

Wabi Sabi



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Materials developed by Kim Langley, M.Ed. for WordSPA ministry

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Young maple tree—
your rich brown leaves,
they last a season.

By Soha

Somber and tall
The forest of oaks.
In and out
Through the little gate
To the cherry blossoms.

By Basho

As for the hibiscus
on the roadside—
my horse ate it.

By Basho



(Image: Joe Prekop)

Tea (*for Thich Nhat Hanh*)

How many years of suffering
revealed in hands like his
small and deliberate as a child's

The way he raises them
from his lap, grasps the teacup
with sure, unhurried ease

Yet full of anticipation
for what he will taste in each sip
he drinks as if it's his first time

Lifts the cup to his mouth,
a man who's been practicing all his life,
each time tasting something new.

By Amy Uyematsu, from *Stone Bow Prayer* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005).

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Happiness

This was when my daughters were just children
playing on the rocky shore of the lake,

their hair in braids, their bright-colored jackets
tied around their waists. It was afternoon,

the shadows falling away, their faces
glowing with light. Whatever we said then

(and it must have been happy; it must have
been hopeful) is lost as I am now lost

from that life I lived. This was when nothing
that I wanted mattered, though all I wanted

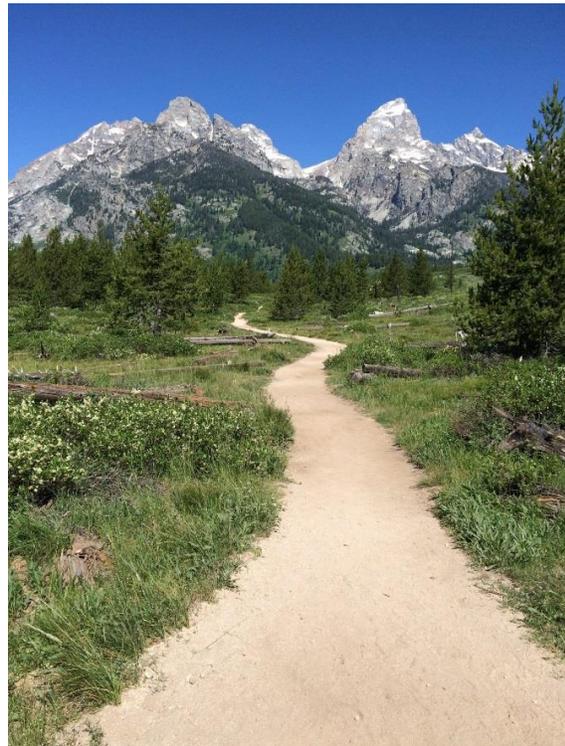
was happiness, pure happiness, simple
as strawberries and cream in a saucer,

as curtains floating from a window sill,
as small pairs of shoes arranged in a row.

By Joyce Sutphen, from *First Words*. (Red Dragonfly Press, 2010).

Full Day

The pilot on the plane says:
In one minute and fifty seconds
we're going as far
as the covered wagon went
in a full day.
We look down
on clouds,
mountains of froth and foam.
We eat a neat
and subdivided lunch.
How was it for the people in
the covered wagon?
They bumped and jostled.
Their wheels broke.
Their biscuits were tough.
They got hot and cold and old.
Their shirts tore on the branches
they passed.



(Image: Gayle Canary)

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But they saw the pebbles
and the long grass
and the sweet shine of evening
settling on the fields.
They knew the ruts and the rocks.
They threw their furniture out
to make the wagons lighter.
They carried their treasures
in a crooked box.

By Naomi Shihab Nye, from *Come With Me* (Greenwillow, 2000).

(Image: Joe Prekop)



Grass

Yesterday, and the day before that,
the cows ate grass.
Tomorrow, and the next, and every day after that,
the cows will eat grass.
They'll eat until they can't stand up,
and even then, collapsed upon the earth in their last hours,
if they can reach it with their mouths, they'll eat grass.
They'll eat until they've eaten it all, until there are only
a few stray blades
halfway buried under boulders—then
they'll nudge aside the boulders
with their large and knowing lips,
and eat that grass, too.
Only the smallest calves, today,
the ones no bigger than dogs, are lying down.
They gaze out onto the landscape like dreamers:
the sky marbled with fatty clouds;

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the cherry trees beginning to leaf;
the first few poppies, unfurling their cadmium banners;
the fences making some things possible, and others difficult;
the shadows falling from, and following, each thing;
and the world seems so strange, so common and wondrous
at once, that the calves ask the cows eating grass,
Is this all there is?
And the answer comes back from mouths full of grass:
This is all there is.

By Ruth L. Schwartz, from *dear good naked morning* (Autumn House Press, 2005).

it may not always be so...

it may not always be so; and i say
that if your lips, which i have loved, should touch
another's, and your dear strong fingers clutch
his heart, as mine in time not far away;
if on another's face your sweet hair lay
in such a silence as i know, or such
great writhing words as, uttering overmuch,
stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;

if this should be, i say if this should be—
you of my heart, send me a little word;
that i may go unto him, and take his hands,
saying, Accept all happiness from me.
Then shall i turn my face, and hear one bird
sing terribly afar in the lost lands.

By E.E. Cummings, from *100 Selected Poems* (Grove Press, 1954).

