

The Journey by 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,
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.

To be of use

Marge Piercy

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

The Clause

C.K. Williams

This entity I call my mind, this hive of restlessness,
this wedge of want my mind calls self,
this self which doubts so much and which keeps reaching,
keeps referring, keeps aspiring, longing, towards some state
from which ambiguity would be banished, uncertainty expunged;

this implement my mind and self imagine they might make together,
which would have everything accessible to it,
all our doings and undoings all at once before it,
so it would have at last the right to bless, or blame,
for without everything before you, all at once, how bless, how blame?

this capacity imagination, self and mind conceive might be the "soul,"
which would be able to regard such matters as creation and
destruction,
origin and extinction, of species, peoples, even families, even mine,
of equal consequence, and might finally solve the quandary
of this thing of being, and this other thing of not;

these layers, these divisions, these meanings or the lack thereof,
these fissures and abysses beside which I stumble, over which I reel:
is the place, the space, they constitute,
which I never satisfactorily experience but from which the fear
I might be torn away appalls me, me, or what might most be me?

Even mine, I say, as if I might ever believe such a thing;
bless and blame, I say, as though I could ever not.
This ramshackle, this unwieldy, this jerry-built assemblage,
this unfelt always felt disarray: is this the sum of me,
is this where I'm meant to end, exactly where I started out?

"Lost" [by David Wagoner]

Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you

Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,

And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,

Must ask permission to know it and be known.

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,

I have made this place around you.

If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.

No two trees are the same to Raven.

No two branches are the same to Wren.

If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,

You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows

Where you are. You must let it find you.

-- David Wagoner

(1999)

The Meadow Mouse - Poem by Theodore Roethke

1

In a shoe box stuffed in an old nylon stocking

Sleeps the baby mouse I found in the meadow,

Where he trembled and shook beneath a stick

Till I caught him up by the tail and brought him in,

Cradled in my hand,

A little quaker, the whole body of him trembling,

His absurd whiskers sticking out like a cartoon-mouse,

His feet like small leaves,

Little lizard-feet,

Whitish and spread wide when he tried to struggle away,

Wriggling like a minuscule puppy.

Now he's eaten his three kinds of cheese and drunk from his

bottle-cap watering-trough--

So much he just lies in one corner,

His tail curled under him, his belly big

As his head; his bat-like ears

Twitching, tilting toward the least sound.

Do I imagine he no longer trembles

When I come close to him?

He seems no longer to tremble.

2

But this morning the shoe-box house on the back porch is empty.

Where has he gone, my meadow mouse,

My thumb of a child that nuzzled in my palm? --

To run under the hawk's wing,

Under the eye of the great owl watching from the elm-tree,

To live by courtesy of the shrike, the snake, the tom-cat.

I think of the nestling fallen into the deep grass,

The turtle gasping in the dusty rubble of the highway,

The paralytic stunned in the tub, and the water rising,--

All things innocent, hapless, forsaken.

Blackberry Eating

Galway Kinnell, 1927 - 2014

I love to go out in late September
among the fat, overripe, icy, black blackberries
to eat blackberries for breakfast,
the stalks very prickly, a penalty
they earn for knowing the black art
of blackberry-making; and as I stand among them
lifting the stalks to my mouth, the ripest berries
fall almost unbidden to my tongue,
as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words
like *strengths* or *squinched*,
many-lettered, one-syllabled lumps,
which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well
in the silent, startled, icy, black language
of blackberry-eating in late September.

Deep in the Quiet Wood

James Weldon Johnson, 1871 - 1938

Are you bowed down in heart?

Do you but hear the clashing discords and the din of life?

Then come away, come to the peaceful wood,

Here bathe your soul in silence. Listen! Now,

From out the palpitating solitude

Do you not catch, yet faint, elusive strains?

They are above, around, within you, everywhere.

Silently listen! Clear, and still more clear, they come.

They bubble up in rippling notes, and swell in singing tones.

Now let your soul run the whole gamut of the wondrous scale

Until, responsive to the tonic chord,

It touches the diapason of God's grand cathedral organ,

Filling earth for you with heavenly peace

And holy harmonies.

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

W. B. Yeats, 1865 - 1939

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee;
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping
slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket
sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

The Search for Words

Kiley Harrison

As a child, I asked again

and again where words

came from. Who made the word

rhododendron? Who first spoke

somnambulist?

I followed my parents through

grocery stores, asking,

but they never knew how to answer,

searched for what cheese to buy,

what milk, what cereal.

I would ask,

but why do we call it *milk*?

