

Poems in WordPerfect: T

by

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Poetry Collection
60 pages

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The bards

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950),
I would have liked to be your friend,
had I known you in my teens - when,
like you, I was preoccupied by death.

Much older now than when you, yourself, died,
I ponder your tributes to the beauty
of geese, hunchbacks, the wise,
and again consider the possibility

that all the bards recently read
in anthologies of the Modern British
and American poets will be accessible
to me as soul mates on life's other side.

The bliss trapeze

Would Robert Frost be pleased -
perhaps indeed he knows -
that I've enjoyed his poems
on the last four mornings?

He complains of the west wind,
the freeze that must have hurt
a peach tree he had planted
sometime before 1936 - when I
was five and fretted about Hitler.
So it goes - a young peach tree withers,
and some years later its planter also dies.

Tonight, my daughter flies to Zimbabwe
from London. Within two years, her London
friend will pass on, from cancer.
Yet today may bring us a good surprise.
We may laugh or smile, swinging
for a moment on a bliss trapeze.

The brave new world

Of Sixty Minutes I saw enough
to make my thoughts since ponder
the fact we all know - that already
people are being cloned,
that, amazingly, cloned babies are growing.

My two granddaughters may well
choose to clone babies -
from a little finger?
Good-by morning sickness,
the weight of pregnancy!

But if my grandson will
clone from his thigh or ear
a son or daughter - would he marry,
or hire a concubine-nanny?

How large or small the generation gap will be,
when talking computer friends are carried already
in one's breast pocket? In importance,
I now lag behind my grandson's
mechanical space monsters.

The chain

Because I early lost my grandmothers and mother,
I try to walk and not to walk the path,
acting the role of gentle matriarch,
and attempting to avoid the errors.

Before we meet and add to the chain my link,
I glory in all contact with my three daughters,
two merry granddaughters jigging in the ring.
Over my grandson and son my heart falters -

I love them so - aiming not to project
on them the men I knew.

The chart

In the dreams, the paths of the forbidden
are spread before her.

Awake, she knows only craving
for the fruit that others
so easily grow and gather.

Simple joys have to be clutched
with anxious fingers, stolen
when the mind floats, ignorant.
As the body lets go its weight,
oblivion breaks the studded door
of the prison, releasing the inmate.
But certain pleasures
remain barred even then,

for she calculated before birth
the dimensions
between her steady thirst
and the objects of her longing.

She suspended her chart
high in ether
and there it must remain uncorrected,
until her soul sweeps it along
on its flight home,
adding it to its previous blueprints.

The cherub cheeks of spring

Through puffed up cherub cheeks
spring blows its breath,
its official start ignoring,
rushing to possess.
the birds join in with lustful peeps.

This morning, I feel restless
with March madness.
A friend and I shall walk
in tamed nature, talk
and be glad among the trees,
turning from sadness.

The crucial quarter of a bushel
For Tom and Evelyn

They have tested the hot coals
with their feet,
then braved the fire.

Not trusting the whirl
of hormones,
they waited for the blood
to simmer down,

then cautiously,
sly-eyed,
they approached
each other,
warned by statistics
and their own scars.

After that, they sat
at many tables together,
until the crucial
peck of salt was eaten,
for friendship,
as Aristotle says,
is a slowly ripening fruit.

Now a peck, a quarter
of a bushel, is a lot of salt,
but one cannot
know another,
until one has eaten it,
according to an ancient proverb
quoted in Ethics.

The slush of the everyday
did not bar them
from growing
deeper
into each other.

May in their marriage
of true minds
remain no impediment.

The ebb and flow of desire

On a crossroad as always
between the slap of the sun
and the other, tender fingers
beckoning me back behind shut
eyelids, I sway, reluctantly
pulling down the shades,
though never closing
the shutters before a hurricane,
abandoning myself to its fierce will,
deeming it to demolish
the flames.

