wrong,
they will miss the wrong woman, miss the wrong man,
all the stories they tell will be tales of their own invention.

Your story was this: you were happy, then you were sad, you slept,
you awakened.

Sometimes you ate roasted chestnuts, sometimes persimmons.

**'It Was Like This: You Were Happy' by Jane Hirshfield.
Reproduced with kind permission of Bloodaxe Books.'**

A Ritual to Read to Each Other

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider--
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe--
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

William Stafford

How will you know the difficulties of being human
if you are always flying off to blue perfection?
Where will you plant your grief seeds?
Workers need ground to scrape and hoe,
not the sky of unspecified desire—

Rumi, tr. Barks

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

Mary Oliver

Logos

Why wonder about the loaves and the fishes?
If you say the right words, the wine expands.
If you say them with love
and the felt ferocity of that love,
the fish explode into many.
Imagine him, speaking,
and don't worry about what is reality
and what is plain and what is mysterious.
If you were there it was all those things.
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.
Eat, drink, be happy.
Accept the miracle.
Accept, too, each spoken word,
spoken with love.

Mary Oliver

There is some kiss we want with
our whole lives, the touch of

spirit on the body. Seawater
begs the pearl to break its shell.

And the lily, how passionately
it needs some wild darling! At

night, I open the window and ask
the moon to come and press its

face against mine. Breath into
me. Close the language-door and

open the love-window. The moon
won't use the door, only the window.

-- Rumi / translated by Coleman Barks

Late Fragment

by Raymond Carver

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.

And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

Prayer

Every day I want to speak with you. And every day something more important calls for my attention—the drugstore, the beauty products, the luggage

I need to buy for the trip.
Even now I can hardly sit here

among the falling piles of paper and clothing, the garbage trucks outside already screeching and banging.

The mystics say you are as close as my own breath.
Why do I flee from you?

My days and nights pour through me like complaints
and I become a story I forgot to tell.

Help me. Even as I write these words I am planning
to rise from the chair as soon as I finish this sentence.

—Marie Howe, from *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time* (W. W. Norton and Co., 2008)

Eternity

A poem written three thousand years ago

about a man who walks among horses
grazing on a hill under the small stars

comes to life on a page in a book

and the woman reading the poem
in her kitchen filled with a gold metallic light

finds the experience of living in that moment

so vividly described as to make her feel known
to another, until the woman and the poet share

not only their souls but the exact silence

between each word. And every time the poem is read,
no matter her situation or her age,

this is more or less what happens.

—Jason Schinder

Annunciation

Even if I don't see it again—nor ever feel it
I know it is—and that if once it hailed me
it ever does—

and so it is myself I want to turn in that direction
not as towards a place, but it was a tilting
within myself,

as one turns a mirror to flash the light to where
it isn't—I was blinded like that—and swam
in what shone at me

only able to endure it by being no one and so
specifically myself I thought I'd die
from being loved like that.

—Marie Howe

Escape

When we get out of the glass bottles of our ego,
And we escape like squirrels turning in the cages of our personality
and get into the forests again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.

Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taught with power,
we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like burnt paper.

D.H. Lawrence

Crying

by Galway Kinnell

Crying only a little bit
is no use. You must cry
until your pillow is soaked!
Then you can get up and laugh.
Then you can jump in the shower
and splash-splash-splash!
Then you can throw open your window
and, "Ha ha! ha ha!"
And if people say, "Hey
what's going on up there?"
"Ha ha!" sing back, "Happiness
was hiding in the last tear!
I wept it! Ha ha!"

Call Me by My True Names
Thich Nhat Hanh

Don't say that I will depart tomorrow --
 even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving
 to be a bud on a Spring branch,
 to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,
 learning to sing in my new nest,
 to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
 to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
 to fear and to hope.

The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
 of all that is alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing
 on the surface of the river.
 And I am the bird
 that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily
 in the clear water of a pond.
 And I am the grass-snake
 that silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
 my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
 And I am the arms merchant,
 selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl,
 refugee on a small boat,
 who throws herself into the ocean
 after being raped by a sea pirate.
 And I am the pirate,
 my heart not yet capable
 of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo,
 with plenty of power in my hands.
 And I am the man who has to pay
 his "debt of blood" to my people
 dying slowly in a forced-labor camp.

My joy is like Spring, so warm
it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth.
My pain is like a river of tears,
so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart
can be left open,
the door of compassion.

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

Exercise

First forget what time it is
 for an hour
 do it regularly every day

then forget what day of the week it is
 do this regularly for a week
 then forget what country you are in
 and practice doing it in company
 for a week
 then do them together
 for a week
 with as few breaks as possible

follow these by forgetting how to add
 or to subtract
 it makes no difference
 you can change them around
 after a week
 both will help you later
 to forget how to count

forget how to count
 starting with your own age
 starting with how to count backward
 starting with even numbers
 starting with Roman numerals
 starting with fractions of Roman numerals
 starting with the old calendar
 going on to the old alphabet
 going on to the alphabet
 until everything is continuous again

go on to forgetting elements
 starting with water
 proceeding to earth
 rising in fire

forget fire

- W.S. Merwin

Body of Mist by Kim Rosen
for Apela on her 61st birthday (after Navajo Chant)

Body of mist
Body of flaking ash
Body of the night wind
Body of mother blood
Body of seed pods
Body of father blood
Body of honeybees
Body of shattered stars

night's breath is spinning me
the way through is the breathing night
the untold stories rise up to sound me
These empty hands I raise:

receive this prayer from me
receive these fighting thoughts
receive this cry from me
receive this broken song

in time, my thoughts become still
in time, I rest
in time, my ears awaken
in time, I hear my sound

with my sound rushing through me, may I walk
no longer torn may I walk
with all my feelings may I walk
on a path of sacred words may I walk

now, my feet remember the dirt
my arms the sky
my breath the waves
my tongue the taste of rain

may it be beautiful before me
may it be beautiful behind me
may it be beautiful below me
may it be beautiful above me

may it be beautiful all around me
In beauty it is finished.
In beauty it is finished.
In beauty it is finished.

What the Living Do by Marie Howe

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days, some utensil probably
fell down there.

And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous, and the crusty dishes
have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is the everyday we
spoke of.

It's winter again: the sky's a deep headstrong blue, and the sunlight
pours through

the open living room windows because the heat's on too high in here, and
I can't turn it off.

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in the street,
the bag breaking,

I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And yesterday, hurrying
along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my coffee down my
wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a hairbrush: This is it. Parking.
Slamming the car door shut in the cold. What you called
that yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come and the winter to
pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss – we want more and more and
then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a glimpse of myself in the
window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm gripped by a cherishing
so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned coat that I'm
speechless:

I am living, I remember you.

Beannacht
("Blessing")

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when your eyes
freeze behind
the grey window
and the ghost of loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green,
and azure blue
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
in the currach of thought
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.
And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.

~ John O'Donohue ~

I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.
One world is aware and by far the largest to me, and that is myself,
And whether I come to my own today or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait.

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

There Is No Going Back

No, no, there is no going back.
Less and less you are
that possibility you were.
More and more you have become
those lives and deaths
that have belonged to you.
You have become a sort of grave
containing much that was
and is no more in time, beloved
then, now, and always.
And so you have become a sort of tree
standing over a grave.
Now more than ever you can be
generous toward each day
that comes, young, to disappear
forever, and yet remain
unaging in the mind.
Every day you have less reason
not to give yourself away.

