

hieroglyphic stairway

it's 3:23 in the morning
and I'm awake

because my great great grandchildren
won't let me sleep

my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams

what did you do while the planet was plundered?
what did you do when the earth was unraveling?

surely you did something
when the seasons started failing?

as the mammals, reptiles, birds were all dying?

did you fill the streets with protest
when democracy was stolen?

what did you do
once
you
knew?

I'm riding home on the Colma train
I've got the voice of the milky way in my dreams

I have teams of scientists
feeding me data daily
and pleading I immediately
turn it into poetry

I want just this consciousness reached
by people in range of secret frequencies
contained in my speech

I am the desirous earth
equidistant to the underworld
and the flesh of the stars

I am everything already lost

the moment the universe turns transparent
and all the light shoots through the cosmos

I use words to instigate silence

I'm a hieroglyphic stairway
in a buried Mayan city
suddenly exposed by a hurricane

a satellite circling earth
finding dinosaur bones
in the Gobi desert
I am telescopes that see back in time

I am the precession of the equinoxes,
the magnetism of the spiraling sea

Im riding home on the Colma train
with the voice of the milky way in my dreams

I am myths where violets blossom from blood
like dying and rising gods

I'm the boundary of time
soul encountering soul
and tongues of fire

It's 3:23 in the morning
and I can't sleep
because my great great grandchildren
ask me in dreams
what did you do while the earth was unraveling?

I want just this consciousness reached
by people in range of secret frequencies
contained in my speech

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WEATHERING

My face catches the wind
from the snow line
and flushes with a flush
that will never wholly settle.
Well, that was a metropolitan vanity,
wanting to look young forever, to pass.
I was never a pre-Raphaelite beauty
and only pretty enough to be seen
with a man who wanted to be seen
with a passable woman.

But now that I am in love
with a place that doesn't care
how I look and if I am happy,
happy is how I look and that's all.
My hair will grow grey in any case,
My nails chip and flake, my waist thicken,
and the years work all their usual changes.

If my face is to be weather beaten as well,
It's little enough lost
for a year among lakes and vales
where simply to look out of my window
at the high pass
makes me indifferent to mirrors
and to what my soul may wear
over it's new complexion.

Fleur Adcock

Don't establish the
boundaries first,
The squares, triangles, boxes
of preconceived possibility,
and then pour life into them,
Trimming off the left-over edges,
Ending potential.

A.R. Ammons

Benedicto: May your trails be crooked,
winding, lonesome,
dangerous, leading to the most amazing
view.
May your rivers flow without end,
meandering through pastoral valleys
tinkling with bells,
past temples and castles and poets' towers
into a dark primeval forest where tigers
belch and monkeys howl,
through miasmal and mysterious swamps
and down into a desert of red rock,
blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and
grottos of endless stone,
and down again into a deep vast ancient
unknown chasm
where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled
cliffs,
where deer walk across the white sand
beaches,
where storms come and go
as lightning clangs upon the high crags,
where something strange and more beautiful
and more full of wonder than your deepest
dreams
waits for you—
beyond the next turning of the canyon walls.

Edward Abbey

NO ONE TOLD ME

No one told me
it would lead to this.
No one said
there would be secrets
I would not want to know.

No one told me about seeing,
seeing brought me
loss and a darkness I could not hold.

No one told me about writing or speaking.
Speaking and writing poetry I unsheathed the sharp edge of experience that led me here.

No one told me
it could not be put away.
I was told once, only,
in a whisper,
“The blade is so sharp—
It cuts things together
—not apart.”

This is no comfort.
My future is full of blood
from being blindfold
hands outstretched,
feeling a way along its firm edge.

David Whyte

REVELATION MUST BE TERRIBLE

Revelation must be
terrible with no time left
to say goodbye.

Imagine that moment
staring at the still waters
with only the brief tremor

of your body to say
you are leaving everything
and everyone you know behind.

Being far from home is hard, but you know,
at least we are exiled together.
When you open your eyes to the world

you are on your own for
the first time. No one is
even interested in saving you now

and the world steps in
to test the calm fluidity of your body
from moment to moment

as if it believed you could join
its vibrant dance
of fire and calmness and final stillness.

As if you were meant to be exactly
where you are, as if
like the dark branch of a desert river

you could flow on without a speck
of guilt and everything
everywhere would still be just as it should
be.

As if your place in the world mattered
and the world could
neither speak nor hear the fullness of

its own bitter and beautiful cry
without the deep well
of your body resonating in the
echo.

Knowing that it takes only
that one, terrible
word to make the circle complete,

revelation must be terrible
knowing you can
never hide your voice again.

David Whyte

SELF-PORTRAIT

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.

David Whyte

THE WELL OF GRIEF

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief

turning downward through its black water
to the place we cannot breathe

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

Green Man Walking

There will always be sky days: intervals through which we stroll, light-footed and easy; lifetimes that fill up with cloud expanse, the pull back the curtain to blue, bluster, and breeze—autumn fully here, a current of winter in the air.