During the sun's benevolent reign
I ferret in the sky for the stars
corseted in the Milky Way' satin,
but at night I squat beside the dog
who, barking at the moon,
harks after - who knows what -
maybe the mundane light of day.

The fabric of illusion

I'm
overwhelmed by words
disguising thought, feeling,
all for one purpose:

to escape from pain -
or its twin – despair.
No: despair is
pain's parent.

Words are the fabric
of illusion's veil
which distances man
from despair and pain.

The faithful

Each day I choose
not to delve too far,
not to dig beneath,
sifting the brittle treasure
from the closed trench
following my feet.

Wherever I go
I hear a weak voice calling,
sometimes a chorus
trilling an old hymn
from throats long buried
yet still moving.

My bare feet or hands
frequently sense a trembling
of someone's light hand -
but soon again
empty air encases.

As altar candles
two dimming eyes burn
during a mass
devoted dead attend.

The finches

While waiting for the window cleaners
to turn up, I read a poem about a Greek village.
A word comes to me - imagination.
I remember it's tomorrow a meeting's to be held.
The tinnitus in my ear rings as I think this.

Yesterday was hot. Annette and I sat
under the patio umbrella. We watched
the finches at the bird feeder
mill around, sharing with a squirrel.
The traffic was loud. I strained to hear
Annette, who's bothered by her throat.
Today I start on the road towards seventy-
one. Marilyn took me out for a dinner
and movie. The people I love are alive.

The first Hillstead Museum Reading of the season

The grass bloomed with beach chairs,
shawls, insect spray, as a great multitude
of us, worshipers of words, listened,
first to the silence,
snug in the nest of the Sunken Garden.
How the nightingales sang while the poet
paid homage to William Butler Yeats,
James Cavanaugh, Emily Dickenson,
and Donald Hall's wife Jane -
reciting their verses lovingly
from memory! When he read his poems,
Galway Kinnell led us back
to our siblings - the sow, bear,
wolf suckling Romulus and Remus,
as the poet's mother permitted
his big brother and him
to suck on her breasts,
aroused and flattered.
The Earth heaved for us
as Kinnell sang his tribute
in the darkening air,
which held the promise
of stars.

The fountain

We all need reminders to live in the moment -
an inspirational book, a poem about a grandparent
who was a comic in his prime,
the birthday party for an aunt who reached a hundred,
a walk with one's dog on spring grass,
French toast, birds splashing in a fountain,
lunch with a friend, at night a glass of wine -
because the riddles man for thousands of years
tried to solve may not have any meaning.
So, live well while you can, before you die.

The great highway motor inn
For Richard

A dark, damp cell -
but through the bathroom window
of the motel room
bright light,
sounds of cars shooting
along La Playa,
bird chirps
thrown in,
three minutes on foot
from the Pacific Beach.

We will walk, chat,
take a bus,
view the Mongolian exhibit,
sit in Golden Gate Park,
then reminisce
over a dinner.
I wish to know how
your early years
and I as your mother
strike you.

Surprised, no doubt,
and worn out
by July
in the streets
of San Francisco,
I will then, humbled,
again enter
this shabby room,
allowing its bed
to soothe me.

The grieving ground of New England

Winter is slowly
shedding its white beard,
loading soft padding
on the shrubbery.

As the snowfall thickens,
the darkened sky lifts
above the bare tops
of the robust trees

that, seemingly senseless,
stand in their place,
prepared to endure
months of hibernating.

Where the maples grew
enormous beside the house,
the ground shifts, unsettled,
missing the roots,

in two wide wounds
refusing to heal.

The Hale-Bopp comet

I'm turning from loss
raising its head like a bull frog
to croak above an evening lake
and gaze in the direction
of the Hale-Bopp Comet
that spreads its luminous tail
in the night sky -
to imprint, among its other tasks,
after forty-two hundred years elsewhere,
the new minutiae of the face
of mankind, rolling them away,
as one of innumerable dusty parchments,
less controversial than
the Turin shroud.