- Wendell Berry

If...

Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with wornout tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!

There's a Girl Inside

There is a girl inside.
She is randy as a wolf.
She will not walk away and leave these bones
to an old woman.

She is a green tree in a forest of kindling.
She is a green girl in a used poet.

She has waited patient as a nun
for the second coming,
when she can break through gray hairs
into blossom

and her lovers will harvest
honey and thyme
and the woods will be wild
with the damn wonder of it.

~Lucille Clifton

Jump Rope Rhyme

Tat tvam asi:
thou art that -
that leaf, that tree,
that cow, that cat,
that cloud, that sky,
that moon, that sun,
that you, that I -
for all are one.
So here you are
and there you go
and who you were
you hardly know.

I think this I
is only me:
a drip, a drop,
but not the sea.
Yet when I wake
from all these dreams,

then, like the snake,
I'll shed what seems:
this mask, this skin,
this ball and chain.
I will begin
to fall like rain.

Our heart's last home:
the wind-whipped foam,
the sweet, deep sea.
Tat tvam asi.

- Tom Hansen

Terra Incognita

D. H. Lawrence

There are vast realms of consciousness still undreamed of
vast ranges of experience, like the humming of unseen harps,
we know nothing of, within us.
Oh when man has escaped from the barbed-wire entanglement
of his own ideas and his own mechanical devices
there is a marvelous rich world of contact and sheer fluid beauty
and fearless face-to-face awareness of now-naked life
and me, and you, and other men and women
and grapes, and ghouls, and ghosts and green moonlight
ruddy-orange limbs stirring the limbo
of the unknown air, and eyes so soft
softer than the space between the stars,
and all things, and nothing, and being and not-being
alternately palpitant,
when at last we escape the barbed-wire enclosure
of Know Thyself, knowing we can never know,
we can but touch, and wonder, and ponder, and make our effort
and dangle in a last fastidious fine delight
as the fuchsia does, dangling her reckless drop
of purple after so much putting forth
and slow mounting marvel of a little tree.

Marsh Languages

The dark soft languages are being silenced:
Mothertongue Mothertongue Mothertongue
falling one by one back into the moon.

Language of marshes,
languages of the roots of rushes tangled
together in the ooze,
marrow cells twinning themselves
inside the warm core of the bone:
pathways of hidden light in the body fade and wink out.

The sibilants and gutturals,
the cave language, the half-light
forming at the back of the throat,
the mouth's damp velvet moulding
the lost syllable for "I" that did not mean separate,
all are becoming sounds no longer
heard because no longer spoken,
and everthing that could once be said in them has
ceased to exist.

The languages of the dying suns
are themselves dying,
but even the word for this has been forgotten.
The mouth against skin, vivid and fading,
can no longer speak both cherishing and farewell.
It is now only a mouth, only skin.
There is no more longing.

Translation was never possible.
Instead there was always only
conquest, the influx
of the language of hard nouns,
the language of metal,
the language of either / or,
the one language that has eaten all the others.

copyright 1995 by Margaret Atwood

From: **Poetry as Insurgent Art**

I am signaling you through the flames.

The North Pole is not where it used to be.

Manifest Destiny is no longer manifest.

Civilization self-destructs. Nemesis is knocking at the door.

What are poets for in such an age?

What is the use of poetry?

Words can save you where guns can't.

You are Whitman, you are Poe, you are Mark Twain, you are Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay; you are Neruda and Mayakovsky and Pasolini, you are an American or a non-American, you can conquer the conquerors with words.

You can never see or hear or feel too much. If you can stand it.

Be a wolf in the sheepfold of silence.

Poems are burning bows, poems are arrows of desire, poetry gives words to the heart.

I am signaling you through the flames.

Wake up! The world is on Fire.

Have a nice day.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

This is It
and I am It
and You are It
and so is That
and He is It
and She is It
and It is It
and That is That.

O It is This
and It is Thus
and It is Them
and It is Us
and It is Now
and here It is
and here We are
so This is It.

~James Broughton

Finding a Teacher

In the woods I came on an old friend fishing
and I asked him a question
and he said Wait
fish were rising in the deep stream
but his line was not stirring
but I waited
it was a question about the sun
about my two eyes
my ears my mouth
my heart the earth with its four seasons
my feet where I was standing where I was going
it slipped through my hands
as though it were water
into the river
it flowed under the trees
it sank under hulls far away
and was gone without me
then where I stood night fell
I no longer knew what to ask
I could tell that his line had no hook
I understood that I was to stay and eat with him
~ W.S. Merwin ~

Again, again, even if we know the countryside of love,
and the tiny churchyard with its names mourning,
and the chasm, more and more silent, terrifying, into which

the others dropped: we walk out together anyway
beneath the ancient trees, we lie down again,
again, among the flowers, and face the sky.

- Rainer Maria Rilke, tr. Robert Bly

If You Knew

What if you knew you'd be the last
to touch someone?

If you were taking tickets, for example,
at the theater, tearing them,
giving back the ragged stubs,
you might take care to touch that palm,
brush your fingertips
along the life line's crease.

When a man pulls his wheeled suitcase
too slowly through the airport, when
the car in front of me doesn't signal,
when the clerk at the pharmacy
won't say *Thank you*, I don't remember
they're going to die.

A friend told me she'd been with her aunt.
They'd just had lunch and the waiter,
a young gay man with plum black eyes,
joked as he served the coffee, kissed
her aunt's powdered cheek when they left.
Then they walked half a block and her aunt
dropped dead on the sidewalk.

How close does the dragon's spume
have to come? How wide does the crack
in heaven have to split?
What would people look like
if we could see them as they are,
soaked in honey, stung and swollen,
reckless, pinned against time?

Ellen Bass
from *The Human Line*
Copper Canyon Press, 2007

THE LAYERS

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.

Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:

"Live in the layers,
not on the litter."

Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.

I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz

The Song of Amergin

I am the wind that breathes on the sea,
I am the ocean wave,
I am the roar of the surf in the storm,
I am the ox of the seven tines.

I am the vulture on the rock,
I am the light through a dewdrop
I am the fairest of flowers
I am the wild boar for valour

I am the salmon in a pool
I am the lake in a plain
I am the mountain in a man
I am the poetic word
and the tip of the sword as it goes toward battle

I am the God who sets a fire in your head.
Who smooths the sides of the mountain?
Who fashions the phases of the moon?
Who announces the place where the sunset falls?

Who called the cattle from the house of Tethra?
On whom do those cattle smile?
Enchantment of a sword?
Enchantment of the wind?

*Version by Kim Rosen, based on several other translations including John O'Donahue,
Paddy Busche and others*

Day Dream

One day people will touch and talk perhaps easily,
 And loving be natural as breathing and warm as sunlight,
 And people will untie themselves, as string is unknotted,
 Unfold and yawn and stretch and spread their fingers,
 Unfurl, uncurl like seaweed returned to the sea,
 And work will be simple and swift as a seagull flying,
 And play will be casual and quiet as a seagull settling,
 And the clocks will stop, and no one will wonder or care or notice,
 And people will smile without reason, even in winter, even in the rain.

