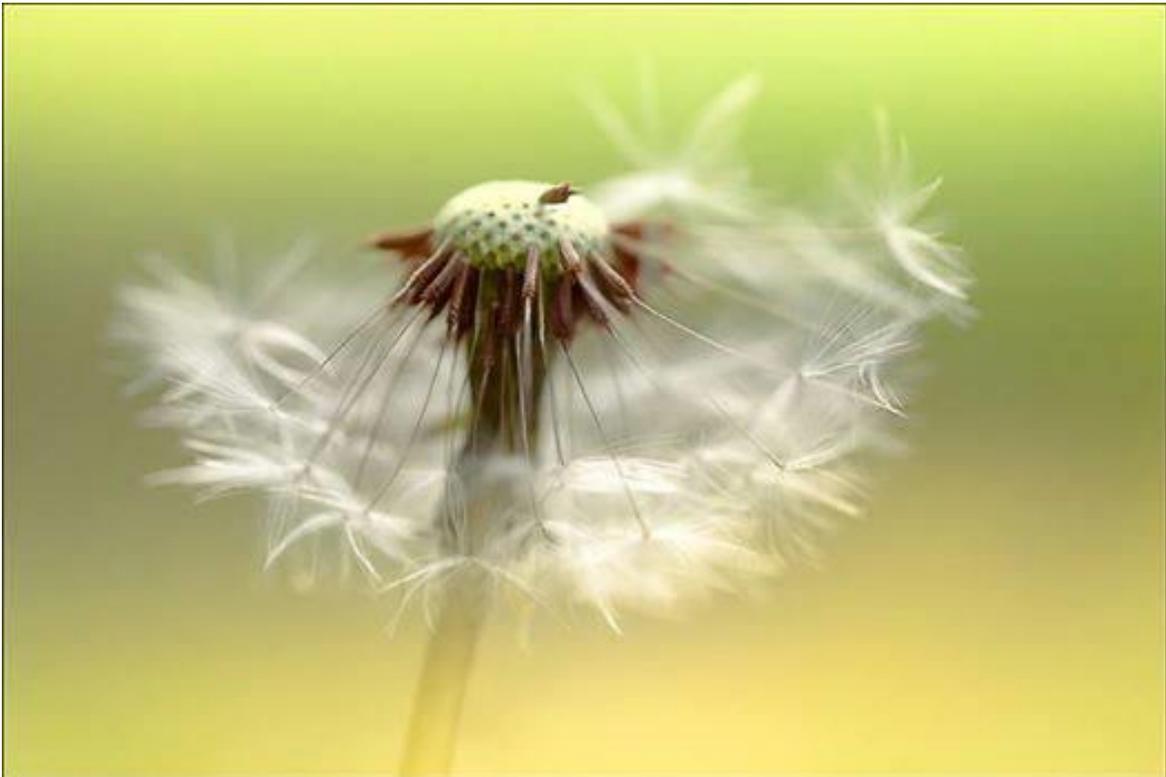


Poetry and the Spirituality of Transformation



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Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.



Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night
with plans and the simple breath
that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness
as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow
as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness
that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day
to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say

it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye

I live my life in growing orbits
which move out over the things of the world.
Perhaps I can never achieve the last,
but that will be my attempt.

I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,
and I have been circling for a thousand years,
and I still don't know if I am a falcon, or a storm,
or a great song.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Root Cellar

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stinks!
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

by Theodore Roethke

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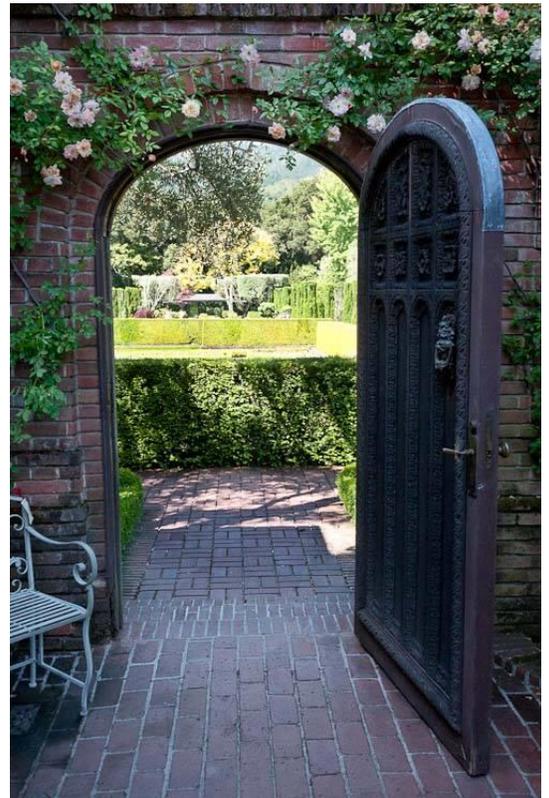
There is Some Kiss We Want with Our Whole Lives