On that scale,
I recognize myself
small as a starfish,
tossed on the beach,
then swept back
by the cresting tide,
my limited body bringing
tiny pleasure
mixed with prickly pain
to roost in the nest
of a minuscule brain,
less than a speck
in the trail of evolution.

The heat

Tired of the heat and reading
of a distant land, I think of -
what? - of thinking nothing -
how it would be to let the mind go blank.

What am I trying to prove -
that I am still living,
set as always on accomplishing tasks,
while the sand drips within the hourglass.

Striving to better myself, to earn some
money, fame - who told me I must -
my dead parents? They still empower
the restless inner hand that prods me on.

The Holocaust Museum at Washington, D. C.

After seeing the exhibit Daniel's Story,
I went to the Museum Restaurant
for a snack, also intending
to write a poem.
Instead,
after a few spoonfuls of matzo ball soup,
I felt violently sick.

I fought
the awful gagging,
not wanting to spoil the meal
for the hushed visitors.
I knew I wouldn't make it
to the restroom, so I repeatedly
swallowed, taking deep breaths
and swearing never again to
eat matzo soup.

The sensation began to wear off
as I read the leaflets.

The Daniel's Story exhibit
may have been the cause.
My body violently
recollected those years
and
the murdered Jewish children
I used to play with.

The horses of the heart

If a hand erased the names of loved ones
from the brain, where would
the horses of the heart turn
their sleek heads, as they pound
their hooves in the small stable?
They'd languish without the imaginary hay;
thirst would collapse their neighing.
Docile knees would buckle under them -
or else, the very opposite would happen -
without the illusion of hands tending them,
the horses of the heart would demolish
the rickety doors of the stable
and burst out with the force of a minor
hurricane - these horses
are not young, only foolish.
They'd roam dangerously in streets
full of cars and screeching motorcycles -
seeking the vast plains of the American
Midwest or Southern France,
where their cousins blend with the wind,
wild, ignorant of the harness of caring.

The hourglass

Curious if the mind
will reveal
something new,
she hesitates
some seconds.

The clams are shut,
bathing in low tide.
The moon lies hidden.
The air-conditioner hums,
a faithful parasite,
while she sits, remembering
the scenes of yesterday.

In the day ahead,
will she waste
time and money
by shopping for clothes
that she'll never wear?

Tired of being herself,
she knows the sand
is dripping, dripping.

The hunt

A hunt or discipline
is what I indulge in -
a poem read, a new poem
written after breakfast,
extending the pleasure,
like having an extra egg.
Others may work a cross-
word puzzle, play the violin.

Buzzard wings folded,
I fall and fasten on
my prey -
an image or a phrase
emerging
from the lake
like a Loch Ness monster -
barely revealing
its head or wavy tail -
and haul it
here and there,
or slyly
follow its trail.
Then comes
the thrill of
devouring
or taming.

The journey

Shifting gears - of style,
of perception, prompted by a desire
to scan a new terrain, not just

of thought but mud and dust,
prickly gravel hurting exposed feet.
Desire to climb over the self-imposed

barriers, the steady pull backwards
wearying the soul - in the time left -
for time has been wasted.

The arrows are faint, yet always
pointing along the handful
of roads.

I follow, amazed, then breathless
and disgruntled. The trek is
marked, so I hike on.

The medics

What purpose carries
ushering the words
on a yellow pad
during a chilly morning?

The words, like hummingbirds,
suck nectar from the moments
which otherwise would wither
by the bleak roadside.

They tend the soldiers' wounds
by gently reopening them,
washing torn flesh and
all the departed.

The morning after

She bends to gather sticks as firewood
and finds them soggy with rain, useless.
As she stands up, her back begins to ache.

A mushy substance permeates her brain,
making her sneeze to clear her sinuses
within her skull from which sleep has fled.

In the house lies the man whom she married,
who can rest soundly in their queen-sized bed.
She camps outside, while he buries himself in.