~A. S. J. Tessimond

Postscript

by Seamus Heaney

And some time make the time to drive out west
 Into County Clare, along the Flaggy Shore
 In September or October, when the wind
 And the light are working off each other
 So that the ocean on one side is wild
 With foam and glitter, and inland among stones
 The surface of a slate-grey lake is lit
 By the earthed lightning of a flock of swans,
 Their feathers roughed and ruffling, white on white,
 Their fully grown, headstrong-looking heads
 Tucked or cresting or busy underwater.
 Useless to think you'll park and capture it
 More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there,
 A hurry through which known and strange things pass
 As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways
 And find the heart unlatched and blow it open.

When school and mosque and minaret
get torn down, then dervishes
can begin their community.

Not until faithfulness turns into betrayal
and betrayal into trust
can any human being
become part of the truth.

Not until a person dissolves,
can he or she know
what union is.

There is a descent into emptiness.
A lie will not change
the truth with just
talking about it.

While you are still yourself,
you're blind to both worlds.

That ego-drunkenness
will not let you see.
Only when you are cleansed of both,
will you cut the deep roots
of fear and anger.

~Rumi (Translated by Coleman Barks from *The Soul of Rumi*)

Relax by Ellen Bass

Bad things are going to happen.
Your tomatoes will grow a fungus
and your cat will get run over.
Someone will leave the bag with the ice cream
melting in the car and throw
your blue cashmere sweater in the drier.
Your husband will sleep
with a girl your daughter's age, her breasts spilling
out of her blouse. Or your wife
will remember she's a lesbian
and leave you for the woman next door. The other cat –
the one you never really liked — will contract a disease
that requires you to pry open its feverish mouth
every four hours for a month.
Your parents will die.
No matter how many vitamins you take,
how much Pilates, you'll lose your keys,
your hair and your memory. If your daughter
doesn't plug her heart
into every live socket she passes,
you'll come home to find your son has emptied
your refrigerator, dragged it to the curb,
and called the used appliance store for a pick up — drug money.
There's a Buddhist story of a woman chased by a tiger.
When she comes to a cliff, she sees a sturdy vine
and climbs half way down. But there's also a tiger below.
And two mice — one white, one black — scurry out
and begin to gnaw at the vine. At this point
she notices a wild strawberry growing from a crevice.
She looks up, down, at the mice.
Then she eats the strawberry.
So here's the view, the breeze, the pulse
in your throat. Your wallet will be stolen, you'll get fat,
slip on the bathroom tiles of a foreign hotel
and crack your hip. You'll be lonely.
Oh taste how sweet and tart
the red juice is, how the tiny seeds
crunch between your teeth.

Sweetness

Just when it has seemed I couldn't bear one more friend
waking with a tumor, one more maniac

with a perfect reason, often a sweetness has come
and changed nothing in the world

except the way I stumbled through it, for a while lost
in the ignorance of loving

someone or something, the world shrunk
to mouth-size,
hand-size, and never seeming small.

I acknowledge there is no sweetness
that doesn't leave a stain,
no sweetness that's ever sufficiently sweet

Tonight a friend called to say his lover
was killed in a car
he was driving. His voice was low

and guttural, he repeated what he needed
to repeat, and I repeated
the one or two words we have for such grief

until we were speaking only in tones.
Often a sweetness comes
as if on loan, stays just long enough

to make sense of what it means to be alive,
then returns to its dark
source. As for me, I don't care

where it's been, or what bitter road
it's traveled
to come so far, to taste so good.

Stephen Dunn

Pilgrim (updated 9/2017)

I am the war and I am the people
and I am the tyrant who feeds on your fears

I am the weapon and I am the victim
and I am the mother and each of her tears –

CHORUS: But if I go to war now
I know I'll never come home
If I fight now,
I'll never come home.

I am the soldier marching proud into battle
and I am the daughter left weeping alone

I am the wounded and I am the hero
and I am the millions who never came home.

CHORUS

I am the body of Earth that they fight for
ravaged and torn when the fighting is done
And I am a child naked and hungry,
Desperately lost though the battle was won

CHORUS

I was the last soldier to die in a field of death
Amidst a thousand bodies, I took the last breath

I saw a thousand spirits awake
I saw a thousand spirits rise up
I saw a thousand spirits come Home...

So if I go to war now I know I'll only go Home
If I fight now will I always come home?

I am the pilgrim that the angels behold
and I am the heart watching lifetimes unfold
I am the dying and I am the living
For I am the Silence inside every soul

And if I go to war now, will I ever come home?
If I fight now, will I ever come home?

~Kim Rosen, 1989

Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.

The inner -- what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.

~Rilke, translated by Stephen Mitchell

Call You Grass*by Leonard Cohen*

Call you grass
call you wind-bent slender grass
say you are full of grace
and grown by the river
Say what country
say what river
say what colour
Tell where is the clock
in the rose's face
tell where are the speared hands
bending the fences over
Call you loving in whatever room
in orchards on seas
knowing not whom you leave
whom you pass
who reaches after
Call you falling before a strange ark
beads and wedding band asunder
knowing not who watches and grieves
behind his glory wings
Claim you now
for blood for kingdom for love
Tell the collapsed belly of Mary
tell the limbs hanging so sadly over
Claim you
Claim you in my father's name
Call you grass

In this passing moment

by Hogen Bays

In this passing moment karma ripens
and all things come to be.

I vow to choose what is:

If there is cost, I choose to pay.

If there is need, I choose to give.

If there is pain, I choose to feel.

If there is sorrow, I choose to grieve.

When burning — I choose heat.

When calm — I chooses peace.

When starving — I choose hunger.

When happy — I choose joy.

Whom I encounter, I choose to meet.

What I shoulder, I choose to bear.

When it is my death, I choose to die.

Where this takes me, I choose to go.

...

To Posterity

by Bertold Brecht
(translated from German by H. R. Hays)

1.
Indeed I live in the dark ages!
A guileless word is an absurdity. A smooth forehead betokens
A hard heart. He who laughs
Has not yet heard
The terrible tidings.
Ah, what an age it is
When to speak of trees is almost a crime
For it is a kind of silence about injustice!
And he who walks calmly across the street,
Is he not out of reach of his friends
In trouble?
It is true: I earn my living
But, believe me, it is only an accident.
Nothing that I do entitles me to eat my fill.
By chance I was spared. (If my luck leaves me
I am lost.)
They tell me: eat and drink. Be glad you have it!
But how can I eat and drink
When my food is snatched from the hungry
And my glass of water belongs to the thirsty?
And yet I eat and drink.
I would gladly be wise.
The old books tell us what wisdom is:
Avoid the strife of the world
Live out your little time
Fearing no one
Using no violence
Returning good for evil --
Not fulfillment of desire but forgetfulness
Passes for wisdom.
I can do none of this:
Indeed I live in the dark ages!

2.

I came to the cities in a time of disorder
 When hunger ruled.
 I came among men in a time of uprising
 And I revolted with them.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.
 I ate my food between massacres.
 The shadow of murder lay upon my sleep.
 And when I loved, I loved with indifference.
 I looked upon nature with impatience.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.
 In my time streets led to the quicksand.
 Speech betrayed me to the slaughterer.
 There was little I could do. But without me
 The rulers would have been more secure. This was my hope.
 So the time passed away
 Which on earth was given me.