Then there are, too, the ground days: those downtrodden, dark and damp spans you trudge through, deadheaded, as if legs were sodden logs, your head a block of cement in the current, tree roots pulled from the sludge at every step.

Worse, still, the empty ghost days: numb corridor afternoons, uninhabited; shadows and light, flimsy blinds fluttering, no one home. Trance to the store for milk two days this side of souring. Litany of lists, want ads. Lost hours stalking the cage.

I want to be a Green Man walking.
To bring sky and ground with me
as I move in my life, not dragging them
behind in a storm wake, but carrying
their elements within, a whole season
of life in my diurnal blood, astride the day

and in time—feet gnarled tree roots,
head frosted with turning leaves, heart
pumping out the morning's birdcall, breath
a breeze after a day of deadening heat—
to come to the sacred table of the world
(avid, grateful) and share in its bounty.

Sebastian Matthews

THE JOURNEY

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—
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.

Mary Oliver

Last night I had a dream—
a blessed illusion it was—
I dreamt of a fountain flowing
deep down in my heart.
Water, by what hidden channels
have you come, tell me, to me,
welling up with new life
I never tasted before?

Last night I had a dream—
a blessed illusion it was—
I dreamt of a hive at work
deep down in my heart.
Within were the golden bees
straining out the bitter past
to make sweet-tasting honey,
and white honeycomb.

Last night I had a dream—
a blessed illusion it was—
I dreamt of a hot sun shining
deep down in my heart.
The heat was in the scorching
as from a fiery hearth;
the sun in the light it shed
and the tears it brought to the eyes.

Last night I had a dream—
a blessed illusion it was—
I dreamt it was God I'd found
deep down in my heart.

Has my heart gone to sleep?
Have the beehives of my dreams stopped working, the waterwheel of the mind run dry,
scoops turning empty,
only shadow inside?
No, my heart is not asleep,
It is awake, wide awake.
Not asleep, not dreaming—
its eyes are opened wide
watching distant signals, listening on the rim of the vast silence.

Antonio Machado

One summer night —
my balcony door stood open
and the front door also —
Death entered my house.
He approached her bed —
not even noticing me —
and with very fine hands
broke something delicate.
Death crossed the room
a second time. What did you do?
He did not answer.
I saw no change in her,
but my heart felt heavy.
I knew what he broke:
it was the thread between us.

Antonio Machado

You walking, your footprints 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 you
Never will step on again.
Walker, there is no road,
Only wind trails in the sea.

Antonio Machado

How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the smallest thing
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.

Each thing —
each stone, blossom, child —
is held in place.
Only we, in our arrogance,
push out beyond what we each belong to
for some empty freedom.

If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.

Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.

So, like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart;
they have never left him.

This is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.

Rilke

I find you in all these things of the world
that I love calmly, like a brother;
in things no one cares for, you brood like a seed;
and to powerful things you give an immense power.

Strength plays such a marvelous game
it moves through the things of the world like a servant,
groping out in roots, tapering in trunks,
and in the treetops like a rising from the dead.

Rilke

I love the dark hours of my being,
my mind deepens into them.

There I can find, as in old letters,
the days of my life, already lived,
and held like a legend, and understood.

Then the knowing comes; I can open
to another life that's wide and timeless.

So I am sometimes like a tree rustling over a gravesite
and making real the dream
of the one its living roots
embrace.

A dream once lost
among sorrows and songs.

Rilke

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 yourself.
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

SAIL FORTH

Sail forth— steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless O Soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou
with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared
to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

O my brave soul!
O farther, farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the
seas of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!

Walt Whitman, "Passage to India"

If words are of any use at all, they are the words
of the poet. For poetry has the ability to point us
toward the truth and then stand aside while prose
stands in the doorway relating all the wonders on
the other side but rarely lets us pass.

Lao Tzu

There is no need to run outside
For better seeing,
Nor to peer from a window. Rather abide
At the center of your being;
For the moment you leave it, the less you learn.
Search your heart and see
If he is wise who takes each turn:
The way to do is to be.

Mindful

Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less
kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle
in the haystack
of light.
It was what I was born for
to look, to listen,
to lose myself
inside this soft world -
to instruct myself
over and over
in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,
the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant -
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,
the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help
but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light
of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

Mary Oliver

A FEW WORDS ON THE SOUL

We have a soul at times.
No one's got it non-stop,
for keeps.

Day after day,
year after year
may pass without it.

Sometimes
it will settle for awhile
only in childhood's fears and raptures.
Sometimes only in astonishment
that we are old.

It rarely lends a hand
in uphill tasks,
like moving furniture,
or lifting luggage,
or going miles in shoes that pinch.

It usually steps out
whenever meat needs chopping
or forms have to be filled.

For every thousand conversations
it participates in one,
if even that,
since it prefers silence.

Just when our body goes from ache to pain,
it slips off-duty.

It's picky:
it doesn't like seeing us in crowds,
our hustling for a dubious advantage
and creaky machinations make it sick.