She opts for the squirrels to rummage with
in the wooded yard, preparing for autumn.

The pasture

Slit the darkness before my face,
the swirling fog spilling into nostrils!
Lead me, an unwilling ox, to your pasture,
spread like a tablecloth,
fresh from the drawer of the earth.
Bless me!
My skin squirms, scalp itches,
gasping for the circling of your nails.
The doors behind my eyes are wide open
for you, admitting no one else!

The puzzle

Before you open today's brand new book,
look around. You'll find familiar spaces
spread out like water in a pan,
waiting to be boiled, like the traces
of dough on a baker's hands.

That is why sages gaze in admiration
at a leaf, a petal, a finger, or a thread,
trying to comprehend it before its end,
mind filled with awe, in light meditation.

There is still room to gamble, win, or lose.
The cards are dealt, yet the skill of each player
will determine the course of this day's game.

The resurrection of Christ is an anchor
which secures our faith in all weathers

A week ago, Jody slipped this quote
under my door. Perhaps she wanted
to be remembered that way. Last night,
Jody died, of a heart attack. I found
this message under the door while making
breakfast. Her presence fills my room
where I write a fumbling tribute,
to still my mind, shocked by the news -
she was my next door neighbor, one
of the younger residents.
She passed on Thanksgiving, aged seventy,
her body spent by grieving and by service.
I tried to become her friend, but we kept
moving in opposite directions. The admiration
grew mutual, not the intent.

Two days ago, she passed me chatting with Renate.
As she smiled into the stroller at Renate's
grandchild, I thought again of her sad fate:
no grandchildren, beloved husband
and child dead early, the remaining
daughter far away and sick. But now, Jody's
reunited with her adored Alec, daughter,
parents, friends. No need to wonder the corridors
to escape the stuffed apartment. No more
exhaustion from charitable duties, reading
through the night, doctors, blood pressure
measurements. She did not even cause an accident
when summoned at the wheel of her car.
In the dark, on a country road, she drove,
considerate as usual, into a fence.
If anyone ever is, she was ready.
I feel her close in her meticulous dress.

The runway

For forty years, wandering the wilderness,
Moses kept wishing to see the Promised
Land, then died, barely catching a glimpse
of it from a high mountain.

Afterwards, no doubt, he could watch it clearly,
bathed with Elijah in a timeless fountain,
or walking with him through iridescent sand,
where shrunken hopes grow to a full fruition, all dearly

loved and lost are found again.

We merely move on an airport runway,
the pilot awaiting the command to take off.
The plane will soon soar into the hallway

of a new heaven and earth, where no fruit falls, lost
to the tree that bore it - past all expectation.
What rises falls. What falls rises in resurrection.

The scare is over
For Elizabeth

On its way, the danger being over,
a baby gently chugging its fifth month,
looking half human, half an ET
on the ultrasound photos, already
sucking its sweet thumb, soon
to start ramming bony heels
into its padding, the spongy
wall of the womb.

Phew! No birth defects!
Now we can splurge
on maternity outfits,
to keep the breadwinner pretty!

Did the humidity or sheer
excitement prevent me from
sleeping? I wonder.
Perhaps the silent guest
in your belly disturbed me.
A baby has much power.

Four-and-a-half more months,
and it will emerge and holler,
suck at the breast, spit,
while the family is expanded.

The season's biggest snowstorm

The white splendor
is unwelcome
this Fool's day,
the clumsy pounding
of wet snow
bothering
the budding trees.
The crocuses shiver,
dying under
the chilly blanket.
The Northeaster
has spewed
the lawn with
tree limbs
and made the padded pines
lean towards the house
like pregnant women.
With Puritan persistence,
Storm Florence
keeps whipping
New England.

The see-through fence

Having read about a boy
drawing pigeons
above burning buildings
each night in a hospital
where he was being evaluated,

I remember standing
as a six-year-old
before a chicken wire fence,
watching huge flames consuming
the warehouse of a neighbor.