3.

You, who shall emerge from the flood
 In which we are sinking,
 Think --
 When you speak of our weaknesses,
 Also of the dark time
 That brought them forth.
 For we went, changing our country more often than our shoes.
 In the class war, despairing
 When there was only injustice and no resistance.
 For we knew only too well:
 Even the hatred of squalor
 Makes the brow grow stern.
 Even anger against injustice
 Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas, we
 Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
 Could not ourselves be kind.
 But you, when at last it comes to pass
 That man can help his fellow man,
 Do no judge us
 Too harshly.

"If It Be Your Will" by Leonard Cohen

If it be your will
That I speak no more
And my voice be still
As it was before
I will speak no more
I shall abide until
I am spoken for
If it be your will
If it be your will
That a voice be true
From this broken hill
I will sing to you
From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will
To let me sing
From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will
To let me sing

If it be your will
If there is a choice
Let the rivers fill
Let the hills rejoice
Let your mercy spill
On all these burning hearts in hell
If it be your will
To make us well

And draw us near
And bind us tight
All your children here
In their rags of light
In our rags of light
All dressed to kill
And end this night
If it be your will If it be your will.

The Last Time

The last time we had dinner together in a restaurant
with white tablecloths, he leaned forward

and took my two hands in his hands and said,
I'm going to die soon. I want you to know that.

And I said, I think I do know.
And he said, What surprises me is that you don't.

And I said, I do. And he said, What?
And I said, Know that you're going to die.

And he said, No, I mean know that you are.

-Marie Howe
from WHAT THE LIVING DO (W.W. Norton, 1998)

A Quiet Joy

I'm standing in a place where I once loved.
The rain is falling. The rain is my home.

I think words of longing: a landscape
out to the very edge of what's possible.

I remember you waving your hand
as if wiping mist from the window pane,

and your face, as if enlarged
from an old blurred photo.

Once I committed a terrible wrong
to myself and others.

But the world is beautifully made for doing good
and for resting, like a park bench.

And late in life I discovered
a quiet joy
like a serious disease that's discovered too late:

just a little time left now for quiet joy.

~Yehuda Amichai, tr. by Chana Bloch

Relax

by Ellen Bass

Bad things are going to happen.
Your tomatoes will grow a fungus
and your cat will get run over.
Someone will leave the bag with the ice cream
melting in the car and throw
your blue cashmere sweater in the drier.
Your husband will sleep
with a girl your daughter's age, her breasts spilling
out of her blouse. Or your wife
will remember she's a lesbian
and leave you for the woman next door. The other cat –
the one you never really liked — will contract a disease
that requires you to pry open its feverish mouth
every four hours for a month.
Your parents will die.
No matter how many vitamins you take,
how much Pilates, you'll lose your keys,
your hair and your memory. If your daughter
doesn't plug her heart
into every live socket she passes,
you'll come home to find your son has emptied
your refrigerator, dragged it to the curb,
and called the used appliance store for a pick up — drug money.
There's a Buddhist story of a woman chased by a tiger.
When she comes to a cliff, she sees a sturdy vine
and climbs half way down. But there's also a tiger below.
And two mice — one white, one black — scurry out
and begin to gnaw at the vine. At this point
she notices a wild strawberry growing from a crevice.
She looks up, down, at the mice.
Then she eats the strawberry.
So here's the view, the breeze, the pulse
in your throat. Your wallet will be stolen, you'll get fat,
slip on the bathroom tiles of a foreign hotel
and crack your hip. You'll be lonely.
Oh taste how sweet and tart
the red juice is, how the tiny seeds
crunch between your teeth.

My Nana Like the Trees

My Nana, like the trees,
was well-dressed in her time.
Now she barely wears her skin;
arms and feet and fluids caving in
and breath so thin you can see
to the other side.
Ancient fingers curl at her chin
and tumble off the edge of vagrant words
into the season, like the leaves,
retiring from green
to blaze a naked moment then careen
to earth.

My Nana counts at the edge of time
as thoughts melt into numbers: one to six,
seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, then begin again
like the ancient monk
whose measured chant
at once keeps time
and shatters it.

My Nana chants in the autumn light;
numbers pumped from a distant past
fall from her breath, like leaves
from the tree of a branching soul
that reaches wider, higher still

even as the stuff of time
is strewn below or hangs
translucent from the bone
with no wish but to journey down
on gravity's verging tide

and something brilliant -
barely known -
rising through the naked trees,

flies home

The Still Time

I know there is still time—
time for the hands
to open,
to be filled
by those failed harvests,
the imagined bread of the days of not having.
I remember those summer nights
when I was young and empty,
when I lay through the darkness
wanting, wanting,
knowing
I would have nothing of anything I wanted—
that total craving
that hollows the heart out irreversibly.
So it surprises me now to hear
the steps of my life following me—
so much of it gone
it returns, everything that drove me crazy
comes back, as if blessing the misery
of each step it took me into the world;
as though a prayer had ended
and the changed
air between the palms goes free
to become the glitter
on common things that inexplicably shine.
And the old voices,
which once made broken-off, choked, parrot-incoherences,
speak again,
this time on the *palatum cordis*,
saying there is still time
for those who can groan
to sing,
for those who can sing to heal themselves.

- Galway Kinnell

The Still Time

by Galway Kinnell

I know there is still time –
time for the hands
to open,
to be filled by those failed harvests,
the imagined bread of the days of not having.

Now that the fear
has been rummaged down to its husk,
and the wind blowing
the flesh away translates itself
into flesh and the flesh
gives itself in its reveries to the wind.

I remember those summer nights
when I was young and empty
when I lay through the darkness
wanting, wanting
knowing
I would have nothing of anything I wanted –
that total craving
that hollows the heart out irreversibly.

So it surprises me now to hear
the steps of my life following me –
so much of it gone
it returns, everything that drove me crazy
comes back, blessing the misery
of each step it took me into the world;
as though a prayer had ended
and the bit of changed air
between the palms goes free
to become the glitter
on some common thing that inexplicably shines.

And the old voice
which once made its broken-off, choked, parrot-incoherences,
speaks again,
this time on the palatum cordis,
this time saying there is time, still time
for one who can groan
to sing,
for one who can sing to be healed.

(from *Selected Poems*, originally in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* in a different version)

The World - by Marie Howe

I couldn't tell one song from another,
which bird said what or to whom or for what reason.

The oak tree seemed to be writing something using very few words,
I couldn't decide which door to open- they looked the same, or what

would happen when I did reach out and turn a knob. I thought I was safe,
standing there
but my death remembered its date:

only so many summer nights still stood before me, full moon, waning moon,
October mornings: what to make of them? which door?

I couldn't tell which stars were which or how far away any of them was,
or which were still burning or not- their light moving through space like a
long

late train- and I've lived on this earth so long - 50 winters, 50 springs and
summers,
and all this time stars in the sky- in daylight

when I couldn't see them, and at night when, most nights, I didn't look.

Each Moment a White Bull Steps Shining into the World

by Jane Hirshfield

If the gods bring to you
a strange and frightening creature,
accept the gift
as if it were one you had chosen.

Say the accustomed prayers,
oil the hooves well,
caress the small ears with praise.

Have the new halter of woven silver
embedded with jewels.
Spare no expense, pay what is asked,
when a gift arrives from the sea.