Peonies

this morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers

and they open—
pools of lace,
white and pink—
and all day the black ants climb over them,

boring their deep and mysterious holes
into the curls
craving the sweet sap,
taking it away

to their dark, underground cities—
and all day
under the shifty wind,
as in a dance to the great wedding,

the flowers bend their bright bodies,
and tip their fragrance to the air,
and rise,
their red stems holding

all that dampness and recklessness
gladly and lightly
and there it is again—
beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open.
Do you love this world?
Do you cherish your humble and silky life?
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?

do you also hurry half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,
and softly
and exclaiming of their dearness,
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,

with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,
their eagerness
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are
nothing, forever?

Mary Oliver

Are you looking for me? I am in the next seat.
My shoulder is against yours.
You will not find me in stupas, not in Indian shrine
rooms, nor in synagogues, nor in cathedrals:
not in masses, nor kirtans, not in legs winding
around your own 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, tell me, what is God?
He is the breath inside the breath.

Kabir

HOW MUCH IS NOT TRUE

There is nothing but water in the holy pools.
I know, I have been swimming in them.
All the gods sculpted of wood or ivory can't say a word.
I know, I have been crying out to them.
The Sacred Books of the East are nothing but words.
I looked through their covers one day sideways.
What Kabir talks of is only what he has lived through.
If you have not lived through something, it is not true.

Kabir

Friend, hope for the Guest while you are alive.
Jump into experience while you are alive.
Think and think while you are alive.
What you call salvation belongs to the time before death.
If you don't break your ropes while you are alive,
do you think ghosts will do it after?
The idea that the soul will join with the ecstatic
just because the body is rotten,
that is all fantasy.
What is found now is found then.
If you find nothing now, you will simply end up
with an apartment in the City of Death.
If you make love with the divine now,
during the next life you will have the face of satisfied desire.
Plunge into the truth, find out who the teacher is.
Believe in the Great Sound.
Kabir says: When the guest is searched for,
it is the intensity of longing for the guest that does all the work.
Take a look at me, you will see a slave of that intensity.

Kabir

Inside this clay jug there are canyons and pine mountains,
and the Maker of canyons and pine mountains.
All seven oceans are inside,
and hundreds of millions of stars.
The acid that tests gold is there,
and the one who judges jewels,
and the music from the strings that no hand touches,
and the source of all water.

Kabir says: If you want the truth,
I'll tell you the truth;
Friend Listen: the One whom I love is inside.

Kabir

NASS RIVER

Tent tethered among jackpine and blue-bells. Lacewings rise from rock incubators. Wild geese flying north. And I can't remember who I'm supposed to be.

I want to learn how to purr. Abandon, myself, have mistresses in maidenhair fern, own no tomorrow nor yesterday: a blank shimmering space forward and back. I want to think with my belly. I want to name all the stars animals flowers birds rocks in order to forget them, start over again. I want to wear the seasons, harlequin, become ancient and etched by weather. I want to be snow pulse, ruminating ungulate, pebble at the bottom of the abyss, candle burning darkness rather than flame. I want to peer at things, shameless, observe the unfastening, that stripping of shape by dusk. I want to sit in the meadow a rotten stump pungent with slimemold, home for pupae and grubs, concentric rings collapsing into the passacaglia of time. I want to crawl inside someone and hibernate one entire night with no clocks to wake me, thighs fragrant loam. I want to melt. I want to swim naked with an otter. I want to turn insideout, exchange nuclei with the Sun. Toward the mythic kingdom of summer I want to make blind motion, using my ribs as a raft, following the spiders as they set sail on their tasselled shining silk. Sometimes even a single feather's enough to fly.

Robert MacLean

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

THE TURTLE

breaks from the blue-black
skin of the water, dragging her shell
with its mossy scutes
across the shallows and through the rushes
and over the mudflats, to the uprise,
to the yellow sand,
to dig with her ungainly feet
a nest, and hunker there spewing
her white eggs down
into the darkness, and you think

of her patience, her fortitude,
her determination to complete
what she was born to do —
and then you realize a greater thing —
she doesn't consider
what she was born to do.
She's only filled
with an old blind wish.
It isn't even hers but came to her
in the rain or the soft wind,
which is a gate through which her life keeps walking.

She can't see
herself apart from the rest of the world
or the world from what she must do
every spring.
Crawling up the high hill,
luminous under the sand that has packed against her skin,
she doesn't dream
she knows
she is a part of the pond she lives in,
the tall trees are her children,
the birds that swim above her
are tied to her by an unbreakable string.

Mary Oliver

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

When soul rises
Into lips
You feel the kiss
You've wanted.

NOW

Now that you live here in my chest,
anywhere we sit is a mountaintop.

And those other images,
which have enchanted people
like porcelain dolls from China,
which have made men and women weep
for centuries, those have changed now.

What used to be pain is a lovely bench
where we can rest under the roses.

A left hand has become a right.
A dark wall, a window.

A cushion in a shoe heel,
the leader of the community!

Now silence. What we say
is deadly to some
and nourishing to others.

What we say is a ripe fig,
but not every bird that lights
eats figs.