In the prickly darkness,
crackling lumps of cement
flew overhead, while I worried
that the gooseberries bushes first,
then our house would catch fire.

Father and Mother flanked me,
dumb like two monuments,
witnesses of other desolations.

In the roaring flames,
witches lurked,
ever present
in the world

from which already
I knew myself
unprotected.

The shadow

How many times
has unbridled tongue
injected poison
between spouses,
mother and child?

I dread these lashes,
the sudden whip
reopening the wounds
of the past,

yet again, in a stray
lightening
on a blue sky,

cruel words
slashed you
and my lips.

The solitary string

My lute has shed its strings
over the years and only one remains,
but I have much hair left,
toes, fingers extending my body,
and my voice can fly forward
like a snake's tongue, as does
my sight. I can also send my smell,
taste, touch, and sense of movement
out to glean, to bring corn, game,
into the kitchen of the hushed palace
in which I wander free
despite aching bones
and the clock which races
among the antiques.

The spiritualist

Shall I or shall I not visit the psychic fair?
Good food will be there.
I'd wander among benevolent spirits,
seeking a message.

None of my friends or neighbors
can I ask to come with me.
Some would tut-tut the idea,
others present an excuse.

The neighbors are so religious -
already I stick out,
yet don't wish to be regarded
as a downright heretic.

No doubt I will go to the psychic fair
with good food.
Spirits will be there,
some waiting with a message.

The straining

Carry me elsewhere, give me back vigor,
in mind especially, so that I don't spin
a small thought wheel in a minuscule
cage over and over, or as a race horse run
the same track exhausted, unwatched, alone.

Let me abandon the steady fingering
of life mystery's blossoming and fading,
the banal dance, the jig attempted at will,
the hope, the straining - ending
with never enough time to be satisfied.

The swelling

A swelling darkness spreads.
Alien. No words. The emerging
springs, sprawls from an earth -
not the blue planet raped and cheated.

Run from the claws of self!
The seeds from a split pomegranate spill
to mark the path Hansel and Gretel are taking.
The witch as always readies for the kill.

Let the vast spheres within a snowflake break.
Let go. Flow. Surrender and cease.

The tempest

All has been said and will be said again,
as long as the spirits whisper in the ear
on this strange island, interfering,
stirring the springs of earthly joy and pain.

The mind will not, cannot cease receiving
messages from those who should be at rest.
Refusing to hear, a halt in believing,
does only heighten their urgency and stress.

When shall we see the spirits that speak freely
through our lips, who firmly guide the pen?
Will they reveal how they escaped the weary
flesh - Caliban's grudges, Prospero's hand?

The transactional nightmare

If we are glad to have rested,
why do we return to the exhausting chase?
Is it all we know - that groping in the dark
in full daylight, even when madwoman hope
strings her guitar? Yes, that's all we know -

apart from peering between the words
of fumbling poets, seeking a friend
in that void, escaping the fierce judge,

while he frowns at the trio of poor
squirrels exercising on the wheel,
rammed into a single small cage,
chasing each other in an endless game,
in the rhythm of, I'm and you're OK.

The viruses of the Twenty-first Century

No sleep - just coughing through the night,
with a brief dream a morning hour
gave the burning eyes and wheezing chest.
As predicted, a new virus keeps the body bereft
of health and renders the mind sour.

To call the doctor seems the only way,
surrendering. The prescribed antibiotic
may ease the throat. Whatever the experts say,
the drug should make life bearable, the brain
tick somewhat, while the infection rages.

The wake of a storm

Whence come the waves
of dark turbulent water
swirling and gushing,
ceaseless since his birth?

He turns to stare
in their narrow crater,
walled in, suspended
between heaven and earth.

Another day to spend
wading through listless sorrow,
debris of what is gone,
what cannot ever be,

stretching a hand
to the shore of tomorrow,
like a mourning dove cresting
a solitary tree.