Treat it as you yourself
would be treated, brought speechless and naked
into the court of a king.

And when the request finally comes,
do not hesitate even an instant----
stroke the white throat,
the heavy trembling dewlaps
you'd come to believe were yours,
and plunge in the knife.

Not once
did you enter the pasture
without pause,
without yourself trembling,
that you came to love it, that was the gift.

Let the envious gods take back what they can.

from Elegaic Poem
Section III

He goes free of the earth.
The sun of his last day sets
clear in the sweetness of his liberty.

The earth recovers from his dying,
the hallow of his life remaining
in all his death leaves.

Radiances know him. Grown lighter
than breath, he is set free
in our remembering. Grown brighter

than vision, he goes dark
into the life of the hill
that holds his peace.

He's hidden among all that is,
and cannot be lost.

-- from *Collected Poems of Wendell Berry (1957-1982)*

So Much Happiness

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
With sadness there is something to rub against,
A wound to tend with lotion and cloth.
When the world falls in around you, you have pieces to
Pick up,
Something to hold in your hands, like ticket stubs
Or change.

But happiness floats.
It doesn't need you to hold it down.
It doesn't need anything.
Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing,
And disappears when it wants to.
You are happy either way.
Even the fact that you once lived in a peaceful tree house
And now live over a quarry of noise and dust
Cannot make you unhappy.
Everything has a life of its own,
It too could wake up filled with possibilities
Of coffee cake and ripe peaches,
And love even the floor which needs to be swept,
The soiled linens and scratched records...

Since there is no place large enough
To contain so much happiness,
You shrug, you raise your hands, and it flows out of you
Into everything you touch. You are not responsible.
You take no credit, as the night sky takes no credit
For the moon, but continues to hold it, and share it,
And in that way, be known.

Naomi Shihab Nye

The Long Boat

When his boat snapped loose
from its mooring, under
the screaming of the gulls,
he tried at first to wave
to his dear ones on shore,
but in the rolling fog
they had already lost their faces.
Too tired even to choose
between jumping and calling,
somehow he felt absolved and free
of his burdens, those mottoes
stamped on his name-tag:
conscience, ambition, and all
that caring.
He was content to lie down
with the family ghosts
in the slop of his cradle,
buffeted by the storm,
endlessly drifting.
Peace! Peace!
To be rocked by the Infinite!
As if it didn't matter
which way was home;
as if he didn't know
he loved the earth so much
he wanted to stay forever.

- Stanley Kunitz

Yes, We Can Talk

by Mark Nepo

Having loved enough and lost enough,
I'm no longer searching
just opening,

no longer trying to make sense of pain
but trying to be a soft and sturdy home
in which real things can land.

These are the irritations
that rub into a pearl.

So we can talk for a while
but then we must listen,
the way rocks listen to the sea.

And we can churn at all that goes wrong
but then we must lay all distractions
down and water every living seed.

And yes, on nights like tonight
I too feel alone. But seldom do I
face it squarely enough
to see that it's a door
into the endless breath
that has no breather,
into the surf that human
shells call God.

For What Binds Us

There are names for what binds us:
strong forces, weak forces.

Look around, you can see them:
the skin that forms in a half-empty cup,
nails rusting into the places they join,
joints dovetailed on their own weight.

The way things stay so solidly
wherever they've been set down --
and gravity, scientists say, is weak.

And see how the flesh grows back
across a wound, with a great vehemence,
more strong
than the simple, untested surface before.
There's a name for it on horses,
when it comes back darker and raised: proud flesh,

as all flesh
is proud of its wounds, wears them
as honors given out after battle,
small triumphs pinned to the chest --

And when two people have loved each other
see how it is like a
scar between their bodies,
stronger, darker, and proud;
how the black cord makes of them a single fabric
that nothing can tear or mend.

- Jane Hirshfield

The Origin of Your Origin

How long will you move backwards? Come forward!
Don't stray towards disbelief. Come to your Self.
In grief see gentleness. Come towards gentleness.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

Although you may seem to be the child of earth,
You are the child of the pearls of certainty,
The faithful guardian of the treasure of divine life.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

When you have tied yourself to detachment from yourself,
Know you'll be sprung free of your I
And escape that prison with its thousand traps.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

You are of the race of Eve. You are the calif of God.
But you've lowered your eyes to this sad world
And satisfied yourself with meager scraps.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

Although this world still holds you in its thrall,
In your heart you are a hidden treasure.
Open now your inner eyes, the eyes of Love.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

~Rumi, translated by Andrew Harvey

Become Becoming

Wait for evening.
Then you'll be alone.

Wait for the playground to empty.
Then call out those companions from childhood:

The one who closed his eyes
and pretended to be invisible.
The one to whom you told every secret.
The one who made a world of any hiding place.

And don't forget the one who listened in silence
while you wondered out loud:

Is the universe an empty mirror? A flowering tree?
Is the universe the sleep of a woman?

Wait for the sky's last blue
(the color of your homesickness).
Then you'll know the answer.

Wait for the air's first gold (that color of Amen).
Then you'll spy the wind's barefoot steps.

Then you'll recall that story beginning
with a child who strays in the woods.

The search for him goes on in the growing
shadow of the clock.

And the face behind the clock's face
is not his father's face.

And the hands behind the clock's hands
are not his mother's hands.

All of Time began when you first answered
to the names your mother and father gave you.

Soon, those names will travel with the leaves.
Then, you can trade places with the wind.

Then you'll remember your life
as a book of candles,
each page read by the light of its own burning.

~ Li-Young Lee ~

Prayer

Ellen Bass

Once I wore a dress liquid as vodka.
My lover watched me ascend
from the subway
like I was an underground spring
breaking through.
I want to stop wanting to be wanted like that.
I'm tired of the song the rain sings in June,
the chorus of hope, the ravenous green,
the Earth, her ornate crown of trees
spiking up from her loamy head.
There are things I wanted, like everyone.
But to this angel of wishes I've worshipped
so long, I ask now to admit
the world as it is.

The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
 things that change. But it doesn't change.
 People wonder about what you are pursuing.
 You have to explain about the thread.
 But it is hard for others to see.
 While you hold it you can't get lost.
 Tragedies happen; people get hurt
 or die; and you suffer and get old.
 Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
 You don't ever let go of the thread.

~ William Stafford ~

Before the World was Made

If I make the lashes dark
 And the eyes more bright
 And the lips more scarlet,
 Or ask if all be right
 From mirror after mirror,
 No vanity's displayed:
 I'm looking for the face I had
 Before the world was made.

What if I look upon a man
 As though on my beloved,
 And my blood be cold the while
 And my heart unmoved?
 Why should he think me cruel
 Or that he is betrayed?
 I'd have him love the thing that was
 Before the world was made.

W. B. Yeats

Woods

I wish to grow dumber,
to slip deep into woods that grow blinder
with each step I take,
until the fingers let go of their numbers
and the hands are finally ignorant as paws.
Unable to count the petals,
I will not know who loves me,
who loves me not.
Nothing to remember,
nothing to forgive,
I will stumble into the juice of the berry, the shag of bark,
I will be dense and happy as fur.

~Noelle Oxenhandler~

Know Thyself, Know Thyself More Deeply

Go deeper than love, for the soul has greater depths,
love is like the grass, but the heart is deep wild rock,
molten, yet dense and permanent.