Rumi

SO OFTEN

So often I stand like a bashful child, speechless before those I love,
Wanting to tell them all that is in my heart,
but frightened by some distance in their eyes.
Thus, so much of life is lived all alone,
So many conversations with one's self go unanswered.
I would like to begin again, do it all right this time.
There would be no docile, frightened adolescent,
Smiling endlessly to hide his anger
Trampling on his own fears, ignoring his private dreams
Fighting for some recognition that never came from within.
No one would push or prod me,
No one could intimidate or smother me,
No one could drive me to adore a God I didn't understand.
Strange! Even as a little boy, I knew it was all wrong,
That life was far more than docility and duty and self-annihilation!
All these years spent reclaiming that child who was
Instinctively wiser than all of his teachers,
all these years spent trying to recapture
what I surrendered to frightened preachers.
Until I can only ask that the loving, prodigal child
Who was lost will finally reappear,
So that life is the circle it was meant to be,
That the child who flowered at life's beginning
Will once more flourish at its end.

James Kavanaugh

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at
your table and listen.
Do not even listen, simply wait. Do not even wait, be quite
still and solitary.
The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it
has no choice.
It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

Franz Kafka

THE SILENCE OF THE STARS

When Lauren van der Post one night
 In the Kalihari Desert told the Bushmen
 He couldn't hear the stars
Singing, they didn't believe him. They looked at him,
 Half-smiling. They examined his face
 To see whether he was joking
Or deceiving them. Then two of those small men
 Who plant nothing, who have almost
 Nothing to hunt, who live
On almost nothing and with no one
 But themselves, led him away
 From the crackling thorn-scrub fire
And stood with him under the night sky
 And listened. One of them whispered,
 Do you not hear them now?
And van der Post listened, not wanting
 To disbelieve, but had to answer,
 No. They walked him slowly
Like a sick man to the small dim
 Circle of firelight and told him
 They were terribly sorry,
And he felt even sorrier
 For himself and blamed his ancestors
 For their strange loss of hearing,
Which was his loss now. On some clear nights
 When nearby houses have turned off their visions,
 When the traffic dwindles, when through streets
Are between sirens and the jets overhead
 Are between crossings, when the wind
 Is hanging fire in the fir trees,
And the long-eared owl in the neighboring grove
 Between calls is regarding his own darkness,
 I look at the stars again as I first did
To school myself in the names of constellations
 And remember my first sense of their terrible distance,
 I can still hear what I thought
At the edge of silence were the inside jokes
 Of my heartbeat, my arterial traffic,
 The C above high C of my inner ear, myself
Tunelessly humming, but now I know what they are:
 My fair share of the music of the spheres
 And clusters of ripening stars,
Of the songs from the throats of the old gods
 Still tending even tone-deaf creatures
 Through their exiles in the desert.

David Wagoner

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

ITHAKA

When you set out on your journey to Ithaka,
then pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge.
Do not fear the Lestrygonians
and the Cyclopes and the angry Poseidon.
You will never meet such as these on your path,
if your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
emotion touches your body and your spirit.
You will never meet the Lestrygonians,
the Cyclopes and the fierce Poseidon,
if you do not carry them within your soul
if your soul does not raise them up before you.

Then pray that the road is long.
That the summer mornings are many,
that you will enter ports seen for the first time
with such pleasure, with such joy!
Stop at Phoenician markets,
and purchase fine merchandise,
mother-of-pearl and corals, amber and ebony,
and pleasurable perfume of all kinds,
buy as many pleasurable perfumes as you can
visit hosts of Egyptian cities
to learn and learn from those who have knowledge.

Always keep Ithaka fixed in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for long years;
and even to anchor at the isle when you are old,
rich with all that you have gained on the way,
not expecting that Ithaka will offer you riches.

Ithaka has given you the beautiful voyage.
Without her you would never have taken the road.
But she has nothing more to give you.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka has not defrauded you.
With the great wisdom you have gained,
with so much experience,
you must surely have understood by then what Ithakas mean.

Constantine Kavafy

MAGIC WORDS

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.
Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.
That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen could happen—
all you had to do was say it.
Nobody can explain this:
That's the way it was.

Nalungiaq (Inuit)

Spring

Somewhere
a black bear
has just risen from sleep
and is staring

down the mountain.
All night
in the brisk and shallow restlessness
of early spring

I think of her,
her four black fists
flicking the gravel,
her tongue

like a red fire
touching the grass,
the cold water.
There is only one question:

how to love this world.
I think of her
rising
like a black and leafy ledge

to sharpen her claws against
the silence
of the trees.
Whatever else

my life is
with its poems
and its music
and its cities,

it is also this dazzling darkness
coming
down the mountain,
breathing and tasting;

all day I think of her—
her white teeth, her wordlessness,
her perfect love.

Mary Oliver

Reckless Poem

Today again I am hardly myself.
It happens over and over.
It is heaven-sent.

It flows through me
like the blue wave.
Green leaves—you may believe this or not -
have once or twice
emerged from the tips of my fingers

somewhere
deep in the woods,
in the reckless seizure of spring.

Though, of course, I also know that other song,
the sweet passion of one-ness.