The wall of china

Of course I have the strength
to answer my own prayers
and climb steep cliffs
on the rough rope of faith.

The world is a book
whose pages I turn
with a slick finger.

I shall parade with other
Jacks above the tops
of wilting beanstalks.

Of course I can leave below
stacked in a knapsack
men, TV, snacks -
for the wind, rain,
scavenging bear.

The white buffalo woman

She is highly recommended by a trusted friend,
who, with her husband, have each had five readings.
When I finally meet her sipping coffee in their kitchen,
I like her eyes, mouth, but mainly the hair,
falling past the shoulders like a bushy mane.
She seems too slender and pretty to be a channel.
Decidedly, there is something Indian about her
other than the eyes, beads, and fringed leather jacket.

In another room, she explains the process, provides a chair
if I get tired, standing, without the support of shoes.
First, I'm told, will come the rewiring, healing.
Yes, I have brought a tape recorder. The drumming starts.
Her fingers travel around my scalp and forehead,
then move below the clavicles, where my asthma lodges.
I try so hard not to think her fake when she changes
into the White Buffalo Woman, speaking in Sioux language -
the White Buffalo Woman being an intermediary
to an entity that will be channeled next.

It's Archangel Michael, with strange, halting words,
in English. I'm so aghast that I forget to switch
the recorder on, till he is halfway through his message -
saying I should be pleased to have accomplished
what my soul set to do. No need to reincarnate again.
This is my last lifetime. I shall live in ease
until the end. Two souls that wished to be my children,
whom I did not permit to enter, will be welcoming me
when I pass on. In the meantime, I'll do much writing,
which will bring happiness to many. Do I have any questions?
I whisper, No, feeling shy before an archangel.

The session closes with incomprehensible words
of the White Buffalo Woman. I feel overwhelmed, honored -
and like the Unbelieving Thomas must have felt.

The world within

Behind closed eyes,
a world unfurls
its parchments
before each dreamer.
Daylight cowers
in its corner,
while beyond the fluttering sails
angels stand with folded wings,
guarding their charge like watchdogs.

What a stupendous gift - the inner eye,
lidless, fluid,
spilling towards delight,
guiding the homeless to palaces,
the lame into marathons and dance halls,
the old to romance and banquets of flesh!

Third World work

I hoped you'd call me on Sunday,
but you did not. On a far island,
all eyes and ears, you plant your feet
in the unpaved ground, while the palm
trees wave their branches like huge spiders,
spinning webs. This is your first visit.
Here you'll return over and over, as long
as you remain employed by the organization,
which keeps sending you far from their posh
headquarters. When you and your sister,
as teenagers, reversed your plan to live
in a straw hut, working in African
villages, I breathed a sigh of relief.
Now this - just a beginning of new
Third World work, starting on a malaria
riddled island. Are you well,
and is your Spanish improving?

Tilting earth

Grass is beginning to grow
on the yellow lawn.
A bird peeps. Blossoms hang
limp, then fall from
the dogwood tree. Rain
will come soon, to lick
a parched landscape.

In North Dakota, the swirling
Red River, mixed with melting snow,
in just one town has ousted
fifty thousand people into shelters.
Homes of all types float submerged
among snakes, lost toys and
rotting garbage. The newscasts
don't mention the Indians,
how many of them have drowned.

The flooding is spreading into Canada,
unhindered by sandbags,
recent technology.
I feel as if
I'm wading upstream,
with everything known
swimming away.

The earth, I hear,
is tilting
on its axis.

Time running out

Sift hours, sand
in your desert,
no new footsteps
till nightfall,
unless a camel
wanders by,
in search of water

Carry an oasis
in your head,
the fata morgana
of faith.
The vultures
above
are circling.

Tiny steps

For life I have never cared greatly,
I say with Thomas Hardy,
as I look back hesitantly,
with gratitude and guilt
for neglecting the grand gift.