Go down to your deep old heart, woman, and lose sight of yourself.
And lose sight of me, the me whom you turbulently loved.

Let us lose sight of ourselves, and break the mirrors.
For the fierce curve of our lives is moving again to the depths
out of sight, in the deep dark living heart.

But say, in the dark wild metal of your heart
is there a gem, which came into being between us?
is there a sapphire of mutual trust, a blue spark?
Is there a ruby of fused being, mine and yours, an inward glint?

If there is not, O then leave me, go away.
For I cannot be bullied back into the appearances of love,
any more than August can be bullied to look like March.

Love out of season, especially at the end of the season,
is merely ridiculous.
If you insist on it, I insist on departure.

Have you no deep old heart of wild womanhood,
self-forgetful and gemmed with experience,
and swinging in a strange unison of power
with the heart of the man you are supposed to have loved?

If you have not, go away.
If you can only sit with a mirror in your hand, an ageing woman
posing on and on as a lover,
in love with a self that now is shallow and withered,
your own self - that has passed like a last summer's flower
— then go away —

I — do not want a woman whom age cannot wither.
She is a made-up lie, a dyed immortelle
of infinite staleness.

~ D. H. Lawrence

Humpbacks

There is, all around us,
this country
of original fire.

You know what I mean.

The sky, after all, stops at nothing so something
has to be holding
our bodies
in its rich and timeless stables or else
we would fly away.

Off Stellwagan
off the Cape,
the humpbacks rise. Carrying their tonnage
of barnacles and joy
they leap through the water, they nuzzle back under it
like children
at play.

They sing, too.
And not for any reason
you can't imagine.

Three of them
rise to the surface near the bow of the boat,
then dive
deeply, their huge scarred flukes
tipped to the air.

We wait, not knowing
just where it will happen; suddenly
they smash through the surface, someone begins
shouting for joy and you realize
it is yourself as they surge
upward and you see for the first time
how huge they are, as they breach,
and dive, and breach again
through the shining blue flowers
of the split water and you see them
for some unbelievable
part of a moment against the sky —
like nothing you've ever imagined —
like the myth of the fifth morning galloping
out of darkness, pouring
heavenward, spinning; then

they crash back under those black silks
and we all fall back
together into that wet fire, you
know what I mean.

I know a captain who has seen them
playing with seaweed, swimming
through the green islands, tossing
the slippery branches into the air.

I know a whale that will come to the boat whenever
she can, and nudge it gently along the bow
with her long flipper.

I know several lives worth living.

Listen, whatever it is you try
to do with your life, nothing will ever dazzle you
like the dreams of your body,

its spirit
longing to fly while the dead-weight bones

toss their dark mane and hurry
back into the fields of glittering fire

where everything,
even the great whale,
throbs with song.

~ Mary Oliver

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
 what i have shaped into
 a kind of life? i had no model.
 born in babylon
 both nonwhite and woman
 what did i see to be except myself?
 i made it up
 here on this bridge between
 starshine and clay,
 my one hand holding tight
 my other hand; come celebrate
 with me that everyday
 something has tried to kill me
 and has failed.

blessing the boats

Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
 that is entering even now
 the lip of our understanding
 carry you out
 beyond the face of fear
 may you kiss
 the wind then turn from it
 certain that it will
 love your back may you
 open your eyes to water
 water waving forever
 and may you in your innocence
 sail through this to that

You and Art

Your exact errors make a music
that nobody hears.
Your straying feet find the great dance,
walking alone.
And you live on a world where stumbling
always leads home.
Year after year fits over your face -
when there was youth, your talent
was youth;
later, you find your way by touch
where moss redeems the stone;
and you discover where music begins
before it makes any sound,
far in the mountains where canyons go
still as the always-falling, ever-new flakes of snow.

- William Stafford

Hallelujah

I've heard there was a secret chord
 That David played, and it pleased the Lord
 But you don't really care for music, do you?
 It goes like this
 The fourth, the fifth
 The minor fall, the major lift
 The baffled king composing Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
 Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Your faith was strong but you needed proof
 You saw her bathing on the roof
 Her beauty in the moonlight overthrew you
 She tied you to a kitchen chair
 She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
 And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
 Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Baby I have been here before
 I know this room, I've walked this floor
 I used to live alone before I knew you.
 I've seen your flag on the marble arch
 Love is not a victory march
 It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
 Hallelujah, Hallelujah

There was a time when you let me know
 What's really going on below
 But now you never show it to me, do you?
 And remember when I moved in you
 The holy dove was moving too
 And every breath we drew was Hallelujah

Hallelujah, Hallelujah
 Hallelujah, Hallelujah

Maybe there's a God above
 But all I've ever learned from love
 Was how to shoot at someone who outdrew you

Love Sorrow

Love sorrow. She is yours now, and you must
take care of what has been
given. Brush her hair, help her
into her little coat, hold her hand,
especially when crossing a street. For, think,

what if you should lose her? Then you would be
sorrow yourself; her drawn face, her sleeplessness
would be yours. Take care, touch
her forehead that she feel herself not so

utterly alone. And smile, that she does not
altogether forget the world before the lesson.
Have patience in abundance. And do not
ever lie or ever leave her even for a moment

by herself, which is to say, possibly, again,
abandoned. She is strange, mute, difficult,
sometimes unmanageable but, remember, she is a child.
And amazing things can happen. And you may see,

as the two of you go
walking together in the morning light, how
little by little she relaxes; she looks about her;
she begins to grow.”

— Mary Oliver, *Red Bird*

The Thing Is

by Ellen Bass

to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you've held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
your throat filled with the silt of it.
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief--
you think, *How can a body stand this?*
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you again.

ANGELS

This is how an angel comes
out of the earth, upwards
from the underworld
when everybody thought
they came from the light wings
of the sky - no
they are massive -
on nights of rain and sleet, split
the soil, splash and muddy the grass
wingspans wide as lakes
wearing mud armour, they crawl
full length up rivers and streams
dam ditches, seep through drains
penetrate walls, barns, chicken coops
unsettle bats with wing-beats
that shake down trees -
remind us, cradled in our prayers
how we like to remain dry, sheltered.
This is how angels come
mouths full of earth
spitting verses
of poetry.

Miriam Darlington

Vespers

(after "Become Becoming" by Li-Young Lee)

Begin with frog song.
That's when edges blur.

Begin with the vesper sparrow's flight.
Time to climb through those shadows of childhood:

The stone girl caught in the moment of leaving.
The blue girl who could open the ceiling and fly.
The fur in the mare's long ear, kissing your lips as you whisper.

And here is the one that goes with the wound in the wall
where the flung record missed you and stuck:
Was the child a torn canvas? A broken song?
Was the child the mute poem of a mother?

Listen for the cicada's first click, the sound of summer leaving.
Then you'll know the portal.

Watch for the swallows' last sweep, the story of your choicelessness.
Then you'll see the ink path between the trees.

Then you'll discover the girl who fled to the woods
with a box of Crispy Critters under her arm.

The animals became her in the lengthening
shadow of words.

And the eyes inside her eyes had no memory
of a childhood.

And the ears inside her ears knew no sound
that was her name.

All the edges came when you first claimed a shape
to be your own.

Now that shape rides shotgun with the tide.
And you can barter your body for waves.