Just yesterday I watched an ant crossing a path, through the
tumbled pine needles she toiled.
And I thought: she will never live another life but this one.
And I thought: if she lives her life with all her strength
is she not wonderful and wise?
And I continued this up the miraculous pyramid of everything.
until I came to myself.

And still, even in these northern woods, on these hills of sand,
I have flown from the other window of myself
to become white heron, blue whale,
red fox, hedgehog.

Oh, sometimes already my body has felt like the body of a flower!
Sometimes already my heart is a red parrot, perched
among strange, dark trees, flapping and screaming.

Mary Oliver

PROSPECTIVE IMMIGRANTS PLEASE NOTE

Either you will
go through this door
or you will not go through.

If you go through
there is always the risk
of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly
and you must look back
and let them happen.

If you do not go through
it is possible
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes
to hold your position
to die bravely

but much will blind you,
much will evade you,
at what cost who knows?

The door itself
makes no promises.
It is only a door.

Adrienne Rich

All of you undisturbed cities,
Haven't you ever longed for the Enemy?
I'd 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.

Rilke

Already the ripening barberries are red,
and the old asters hardly breathe in their beds.
The man who is not rich now as summer goes
will wait and wait and never be himself.

The man who cannot quietly close his eyes,
certain that there is vision after vision
inside, simply waiting until nighttime
to rise all around him in the darkness
it's all over for him, he's like an old man.

Nothing else will come; no more days will open,
and everything that does happen will cheat him.
Even you, my God. And you are like a stone
that draws him daily deeper into the depths.

Rilke

You mustn't be frightened
If a sadness
Rises in front of you,
Larger than any you have ever seen;
If an anxiety, like light and cloud shadows,
Moves over your hands and everything you do.
You must realize that something is happening to you,
That life has not forgotten you,
That it holds you in his hand
And will not let you fall.

Rilke

YOU DARKNESS

You darkness from which I come,
I love you more than all the fires
that fence out the world,
for the fire makes a circle
for everyone
so that no one sees you anymore.

But darkness holds it all:
the shape and the flame,
the animal and myself,
how it holds them,
all powers, all sight—

and it is possible: its great strength
is breaking into my body.

I have faith in the night.

Rilke

Whom shall I call upon, if not him,
who is dark and more of night than night itself.
The only one who wakes without a light
yet has no fear; the deep one, as yet
unspoiled by the light, the one of whom
I know because in trees he bursts forth from the earth
and because as fragrance
he rises softly from the soil
into my down bent face.

Rilke

You see, I want a lot.
Maybe I want it all:
the darkness of each endless fall,
the shimmering light of each ascent.

So many are alive who don't seem to care.
Casual, easy, they move in the world
as though untouched.

But you take pleasure in the faces
of those who know they thirst.
You cherish those
who grip you for survival.

You are not dead yet, it's not too late
to open your depths by plunging into them
and drink in the life
that reveals itself quietly there.

RM Rilke

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 you love to see are faces
that do work and feel thirst.

You love most of all those who need you
as they need a crowbar or a hoe.

You have not grown old, and it is not too late
to dive into your increasing depths
where life calmly gives out its own secret.

Rilke (Bly trans)

THE SHADOW IN THE OTHER'S HEART

It has none, of course.
Appearing to carry one
in the specious recesses
of its homogeneous cells
is just its way of saying
*Look, we're all alike:
we each chew our cow
or our cowslip with the same
raw grin, greet tomorrow
with the same idle threat
of disregard, looking over
our shoulders at our footprints
in the middle of desire. Like you
I'm normal, tricked out
with darkness murmuring
its undetectable counterpoint
to the beating of my heart,
so perfectly synchronized with yours
you spend the better part
of your life walking through me
into your image of yourself.*
We do the tricking, just as we
give it words to explain itself,
an image speaking with our lips,
easy to pass off as the ventriloquist.
But if on a given day
you lay your finger across its mouth,
to still a moment
the voice you suspect might be
tending in your mind, you feel only
cold and motionless reserve,
and you are left with nothing
out there that is you, your finger
in the air, poised, thrusting up
as if making a point
in the long lecture of becoming,
or as if you are counting
the number of people here
whose shadow has been lifted
like a mute veil from the world.

Dabney Stuart

You mustn't be frightened
If a sadness
Rises in front of you,
Larger than any you have ever seen;
If an anxiety, like light and cloud shadows,
Moves over your hands and everything you do.
You must realize that something is happening to you,
That life has not forgotten you,
That it holds you in his hand
And will not let you fall.

Rilke

Sorrow prepares you for joy.
It violently sweeps everything out of your house,
so that new joy can find space to enter.
It shakes the yellow leaves from the bough of your heart,
so that fresh, green leaves can grow in their place.
It pulls up the rotten roots,
so that new roots hidden beneath have room to grow.
Whatever sorrow shakes from your heart,
far better things will take their place.

Jalaluddin Rumi

Cry Out Your Grief

Cry out all your grief, your
disappointments! Say them in

farsi, then Greek. It doesn't
matter whether you're from Rum

or Arabia. Praise the beauty
and kindness praised by every

living being. You hurt and
have sharp desire, yet your presence

is a healing calm. Sun, moon,
bonfire, candle, which? Someone

says your flame is about to be dowsed,
but you're not smoke or

fire. You're infinitely more
alive. Say how that is! This

fluttering love will not stay
much longer in my chest. Soon it

will fly like a falcon to its master,
like an owl saying HU.