In next life I'll be different,
yet that may never come,
so I must learn to spend well
this life's allotted span.

Each day I try to be kind,
less coarse, low, less lifeless,
but all I end up accomplishing
are tiny steps from the old mess.

Tired on July the Fourth

Stillness spreads near
the graves in the cemetery
where Babi
pushes the stroller.

The six-month-old baby
slumps forward, sleeping
two-and-a-half hours
in midday heat,

while Babi keeps
plodding,

feet drumming
a tune for her granddaughter,
a steady rhythm,

during which she can
shed the stress
of Day Care.

To a dying friend

Your face hovers before me
attached to wings - the way
angels used to be depicted
in medieval paintings.
Distance and the ticking clock
have already shrouded
the rest of you in oblivion.
Yet, I remember well
your quiet contours,
often clad in twice cast away
clothes I used to send you
from America.
I cannot comprehend
that I will not find you
when I visit Prague
and hear your gentle voice -
which makes my mind leap
forward, having you canonized.
When I received the sad news
last night on a postcard
from a mutual friend, the first
response in my throat
was a cry, 'Take me with you!
I envied you the adventure,
last preparations for the journey.
Then, selfish again, I felt glad
you were leaving first,
before me, though cruelly
breaking the circle of friends,
who've remained sixteen-year-old
for five decades, and called to you
to be the one who'd fetch me -
because, suddenly, I felt surer
of your caring than of my
long departed mother's.
This is my last, redundant,
letter to you, but soon
we'll be whisked into the instant
channel of communication, in
which the fiber-optics of prayer
have functioned since Paradise.
So why these tears?
You've served well on the Earth
and will continue to grant guidance.

To a lover with lung cancer

After four-and-a-half years
of dark absence, you are
beyond my reach - in heaven
with your mother and the angels,
or playing with grandchildren
while visiting with a daughter
for Thanksgiving.

I could stretch for the telephone
book where I was amazed
to see your name listed
a few streets away
and dial the number
but fear
a woman will answer.
Besides, your voice might erupt
the lava in me,
scorching me
as it used to,
like a dagger with its flame.

To an organist

There was once a young man
determined to have me,
marry me, but first,
possess my teenage heart.

At eighteen, he was my first
serious suitor. It flattered me
he was a nobleman of French descent.
My mother liked him.

Looking back, I only remember
saying good-by to him, never
readying, rushing, burning, blushing,
tripping on cobblestones into his arms.

We faced each other subdued, prim,
his eyes pale
in escalating fires. Once he did
plant on my cheek a kiss.

He would play the organ like a mandolin,
sneaking a love song in the inspired medley
for me, who knelt below on the cold cathedral floor
among old women, incense and Easter bonnets.

Since, we've met twice, as old friends.
He married, named a twin after me,
and became a lawyer. Is he alive or dead?
It's forty-five years since I left the town.

Would our eyes play,
past sagging flesh and wrinkles,
would the precious old organ
still rise?

To a woman abducted by Alzheimer's

It's happened, though
we came close to embracing.
Souls almost entwined.
Now, we are different.
The spider crawled into a hole.
It's not binding us any more.
That's how it goes:
first a chapel,
then a cemetery –
glowing candles,
tears, hardening
muddy ground.

To Karuna, for her first birthday

If perfection is expected,
forget it. The grandmother
I knew, was a thorn, rejected
for her lies and meanness
by the family. Early,
I learned shame for loving
the one who troubled Father
and Mother, but who favored me.
Your mother does not remember
her father's mother, nor the vast
sorrow she caused me. She asks
no questions about my mother,
who like a train whistles
in my memory.

Darling, an exile
since age eighteen,
isolated, I had not seen
a gran at it, caring
for a grandchild!
A prickly pear,
that's me, a rustic
steam engine huffing
and puffing, rusty
in loving her own kin.