Soon you'll know your days
as a spoken ocean,
each breath lit from within by phosphorescence.

Psalm 4

Even in the midst of great pain, Lord,
I praise you for that which is.
I will not refuse this grief
Or close myself to this anguish.

Let shallow men pray for ease:
"Comfort us; shield us from sorrow."
I pray for whatever you send me,
And I ask to receive it as your gift.
You have put a joy in my heart
Greater than all the world's riches.
I lie down trusting the darkness
For I know that even now you are here.

Translated and adapted by Stephen Mitchell

The New Song

by W. S. Merwin

For some time I thought there was time
and that there would always be time
for what I had a mind to do
and what I could imagine
going back to and finding it
as I had found it the first time
but by this time I do not know
what I thought when I thought back then

there is no time yet it grows less
there is the sound of rain at night
arriving unknown in the leaves
once without before or after
then I hear the thrush waking
at daybreak singing the new song

"The New Song" by W.S. Merwin, from *The Moon Before Morning*. ©
Copper Canyon Press, 2014.

Rain Light

By W.S. Merwin

All day the stars watch from long ago
my mother said I am going now
when you are alone you will be all right
whether or not you know you will know
look at the old house in the dawn rain
all the flowers are forms of water
the sun reminds them through a white cloud
touches the patchwork spread on the hill
the washed colors of the afterlife
that lived there long before you were born
see how they wake without a question
even though the whole world is burning

Gravel, Excerpt
by Mary Oliver

1

When death carts me off to the bottomlands, when I begin the long work
of rising—

Death, whoever and whatever you are, tallest king of tall kings, grant me these
wishes: unstring my bones; let me be not one thing but all things, and
wondrously scattered; shake me free from my name. Let the wind, and
the wildflowers, and the catbird never know it. Let time loosen me like the bead
of a flower from its wrappings of leaves. Let me begin the changes, let me—

Can you imagine a world without certainty?

The wind rises the wind falls.

The gravels of the world,
the stones of the world
are in their proper places.

The vast, writhing
worms of the sea
are in their places.

The white gulls
on the wet rocks
are in their places.

All is certainty.

4

Are you afraid?

The ear of corn knows whereof it is plucked.

Are you afraid?

The wind moves this way and that way, something
is pushing it.

Are you afraid?

Somewhere a thousand swans are flying
through the winter's worst storm.

They are white and shining, their black beaks
open a little, the red tongues flash.

Now, and *now*, and *now*, and *now* their heavy wings
rise and fall as they slide across the sky

5

Goodbye to the goldfinches
in their silver baskets.
Goodbye to the pilot whales, and the curl of their spines
in the crisp waves.
Goodbye to the grasshopper.
Goodbye to the pond lilies, the turtle with her
cat's head.
Goodbye to the lion's mane floating in the harbor
like a spangled veil.

Goodbye to the moon uprising in the east.
Goodbye to the going forth, and coming home.
Goodbye to the going forth, and holding on, and worrying.
Goodbye to the engine of breath.

The knee sings its anguish.
The ears fill with the sound of ringing water.
The muscles of the eyes pull toward sleep.

Goodbye to the swaying trees.
Goodbye to the black triangles of the winter sea.
Goodbye to oranges, the prick of their fragrance.
Goodbye to the fox sparrow,
goodbye to the blue-winged teal.
Goodbye to lettuce, and the pale turnip,
and the gatherings of the rice fields.
Goodbye to the morning light.
Goodbye to the goldfinches
and their wavering songs.

Slowly
up the hill,
like a thicket of white flowers,
forever
is coming.

6

It is the nature of stone
to be satisfied.
It is the nature of water
to want to be somewhere else.

Everywhere we look:
the sweet guttural swill of the water
tumbling.
Everywhere we look:
the stone, basking in the sun,

or offering itself
to the golden lichen.

It is our nature not only to see
that the world is beautiful

but to stand in the dark, under the stars,
or at noon, in the rainfall of light,

frenzied,
wringing our hands,

half-mad, saying over and over:

what does it mean, that the world is beautiful—
what does it mean?

The child asks this,
and the determined, laboring adult asks this—

both the carpenter and the scholar ask this,
and the fisherman and the teacher;

both the rich and the poor ask this
(maybe the poor more than the rich)

and the old and the very old, not yet having figured it out,
ask this
desperately

standing beside the golden-coated field rock,
or the tumbling water,
or under the stars—

what does it mean?
what does it mean?

8

Listen, I don't think we're going to rise
 in gauze and halos.
 Maybe as grass, and slowly.
 Maybe as the long-leaved, beautiful grass

I have known, and, you have known—
 or the pine tree—
 or the dark rocks of the zigzag creek
 hastening along—

or the silver rain—

or the hummingbird.

9

I look up
 into the faces of the stars,
 into their deep silence.

10

This the poem of goodbye.
 And this is the poem of don't know.

My hands touch the lilies
 then withdraw;

my hands touch the blue iris
 then withdraw;

and I say, not easily but carefully—
 the words round in the mouth, crisp on the tongue—

*dirt, mud, stars, water—
 I know you as if you were myself.*

How could I be afraid?

RIPENING

The longer we are together
the larger death grows around us.
How many we know by now
who are dead! We, who were young,
now count the cost of having been.
And yet as we know the dead
we grow familiar with the world.
We, who were young and loved each other
ignorantly, now come to know
each other in love, married
by what we have done, as much
as by what we intend. Our hair
turns white with our ripening
as though to fly away in some
coming wind, bearing the seed
of what we know. It was bitter to learn
that we come to death as we come
to love, bitter to face
the just and solving welcome
that death prepares. But that is bitter
only to the ignorant, who pray
it will not happen. Having come
the bitter way to better prayer, we have
the sweetness of ripening. How sweet
to know you by the signs of this world!

Wendell Berry

Of Being

I know this happiness
is provisional:

the looming presences—
great suffering, great fear—

withdraw only
into peripheral vision:

but ineluctable this shimmering
of wind in the blue leaves:

this flood of stillness
widening the lake of sky:

this need to dance,
this need to kneel:

this mystery:

~ Denise Levertov ~

Adrift

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.
This is how the heart makes a duet of
wonder and grief. The light spraying
through the lace of the fern is as delicate
as the fibers of memory forming their web
around the knot in my throat. The breeze
makes the birds move from branch to branch
as this ache makes me look for those I've lost
in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh
of the next stranger. In the very center, under
it all, what we have that no one can take
away and all that we've lost face each other.
It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured
by a holiness that exists inside everything.
I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

Mark Nepo

The Departure of the Prodigal Son

~ Rainer Maria Rilke, *tr. Kim Rosen*

Now to walk away from all this entanglement
 that is ours and yet does not belong to us,
 that, like the water in an old well,
 reflects us trembling and distorts who we are;
 that hooks us again and again, like thorns – to walk away
 from this and that
 we long ago stopped seeing
 (so commonplace were they, and so familiar)
 then to look back once and realize at last – tender, forgiving;
 as if for the first time, so close – to realize
 how impersonal is the suffering that comes to all of us
 that fills childhood to the brim:
 And then to walk away, rending hand from hand
 as if to re-open a wound,
 and walk away: where? Into the unknown,
 far into an unfamiliar, warm country,
 that, whatever happens, remains indifferent
 as a backdrop: a garden or a wall;
 and walk away: why? From mission, from zeal,
 impatience, dark expectation;
 from not knowing and not being known:

To take on all this, to let go all hope
 to let fall whatever you may still be holding onto, perhaps
 to die alone, not knowing why –

Is this the opening to a new life?