Rumi

“What if we discover that our present way of life is
irreconcilable with our vocation
to become fully human?”

Paulo Friere

THE HEALING TIME

Finally on my way to yes
I bump into
all the places
where I said no
to my life
all the untended wounds
the red and purple scars
those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin, my bones,
those coded messages
that send me down
the wrong street
again and again
where I find them
the old wounds
the old misdirections
and I lift them
one by one
close to my heart
and I say
Holy Holy.

Persha Gertler

RETURNING THE BACK WAY

she ravishes, this woman
whose body is the world
she pierces to the quick when you least expect it

two elk
move across the road
in the dusk of a day so rich
in wonders, you couldn't take
one more—

the sight of them
rushes up your limbs like flame
stirs the roots of your hair—

those angular haunches
that dreamlike ungainly motion
is her signature, final flourish
to the love letter she has been writing on your cells

clouds over Taos Mountain
were the color of the inside of her body
vein of green in the gorge
was her ore, there for the taking

and though you felt intimate
as a lover, gazing
deep into her, though she
bared herself for an hour
to bring you to your knees

there is no stopping her
when she leaves, no
holding her, nothing

but the caught breath
released
the ahhh
that is the first syllable
of her secret name

Morgan Farley

Shadow and Light-Source Both

How does a part of the world leave the world?
How does wetness leave water? Don't try to

put out a fire by throwing on more fire! Don't
wash a wound with blood. No matter how fast

you run, your shadow keeps up. Sometimes it's
in front! Only full, overhead sun diminishes

your shadow. But that shadow has been serving
you. What hurts you, blesses you. Darkness is

your candle. Your boundaries are your quest.
I could explain this, but it will break the

glass cover on your heart, and there's no
fixing that. You must have shadow and light-
source both. Listen, and lay your head under
the tree of awe. When from that tree feathers

and wings sprout on you, be quieter than
a dove. Don't open your mouth for even a coo.

Rumi

The coals go out,
The last smoke weaves up
Losing itself in the stars.
This is my first night to lie
In the uncreating dark.

In the heart of a man
There sleeps a green worm
That has spun the heart about itself,
And that shall dream itself black wings
One day to break free into the black sky.

I leave my eyes open,
I lie here and forget our life,
All I see is we float out
Into the mptiness, among the great stars,
On this little vessel without lights.

I know that I love the day,
The sun on the mountain, The Pacific
Shining and accomplishing itself in breakers,
But I know I live half alive in the world,
Half of my life belongs to the wild darkness.

Galway Kinnell

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 feasts 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,
exalting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
to 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.

FACING THE VIRGIN SHADOW

I'm always penetrating you,
But you are always a virgin,
Shadow, like that day
In which I first came
Calling to your secret,
Charged with boundless passion.

Dark full virgin
Overripe with deep rainbows
That can scarcely be seen; all
Black, with the sublime
stars, which do not come
Up to discover you.

Juan Ramon Jimenez

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 we are standing now, quietly in the new life?

Juan Ramon Jimenez

Something will be missing we can't say.
No one will understand the *Ph.G.* we sign after our names,
or why we press our faces
deep into the artificial flowers,
half-hoping to be stung by bees.
Why we always go astray inside the glittering maze
of the department store,
and always end up at the perfume counter, wearing
scents called *Shangri-La*, *Obsession*, *Holy Night*,

finding none of them quite right,
none of them equal to a blow on the head
with a silver mace, a word whispered in a dream
like a gold key slid across a grate.

They won't understand, and we won't remember,
but we will never again be sad—never sad again!—
Or rather, never sad in the same way.

for Dean Young

Tony Hoagland

GENUINE BROKEN HEART

In the very middle of the chest, deep deep inside
Something has broken
And it hurts almost all the time.
Sometimes it gives birth to anxiety, fear, and panic.
Sometimes it gives birth to anger, resentment and blame.
Sometimes it gives birth to tears.
This is our kinship with all who have loved truly—
From beginningless time.
You, my dear friend, understand it well
This genuine heart of sadness can teach us great compassion.
It humbles The Arrogant and softens The Unkind.
This genuine heart of sadness can teach us great
Fearlessness.
It awakens Those who prefer to sleep and pierces through
Indifference.
This continual ache of the human heart—
broken by the Loss of all that we hold dear
Is this not a blessing
Which when accepted fully — can be shared
With all?

Ani Pema Chodron

ONE SOURCE OF BAD INFORMATION

There's a boy in you about three
Years old who hasn't learned a thing for thirty
Thousand years. Sometimes it's a girl.

This child had to make up its mind
How to save you from death. He said things like:
"Stay home. Avoid elevators. Eat only elk."

You live with this child, but you don't know it.
You're in the office, yes, but live with this boy
At night. He's uninformed, but he does want

To save your life. And he has. Because of this boy
You survived a lot. He's got six big ideas.
Five don't work. Right now he's repeating them to you.

