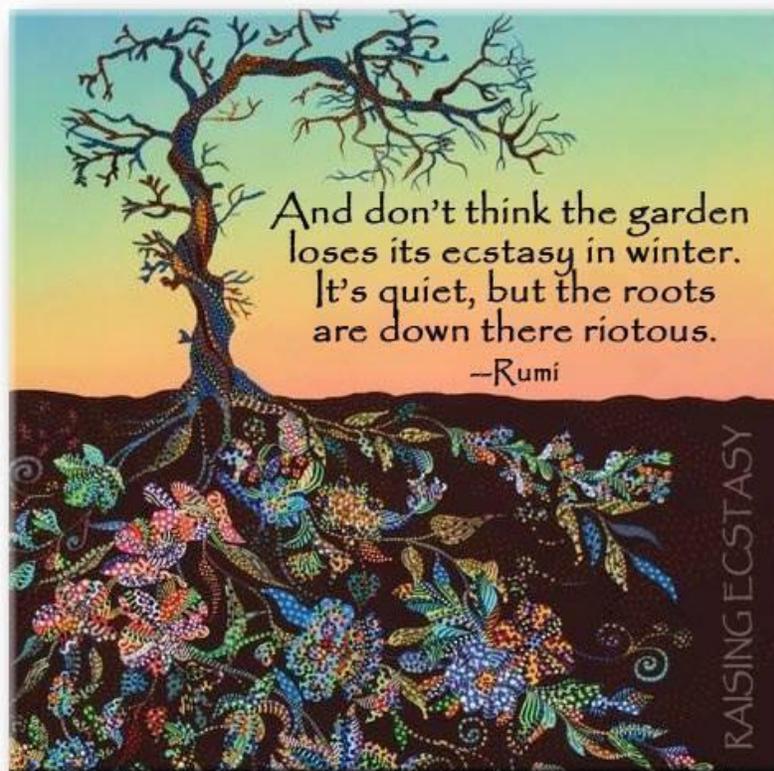


Winter Thaw: A Field Guide to Life



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

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Kindness

In Manhattan, I learned a public kindness
was a triumph
over the push of money, the constrictions

of fear. If it occurred it came
from some deep
primal memory, almost entirely lost-

Here, let me help you, then you me,
otherwise we'll die.
Which is why I love the weather

in Minnesota, every winter kindness
linked
to obvious self-interest,

thus so many kindnesses
when you need them;
praise blizzards, praise the cold.

by Stephen Dunn, from *New and Selected Poems*



This Winter Worse than Most

At night I awaken and listen
to the house creak, its boards sharpening

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in the cold. Days we stay inside,
looking out the window,

and wonder at a world so deep
into temperature. A nuthatch

tweaks thistle seed from a feeder
suction-cupped to the pane.

In moments like this spent close to glass,
how understandable my life is,

inside the heavy ribs of my navy sweater.
I watch the small bird rise

and light on a high branch.

by Madelyne Camrud, from *Oddly Beautiful*. © New Rivers Press, 2013.



Snowdrops

Do you know what I was, how I lived? You know
what despair is then
winter should have meaning for you.

I did not expect to survive,
earth suppressing me. I didn't expect
to waken again, to feel
in damp earth my body
able to respond again, remembering
after so long how to open again
in the cold light of earliest spring



afraid, yes, but among you again
crying yes risk joy

in the raw wind of the new world.

by Louise Gluck, from *The Wild Iris*



Aimless Love

This morning as I walked along the lakeshore,
I fell in love with a wren
and later in the day with a mouse
the cat had dropped under the dining room table.

In the shadows of an autumn evening,
I fell for a seamstress
still at her machine in the tailor's window,
and later for a bowl of broth,
steam rising like smoke from a naval battle.

This is the best kind of love, I thought,
without recompense, without gifts,
or unkind words, without suspicion,
or silence on the telephone.

The love of the chestnut,
the jazz cap and one hand on the wheel.

No lust, no slam of the door –
the love of the miniature orange tree,
the clean white shirt, the hot evening shower,
the highway that cuts across Florida.

No waiting, no huffiness, or rancor –
just a twinge every now and then

for the wren who had built her nest
on a low branch overhanging the water
and for the dead mouse,
still dressed in its light brown suit.

But my heart is always propped up
in a field on its tripod,
ready for the next arrow.