Glimpse
by Chase Twitchell

It was as if a window suddenly blew open
and the sky outside the mind came flooding in.
My childhood shriveled to a close,
just like that, thread of smoke
that rose and touched a cloud - or the cloud's
replica adrift on the slow river of thinking -
and disappeared inside it. In that dark water,
a new lily was opening, sky- white out of the muck.
It was only a glimpse, quick,
like a bird ruffling,
but I saw the flower's
beautiful stark shape, an artichoke
brightened from within by the moon.
A path lay shadowy under my feet,
and I followed it.

vi.

Once again, the moment of impossible
transition, the bow, its silent voice
above the string. Let us say
the story goes like this. Let us say
you could start anywhere.
Let us say you took your spintered being
by the hand, and led it
to the centre of a room: starlight
through the floorboards of the soul.
The patterns of your life
repeat themselves until you listen.
Forgive this. Say now
what you have to say.

from "Art of Fugue" by Jan Zwicky

vi.

Languor 2 a.m. The blown flower of your sex.
To kiss you, slowly

catch the satin of your underlip between my teeth.
To kiss you, your velvet weight on my tongue.

Stretched out along you. Stretching under you,
the winding and unwinding of our names. To feel

earth's measure of us, true geometry, the pattern
spilling from the center of the rose.

The cream silk of your inner arm. My hair caught on your nipple.
Pink tipped, cream-white petals carpeting the porch.

My lips across the dark whorl at the center of your chest.
The slight twitch of your thigh, wrapped under, over mine.

from "Envoy: Seven Variations" by Jan Zwicky

vii.

Rain. The creeks in flood; lakes in the fields,
my mouth, your eyes, my hands on your skin:

we are learning to drown. Be breath. Be nothing.
At last I am truly alive.

Leaves turning, autumn, each drop falling
a hundred times: desire empties me, and again

the music of your nakedness: that
silence. Here, now,

the final compass point,
the body dissolving in the soul:

my lips, your tongue, how even in this low light,
each things gleams.

from "Envoy: Seven Variations" by Jan Zwicky

Enough. These few words are enough,
if not these words, this breath
If not this breath, this sitting here.
This opening to the life
we have refused,
again and again,
until now.
Until now.

—David Whyte

The Affliction
by Marie Howe

When I walked across a room I saw myself walking
As if I were someone else,

when I picked up a fork, when I pulled off a dress,
as if I were in a movie.

It's what I thought you saw when you looked at me.

So when I looked at you I didn't see you
I saw the me I thought you saw, as if I were someone else

I called that outside – watching. Well I didn't call it anything
when it happened all the time

But one morning after I stopped the pills – standing in the kitchen
for one second I was inside looking out

then I popped back outside. And saw myself looking.
Would it happen again? It did, a few days later,

Wendy was pulling on her winter coat standing by the kitchen door
And suddenly I was inside and I saw her
I looked out from my own eyes
and I saw her eyes blue gray transparent
and inside them – Wendy herself!

Then I was outside again.
and Wendy was saying Bye Bye, see you soon,
as if Nothing had Happened.

She hadn't noticed. She hadn't known that I'd Been There
For Maybe 40 Seconds,
and that then I was Gone.

She hadn't noticed that I Hadn't Been There for months,
years, the entire time she'd known me.

I needn't have been embarrassed to have been there for those seconds,
she had not Noticed the Difference.

This happened on and off for weeks,

and then I was looking at my old friend John—
suddenly I was in and I saw him,

and he (and this was almost unbearable)

he saw me see him,

and I saw him see me.

He said something like, You're going to be ok now,
Or, It's been difficult hasn't it,

but what he said mattered only a little.

We met -- in our mutual gaze --in between
a third place I'd not yet been.

Home

by Warsan Shire

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer

than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father
no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown

save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

His disciples said, When will you be visible to us?
and when will we see you?
He said, When you undress and are not ashamed.

from the Gospel of Thomas

Sono's Death Poem

Don't just stand there with your hair turning gray,
soon enough the seas will sink your little island.
So while there is still the illusion of time,
set out for another shore.
No sense packing a bag.
You won't be able to lift it into your boat.
Give away all your collections.
Take only new seeds and an old stick.
Send out some prayers on the wind before you sail.
Don't be afraid.
Someone knows you're coming.
An extra fish has been salted.

Mona (Sono) Santacroce

Phoenix

Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,
made nothing?

Are you willing to be made nothing?
dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.
The phoenix renews her youth
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down
to hot and flocculent ash.

Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest
with strands of down like floating ash
shows that she is renewing her youth like the eagle,
immortal bird.

- D.H. Lawrence

Glimpse
by Chase Twitchell

It was as if a window suddenly blew open
and the sky outside the mind came flooding in.
My childhood shriveled to a close,
just like that, thread of smoke
that rose and touched a cloud - or the cloud's
replica adrift on the slow river of thinking -
and disappeared inside it. In that dark water,
a new lily was opening, sky-white out of the muck.
It was only a glimpse, quick,
like a bird ruffling,
but I saw the flower's
beautiful stark shape, an artichoke
brightened from within by the moon.
A path lay shadowy under my feet,
and I followed it.

What is Left to Say

By Lisel Mueller

The self steps out of the circle;
it stops wanting to be
the farmer, the wife, and the child.

It stops trying to please
by learning everyone's dialect;
it finds it can live, after all,
in a world of strangers.

It sends itself fewer flowers;
it stops preserving its tears in amber.

How splendidly arrogant it was
when it believed the gold-filled tomb
of language awaited its raids!
Now it frequents the junkyards
knowing all words are secondhand.

It has not chosen its poverty,
this new frugality.
It did not want to fall out of love
with itself. Young,
it celebrated itself
and richly sang itself,
seeing only itself
in the mirror of the world.

It cannot return. It assumes
its place in the universe of stars
that do not see it. Even the dead
no longer need it to be at peace.
Its function is to applaud.

Nothing

Nothing sings in our bodies
like breath in a flute.
It dwells in the drum.
I hear it now
that slow beat
like when a voice said to the dark,
let there be light,
let there be ocean
and blue fish
born of nothing
and they were there.
I turn back to bed.
The man there is breathing.
I touch him
with hands already owned by another world
Look, they are desert,
they are rust. They have washed the dead.
They have washed the just born.
They are open.
They offer nothing.
Take it.
Take nothing from me.
There is still a little life
left inside this body,
a little wildness here
and mercy
and it is the emptiness
we love, touch, enter in one another
and try to fill.

~ Linda Hogan

Coda

And now I know what most deeply connects us
after that summer so many years ago,
and it isn't poetry, although it is poetry,
and it isn't illness, although we have that in common,
and it isn't gratitude for every moment,
even the terrifying ones, even the physical pain,
though we are halfway through
it, or even the way you describe the magnificence
of being alive, catching a glimpse,
in the store window, of your blowing hair and chapped lips,
though it is beautiful, it is; but it is
that you're my friend out here on the far reaches
of what humans can find out about each other.

Jason Shinder