Robert Bly

it was a dream

in which my greater self
rose up before me
accusing me of my life
with her extra finger
whirling in a gyre of rage
at what my days had come to.
what,
i pleaded with her, could i do,
oh what could i have done?
and she twisted her wild hair
and sparked her wild eyes
and screamed as long as
i could hear her
This. This. This.

Lucille Clifton

Telling our stories

the fox came every evening to my door
asking for nothing, my fear
trapped me inside, hoping to dismiss her
but she sat till morning, waiting.

at dawn we would, each of us,
rise from our haunches, look through the glass
then walk away.

did she gather her village around her
and sing of the hairless moon face,
the trembling snout, the ignorant eyes?

child, I tell you now it was not
the animal blood i was hiding from.
it was the poet in her, the poet and
the terrible stories she could tell.

Lucille Clifton

FEARING PARIS

Suppose that what you fear
could be trapped,
and held in Paris.
Then you would have
the courage to go
everywhere in the world.
All the directions of the compass
open to you,
except the degrees east or west
of true north
that lead to Paris.
Still, you wouldn't dare
put your toes
smack dab on the city limit line.
You're not really willing
to stand on a mountainside
miles away,
and watch the Paris lights
come up at night.
Just to be on the safe side,
you decide to stay completely
out of France.
But then danger
seems too close
even to those boundaries,
and you feel
the timid part of you
covering the whole globe again.
You need the kind of friend
who learns your secret and says,
"See Paris first."

M. Truman Cooper

SISYPHUS AND THE SUDDEN LIGHTNESS

It was as if he had wings, and the wind
behind him. Even uphill the rock
seemed to move of its own accord.

Every road felt like a shortcut.

Sisyphus, of course, was worried;
he'd come to depend on his burden,
wasn't sure who he was without it.

His hands free, he peeled an orange.
He stopped to pet a dog.
Yet he kept going forward, afraid
of the consequences of standing still.

He no longer felt inclined to smile.

It was then that Sisyphus realized
the gods must be gone, that his wings
were nothing more than a perception
of their absence.

He dared to raise his fist to the sky.
Nothing, gloriously, happened.

Then a different terror overtook him.

Stephen Dunn

SWEET DARKNESS

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

David Whyte

THE FIRE IN THE SONG

The mouth opens
and fills the air
with its vibrant shape

until the air
and the mouth
become one shape.

And the first word,
your own word,
spoken from that fire

surprises, burns,
grieves you now
because

you made that pact
with a dark presence
in your life.

He said, "If you only
stop singing
I'll make you safe."

And he repeated the line,
knowing you would hear
"I'll make you safe"

as the comforting
sound of a door
closed on the fear at last,

but his darkness crept
under your tongue
and became the dim

cave where
you sheltered
and you grew

in that small place
too frightened to remember
the songs of the world,

its impossible notes,
and the sweet joy
that flew out the door

of your wild mouth
as you spoke.

The Soldier

He stands inside my chest and throat,
a soldier at attention. Holding the
line, guarding the storehouse from
looters. They came once and stole
everything, every bit of trust, every
reassuring touch and all the spontaneity.

Those days were long ago, when
intruders came and left their bloody
footprints on my skin.

Still that soldier stands, holding a
musket, a feather in his hat.
I try to steal a smile from him
everyday, but he knows his duty.

I say, "At ease soldier! As you were
before strangers occupied the land,
as you were before my innocent
heart was cut open like a ripe melon!"

He guards the scars and every day I
visit with my bouquet of tender
attention, basket of appreciation.

We touch each other with understanding,
but he does not relax his stand for security.
He has his duties. I have mine.

Robert Man
(psychiatrist and meditation teacher)
From "Out of Nowhere"

SONG OF A MAN WHO HAS COME THROUGH

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.

D.H. Lawrence

Trying to get rid of your ego
Is like trying to get rid of your garbage can.
No one believes you are serious.
The more you shout at the garbage man
The more your neighbors remember your name.

Jay Leeming

ESCAPE

When we get out of the glass bottles of our own ego,
and when we escape like squirrels from turning in the
cages of our personality
and get into the forest 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 taut 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

I will not die an unlived life.
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.
I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible;
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.
I choose to risk my significance,

to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom,
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.

Dawna Markova

What a thing it is to sit absolutely alone,
in the forest, at night, cherished by this
wonderful, unintelligible,
perfectly innocent speech,
the most comforting speech in the world,
the talk that rain makes by itself all over the ridges,
and the talk of the watercourses everywhere in the hollows!
Nobody started it, nobody is going to stop it.
It will talk as long as it wants, this rain.
As long as it talks, I am going to listen,

Thomas Merton

Can you trust this compass—
the polestar, the ancient lighthouse,
the sparkle of magnetite in the
mind of migrating beast?

Your grandmothers would cheer it—
this resolution reclaimed,
this mammalian ferocity and
howling animal grit.

Perhaps you are not too late—
so deft and tenderly wet,
the magic of your midwife's hand
may yet save the day.