To my three-year-old Morgan

Yesterday is a memory,
the long leisurely hours
with you on my knee,
or us switching roles,
playing Hansel and Gretel.

The train of time chugs away with you,
sweetly bossy in a prickly tutu,
hobbling ballerina in one found slipper.

Already you've discarded old Sesame Street friends
for videos like The Little Mermaid.
You now surmise that a kiss from a prince
means becoming a bride, and that Daddy
kissed Mummy before they had children.

Why? is a question you ask often,
especially, Babi, why are you old?

Among the pre-school papers
lies buried a message
that another child bit you.

Each morning, you are whisked
to brave the world
of learning.

You're scared of witches,
cry, Mama! when bothered
by tummy ache,
and whisper to me secrets
I pretend to understand.

To the one standing

Daddy, after nine years,
I pour pink dogwood blossoms
from the tree before my window
over your closed coffin
far away, the lid hiding
your face, probably distorted
by the stroke.

How you used to parade
under the straw hat,
challenging the drought
and Hitler!

Were you standing in the chapel,
waiting for my arrival,
my curtsy before your medals,
proudly displayed?
Did I shame you
by my absence at your funeral
before the handful of admirers?

My sitting cross-legged in the USA,
mouthing loud a Tibetan prayer
for your safe passage
through eerie plains
meant nothing to you,
Master of Ceremonies!

I can't believe I wasn't there!
continues whistling in my sinuses.

Two deer during a snowstorm

With nowhere to hide,
a young buck lumbers
across the white lawn
like a displaced old man
during a mid March
snowstorm, its hooves
weighed down by cold
sticky chains,
a large deer dragging
some forty feet behind,
spurred by maternal instinct,

while wet snow slaps
the listless silent trees
with layers of delicate fabric,
changing them into brides
in lacey gowns.

Two displaced persons telephone dating

Skilled conspirators
brought them to meet
on the airwaves,
and there they remain,
very European
in the midst of America.

Different languages
but the same era
and culture shaped them.
Under the shadow of Nazi Germany
they were both weaned.
After some hushed years
on apple tree farms,
Second World War terror
marred their childhood,
uprooting most beliefs.

At the end of the war,
a brief respite,
when the skies cleared
and the horizon stretched endless -
until the Communists
arrived to ravage
their countries.

After two weeks of daily
talks on the telephone,
they hesitate
to compare
the impact of their
separate escapes
into the so called
free world
of capitalism,

reluctant to face
the glare of each other's eyes,
for they'll mirror them,
damaged by age.

Two little cousins

I had phoned a far-away grandchild
who was sleeping, but who later
heard my Happy First Birthday sung
on the answering machine
in her parents' house
surrounded by trees and mountains.
Hours later, my daughter called: the weather
was wild, yet they hoped two playmates
would make it to the party.

Despite balmy sunshine,
the three-weeks-younger cousin
keeps hitting her mom, the little hand
practicing a new skill no doubt learnt
in day care, or else punishing mummy
for working on the computer, while I am there.
She wants, as I do, for her mom to play -
a three-generation ring-a-ring-o'-roses, yes, all day.

Two roads converging

In a movie named Déjà vue, set in France
and England, I watched a woman
and a man running into each other repeatedly,
however far each went.
It was almost comical,
how they were drawn together
by Karmic forces.

Again, I think
of the likelihood of rebirth.
Did not Jesus himself speak of it?

The Church has, of course, interpreted
Jesus' words as being converted,
taking Christ in, becoming His follower.

As in most matters, there may be
a low and a high road to salvation -
being repeatedly reborn
to absolve one's mistakes,
or in a leap being rewarded
for devotion and service.

Types of worship

Must hurry to church.
There's no time
to write a good poem,
yet I need to ask
the submerged bell
why it's not ringing
in my heart.

Why should I be
happy
at the prospect of
kneeling
before a crisp
Episcopalian altar?
Have I not already
worshipped,
while reading
Mary Oliver's
poem
Goldenrod?