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

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

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

Rumi



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Under the Vulture-Tree

We have all seen them circling pastures,
have looked up from the mouth of a barn, a pine clearing,
the fences of our own backyards, and have stood
amazed by the one slow wing beat, the endless dihedral drift.
But I had never seen so many so close, hundreds,
every limb of the dead oak feathered black,

and I cut the engine, let the river grab the jon boat
and pull it toward the tree.

The black leaves shined, the pink fruit blossomed
red, ugly as a human heart.

Then, as I passed under their dream, I saw for the first time
its soft countenance, the raw fleshy jowls
wrinkled and generous, like the faces of the very old
who have grown to empathize with everything.

And I drifted away from them, slow, on the
pull of the river,
reluctant, looking back at their roost,
calling them what I'd never called them,
what they are,
those dwarfed transfiguring angels,
who flock to the side of the poisoned fox, the
mud turtle
crushed on the side of the road,
who pray over the leaf graves of the
anonymous lost,
with mercy enough to consume us all and
give us wings.



By David Bottoms

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The Fish

I caught a
tremendous fish
and held him
beside the boat
half out of water,
with my hook
fast in a corner of
its mouth.



He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. Here and there
his brown skin hung in strips
like ancient wallpaper,
and its pattern of darker brown
was like wallpaper:
shapes like full-blown roses
stained and lost through age.
He was speckled with barnacles,
fine rosettes of lime,
and infested
with tiny white sea-lice,
and underneath two or three
rags of green weed hung down.
While his gills were breathing in
the terrible oxygen
— the frightening gills,
fresh and crisp with blood,
that can cut so badly —
I thought of the coarse white flesh
packed in like feathers,
the big bones and the little bones,
the dramatic reds and blacks
of his shiny entrails,
and the pink swim-bladder
like a big peony.
I looked into his eyes

which were far larger than mine
but shallower, and yellowed,
the irises backed and packed
with tarnished tinfoil
seen through the lenses
of old scratched isinglass.
They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.
— It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.
I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
— if you could call it a lip —
grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
with all their five big hooks
grown firmly in his mouth.
A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the strain and snap
when it broke and he got away.
Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw.
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels — until everything

was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

By Elizabeth Bishop

Sleeping In the Forest

I thought the earth remembered me,
she took me back so tenderly,
arranging her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds.
I slept as never before, a stone on the river bed,
nothing between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated light as moths
among the branches of the perfect trees.
All night I heard the small kingdoms
breathing around me, the insects,
and the birds who do their work in the darkness.
All night I rose and fell, as if in water,
grappling with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.

By Mary Oliver – in *Twelve Moons*

On youtube at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDh5uFEkI34>
key word search twelve moons youtube Mary Oliver

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To Waiting

You spend so much of your time
expecting to become
someone else
always someone
who will be different
someone to whom a moment
whatever moment it may be
at last has come
and who has been
met and transformed
into no longer being you
and so has forgotten you

meanwhile in your life
you hardly notice
the world around you
lights changing
sirens dying along the
buildings
your eyes intent
on a sight you do not see
yet
not yet there
as long as you
are only yourself

with whom as you
recall you were
never happy
to be left alone for long



by W.S. Merwin, *Present Company*. © Copper Canyon Press, 2007.

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Love after Love after Love after and finally

you arrive in the arms
of your favorite chair
and drink the tea
that has been left
just for you
at the bottom of the cup

you find the stranger
who knows you bone by bone
who has been waiting patiently
all this time
for you to discover the only one
who will always love you

Smile at your own reflection.
Gather yourself up
and be your own child
sitting on your own lap.
Rest your cheek on your own bent knee.
Forgive yourself. Live.

By Leslea Newman



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