Rich Mertes

HOW TO REGAIN YOUR SOUL

Come down Canyon Creek on a summer
afternoon
that one place where the valley floor opens out
You will see
the white butterflies. Because of the way
shadows
come off those vertical rocks in the west, there
are
shafts of sunlight hitting the river and a deep
long purple gorge straight ahead. Put down your
pack.

Above, air sighs the pines. It was this way
when Rome was clanging, when Troy was being
built,
when campfires lighted caves. The white
butterflies dance
by the thousands in the still sunshine. Suddenly
anything
could happen to you. Your soul pulls toward the
canyon
and then shines back through the white wings to
be you again.

William Stafford

THE WAKING

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

CLEARING

I am clearing a space—
here, where the trees stand back.
I am making a circle so open
the moon will fall in love
and stroke these grasses with her silver.

I am setting stones in the four directions,
stones that have called my name

from mountaintops and riverbeds, canyons and mesas.

Here I will stand with my hands empty,
mind gaping under the moon.

I know there is another way to live.
When I find it, the angels
will cry out in rapture,
each cell of my body
will be a rose, a star.

If something seized my life tonight,
if a sudden wind swept through me,
changing everything,
I would not resist.
I am ready for whatever comes.

But I think it will be
something small, an animal
padding out from the shadows,
or a word spoken so softly
I hear it inside.

It is dark out here, and cold.
The moon is stone.
I am alone with my longing.
Nothing is happening
but the next breath, and the next. ...

Morgan Farley

SOMETIMES

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,
Or the wind sweeps through a tree,
Or a dog howls in a far-off farm,
I hold still and listen a long time.

My world turns and goes back to the place
Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,
The bird and the blowing wind
Were like me, and were my brothers.

My soul turns into a tree,
and an animal, and a cloud bank.
Then changed and odd it comes home.
And asks me questions. What should I reply?

Herman Hesse

Cold Poem

Cold now.
Close to the edge. Almost
unbearable. Clouds
bunch up and boil down
from the north of the white bear.
This tree-splitting morning
I dream of his fat tracks,
the lifesaving suet.

I think of summer with its luminous fruit,
blossoms rounding to berries, leaves,
handfuls of grain.

Maybe what cold is, is the time
we measure the love we have always had, secretly,
for our own bones, the hard knife-edged love
for the warm river of the I, beyond all else; maybe

that is what it means the beauty
of the blue shark cruising toward the tumbling seals.

in the season of snow,
in the immeasurable cold,
we grow cruel but honest; we keep
ourselves alive,
if we can, taking one after another
the necessary bodies of others, the many
crushed red flowers.

Mary Oliver

HUNTER'S MOON — EATING THE BEAR

Good friend,
it is a long afternoon.
The shadows of the pines are blue on the field.

When I find you,
I am going to turn the world inside out.
The rocks around you will melt,
your heart will fall from your body.

And I will step out over the fields,

Good friend,
when I crouch beside the blades of fire,
holding a piece of your life on a knife-tip,

I will be leaning in like a spoke to the hub—
the dense orb that is all of us.

my body like a cupped hand

And I will put you into my mouth, yes.
And I will swallow, yes.
So. You will come to live inside me:
muscle, layers of sweet leaves

hidden in the pink fat, the maroon flesh.

holding your vast power, your grace,

Good friend,
the sun going down will signal
the end of the day, around me

your breath, your hairiness,

the pines you can no longer see
will be twisted and small, their shadows
stretching out, still turning around

in the small sinews of my prayers.

some invisible dead center.

Mary Oliver

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

The answer is never the answer. What's really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you'll always be seeking. I've never seen anybody really find the answer—they think they have, so they stop thinking. But the job is to seek mystery, evoke mystery, plant a garden in which strange plants grow and mysteries bloom. The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.

Ken Kesey

Sometimes it doesn't help to know what it is you are really hunting or what love is supposed to look like, because the beauty that the hunter becomes and creates through his willingness to fail in pursuit of what he deeply longs for but doesn't yet understand can cause the incomprehensible thing to show its Divine face, instead of missing the opportunity by chasing after a string of lesser forms our insatiable and impatient greed insists must be the very one.

Martin Prechtel

Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it.

Viktor Frankl

A person's life purpose is nothing more than to rediscover, through the detours of art, or love, or passionate work, those one or two images in the presence of which his heart first opened.

Albert Camus

If at the soul's core we are images, then we must define life as the actualization over time ... of that originating seed image, what Michelangelo called the *immagine del cuor*, or the image in the heart, and that image—not the time that actualized it—is the primary determinant of your life.

James Hillman

4

which has nevertheless always been,
like a sharp iron hoof,
at the center of my mind.

5

One or two things are all you need
to travel over the blue pond, over the deep
roughage of the trees and through the stiff
flowers of lightning — some deep
memory of pleasure, some cutting
knowledge of pain.

6

But to lift the hoof!
For that you need an idea.

7

For years and years I struggled
just to love my life. And then

the butterfly
rose, weightless, in the wind.
“Don't love your life
too much,” it said,

and vanished
into the world.

Mary Oliver