Who decided on *ice cream*,

grocery, marmalade, cracker?

My mother would say

someone who lived long before us,

my father said,

it came from Latin.

Who is this Latin? Or what, or when, or how?

Who saw shapes

in the sky and first whispered *cloud*?

Who bent to mysteries from the ground

and said *gardenia, lavender, sunflower, lily*?

Who first saw a child walk, a lengthy woman,

a sunrise, and said aloud *love*?

Who first rose in the morning

and whispered *begin*?

The Silken Tent - Poem by Robert Frost

She is as in a field a silken tent

At midday when the sunny summer breeze

Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,

So that in guys it gently sways at ease,

And its supporting central cedar pole,

That is its pinnacle to heavenward

And signifies the sureness of the soul,

Seems to owe naught to any single cord,

But strictly held by none, is loosely bound

By countless silken ties of love and thought

To every thing on earth the compass round,

And only by one's going slightly taut

In the capriciousness of summer air

Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

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 one 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.

Fisherman 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
and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.

Fueled

by a million

man-made

wings of fire-

the rocket tore a tunnel

through the sky-

and everybody cheered.

Fueled

only by a thought from God-

the seedling

urged its way

through thicknesses of black-

and as it pierced

the heavy ceiling of the soil-

and launched itself

up into outer space -

no

one

even

clapped.

--Marcie Hans

THIS LITTLE PIGGY WENT TO MARKET

is the usual thing to say when you begin

pulling on the toes of a small child,

and I have never had a problem with that.

I could easily picture the piggy with his basket

and his trotters kicking up the dust on an imaginary road.

What always stopped me in my tracks was

the middle toe -- this little piggy ate roast beef.

I mean I enjoy a roast beef sandwich

with lettuce and tomato and a dollop of horseradish,

but I cannot see a pig ordering that in a delicatessen.

I am probably being too literal-minded here --

I am even wondering why it's called "horseradish."

I should just go along with the beautiful nonsense

of the nursery, float downstream on its waters.

After all, Little Jack Horner speaks to me deeply.

I don't want to be the one to ruin the children's party

by asking unnecessary questions about Puss in Boots

or, again, the implications of a pig eating beef.

By the way, I am completely down with going

"Wee wee wee" all the way home,

having done that many times and knowing exactly how it feels.

by Billy Collins from *Ballistics* (Random House)

“I have a friend who's an artist and has sometimes taken a view which I don't agree with very well. He'll hold up a flower and say "look how beautiful it is," and I'll agree. Then he says "I as an artist can see how beautiful this is but you as a scientist take this all apart and it becomes a dull thing," and I think that he's kind of nutty. First of all, the beauty that he sees is available to other people and to me too, I believe. Although I may not be quite as refined aesthetically as he is ... I can appreciate the beauty of a flower. At the same time, I see much more about the flower than he sees. I could imagine the cells in there, the complicated actions inside, which also have a beauty. I mean it's not just beauty at this dimension, at one centimeter; there's also beauty at smaller dimensions, the inner structure, also the processes. The fact that the colors in the flower evolved in order to attract insects to pollinate it is interesting; it means that insects can see the color. It adds a question: does this aesthetic sense also exist in the lower forms? Why is it aesthetic? All kinds of interesting questions which the science knowledge only adds to the excitement, the mystery and the awe of a flower. It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts.”

– **Richard Feynman**

You've seen a herd of goats

going down to the water.

The lame and dreamy goat

brings up the rear.

There are worried faces about that one,

but now they're laughing.

because look, as they return,

that goat is leading!

There are many different kinds of knowing.

The lame goat's kind is a branch

that traces back to the roots of presence.

Learn from the lame goat,

and lead the herd home.

~ Molana Jalaluddin Rumi

(THE LAME GOAT)

The Essential Rumi by Coleman Barks

Knoxville, Tennessee

Nikki Giovanni, 1943

I always like summer

best

you can eat fresh corn

from daddy's garden

and okra

and greens

and cabbage

and lots of

barbecue

and buttermilk

and homemade ice-cream

at the church picnic

and listen to

gospel music

outside

at the church

homecoming

and go to the mountains with

your grandmother

and go barefooted

and be warm

all the time

not only when you go to bed

and sleep

The Peace of Wild Things

Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound

in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake

rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars

waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

The Swing

Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850 - 1894

How do you like to go up in a swing,

Up in the air so blue?

Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing

Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall,

Till I can see so wide,

River and trees and cattle and all

Over the countryside—

Till I look down on the garden green,

Down on the roof so brown—

Up in the air I go flying again,

Up in the air and down!