When I Think

When I think of where I've come from
or even try to measure as any kind of
distance these places, all the various
people, and all the ways in which I re-
member them, so that even the skin I
touched or was myself fact of, inside,
could see through like a hole in the wall
or listen to, it must have been, to what
was going on in there, even if I was still
too dumb to know anything—When I think

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of the miles and miles of roads, or meals,
of telephone wires even, or even of water
poured out in endless streams down streaks
of black sky or the dirt roads washed clean,
or myriad, salty tears and suddenly it's spring
again, or it was—Even when I think about
all those I treated so poorly, names, places,
their waiting uselessly for me in the rain and
I never came, was never really there at all,
was moving so confusedly, so fast, so driven
like a car along some empty highway passing,
passing other cars—When I try to think of
things, of what's happened, of what a life is
and was, my life, when I wonder what it meant,
the sad days passing, the continuing, echoing deaths,
all the painful, belligerent news, and the dog still
waiting to be fed, the closeness of you sleeping, voices,
presences, of children, of our own grown children,
the shining, bright sun, the smell of the air just now,
each physical moment, passing, passing, it's what
it always is or ever was, just then, just there.

By Robert Creeley, from *On Earth: Last Poems and an Essay* (University of California Press, 2006).

(Image: Kim Langley)



Finding a Box of Family Letters

The dead say little in their letters
they haven't said before.
We find no secrets, and yet
how different every sentence sounds
heard across the years.

My father breaks my heart
simply by being so young and handsome.

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He's half my age, with jet-black hair.
Look at him in his navy uniform
grinning beside his dive-bomber.

Come back, Dad! I want to shout.
He says he misses all of us
(though I haven't yet been born).
He writes from places I never knew he saw,
and everyone he mentions now is dead.

There is a large, long photograph
curled like a diploma—a banquet sixty years ago.
My parents sit uncomfortably
among tables of dark-suited strangers.
The mildewed paper reeks of regret.

I wonder what song the band was playing,
just out of frame, as the photographer
arranged your smiles. A waltz? A foxtrot?
Get out there on the floor and dance!
You don't have forever.

What does it cost to send a postcard
to the underworld? I'll buy
a penny stamp from World War II
and mail it downtown at the old post office
just as the courthouse clock strikes twelve.

Surely the ghost of some postal worker
still makes his nightly rounds, his routine
too tedious for him to notice when it ended.
He works so slowly he moves back in time
carrying our dead letters to their lost addresses.

It's silly to get sentimental.
The dead have moved on. So should we.
But isn't it equally simpleminded to miss
the special expertise of the departed
in clarifying our long-term plans?

They never let us forget that the line
between them and us is only temporary.
Get out there and dance! the letters shout
adding, Love always. *Can't wait to get home!*
And soon we will be. *See you there.*

By Dana Gioia, from *Pity the Beautiful* (Graywolf Press, 2012).

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Sweetness (*for my mother*)

Just when it has seemed I couldn't bear
one more friend
waking with a tumor, one more maniac

with a perfect reason, often a sweetness
has come
and changed nothing in the world

except the way I stumbled through it,
for a while lost
in the ignorance of loving

someone or something, the world shrunk
to mouth-size,
hand-size, and never seeming small.

I acknowledge there is no sweetness
that doesn't leave a stain,
no sweetness that's ever sufficiently sweet. ...

Tonight a friend called to say his lover
was killed in a car
he was driving. His voice was low

and guttural, he repeated what he needed
to repeat, and I repeated
the one or two words we have for such grief

until we were speaking only in tones.
Often a sweetness comes
as if on loan, stays just long enough

to make sense of what it means to be alive,
then returns to its dark
source. As for me, I don't care

where it's been, or what bitter road
it's traveled
to come so far, to taste so good.

By Stephen Dunn, from *New and Selected Poems 1974-1994* (W.W. Norton & Co, 1994).

Don't surrender your loneliness
So quickly.
Let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you
As few human
Or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight
Has made my eyes so soft,
My voice
So tender,

My need of God
Absolutely
Clear.

By Hafiz



(Image: Joe Prekop)

Advice to Myself

Leave the dishes.
Let the celery rot in the bottom drawer of the refrigerator
and an earthen scum harden on the kitchen floor.
Leave the black crumbs in the bottom of the toaster.
Throw the cracked bowl out and don't patch the cup.
Don't patch anything. Don't mend. Buy safety pins.
Don't even sew on a button.
Let the wind have its way, then the earth
that invades as dust and then the dead
foaming up in gray rolls underneath the couch.
Talk to them. Tell them they are welcome.
Don't keep all the pieces of the puzzles
or the doll's tiny shoes in pairs, don't worry
who uses whose toothbrush or if anything
matches, at all.
Except one word to another. Or a thought.
Pursue the authentic-decide first
what is authentic,
then go after it with all your heart.
Your heart, that place
you don't even think of cleaning out.
That closet stuffed with savage mementos.
Don't sort the paper clips from screws from saved baby teeth
or worry if we're all eating cereal for dinner

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again. Don't answer the telephone, ever,
or weep over anything at all that breaks.
Pink molds will grow within those sealed cartons
in the refrigerator. Accept new forms of life
and talk to the dead
who drift in though the screened windows, who collect
patiently on the tops of food jars and books.
Recycle the mail, don't read it, don't read anything
except what destroys
the insulation between yourself and your experience
or what pulls down or what strikes at or what shatters
this ruse you call necessity.

By Louise Erdrich, from *Original Fire: Selected and New Poems* (Harper, 2003).



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