After I carried the mouse by the tail
to a pile of leaves in the woods,
I found myself standing at the bathroom
sink
gazing down affectionately at the soap,

so patient and soluble,
so at home in its pale green soap dish.
I could feel myself falling again
as I felt its turning in my wet hands
and caught the scent of lavender and stone.

by Billy Collins, from *Nine Horses*



Photo Credit Carole Calladine. Used with permission.



Love for Other Things

It's easy to love a deer
But try to care about bugs and scrawny trees
Love the puddle of lukewarm water
From last week's rain.
Leave the mountains alone for now.
Also the clear lakes surrounded by pines.
People are lined up to admire them.
Get close to the things that slide away in the dark.
Be grateful even for the boredom
That sometimes seems to involve the whole world.

Think of the frost
That will crack our bones eventually

by Tom Hennen, from *Love for Other Things: New and Selected Poems*



To My Mother

I was your rebellious son,
do you remember? Sometimes
I wonder if you do remember,
so complete has your forgiveness been.

So complete has your forgiveness been
I wonder sometimes if it did not
precede my wrong, and I erred,
safe found, within your love,

prepared ahead of me, the way home,
or my bed at night, so that almost
I should forgive you, who perhaps
foresaw the worst that I might do,

and forgave before I could act,
causing me to smile now, looking back,
to see how paltry was my worst,
compared to your forgiveness of it

already given. And this, then,
is the vision of that Heaven of which
we have heard, where those who love
each other have forgiven each other,

where, for that, the leaves are green,
the light a music in the air,

and all is unentangled,
and all is undismayed.

by Wendell Berry in *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*



Winter Grace

If you have seen the snow
under the lamppost
piled up like a white beaver hat on the picnic table
or somewhere slowly falling
into the brook
to be swallowed by water,
then you have seen beauty
and know it for its transience.
And if you have gone out in the snow
for only the pleasure
of walking barely protected
from the galaxies,
the flakes settling on your parka
like the dust from just-born stars,
the cold waking you
as if from long sleeping,
then you can understand
how, more often than not,
truth is found in silence,
how the natural world comes to you
if you go out to meet it,
its icy ditches filled with dead weeds,
its vacant birdhouses, and dens
full of the sleeping.
But this is the slowed-down season
held fast by darkness
and if no one comes to keep you company
then keep watch over your own solitude.

In that stillness, you will learn
with your whole body
the significance of cold
and the night,
which is otherwise always eluding you.

Patricia Fargnoli



So

So you aren't Tolstoy or Saint Francis
or even a well-known singer
of popular songs
and will never read Greek
or speak French fluently,
will never see something no one else
has seen before through a lens
or with the naked eye.
You've been given just one life
in the world that matters
and upon which every other life
somehow depends as long as you live,
and also given the costly gifts of hunger,
choice, and pain with which to raise
a modest shrine of meaning.

by Leonard Nathan



Anyone Can Sing

Anyone can sing. You just open your mouth,

and give shape to a sound. Anyone can sing.
What is harder, is to proclaim the soul,
to initiate a wild and necessary deepening:
to give the voice broad, sonorous wings
of solitude, grief, and celebration,
to fill the body with the echoes of voices
lost long ago to bravery, and silence,
to prise the reluctant heart wide open,
to witness defeat, to suffer contempt,
to shrink, lose face, go down in ignominy,
to retreat to the last dark hiding-place
where the tattered remnants of your pride
still gather themselves around your nakedness,
to know these rags as your only protection
and yet still open - to face the possibility
that your innermost core may hold nothing at all,
and to sing from that - to fill the void
with every hurt, every harm, every hard-won joy
that staves off death yet honours its coming,
to sing both full and utterly empty,
alone and conjoined, exiled and at home,
to sing what people feel most keenly
yet never acknowledge until you sing it.
Anyone can sing. Yes. Anyone can sing.

Photo Credit Joe Prekop. Used with permission.



Hey, did you say ANYONE can sing?

by William Ayot, from *Small Things That Matter*
(There is an engaging reading of this poem by Ayot on youtube.)



Commuter Buddhist

I'm learning to be a Buddhist in my car,
listening to a book on tape. One problem
is that, before I've gotten very far,

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my mind gradually becomes aware
that it has stopped listening, straying from
the task of becoming a Buddhist in my car.

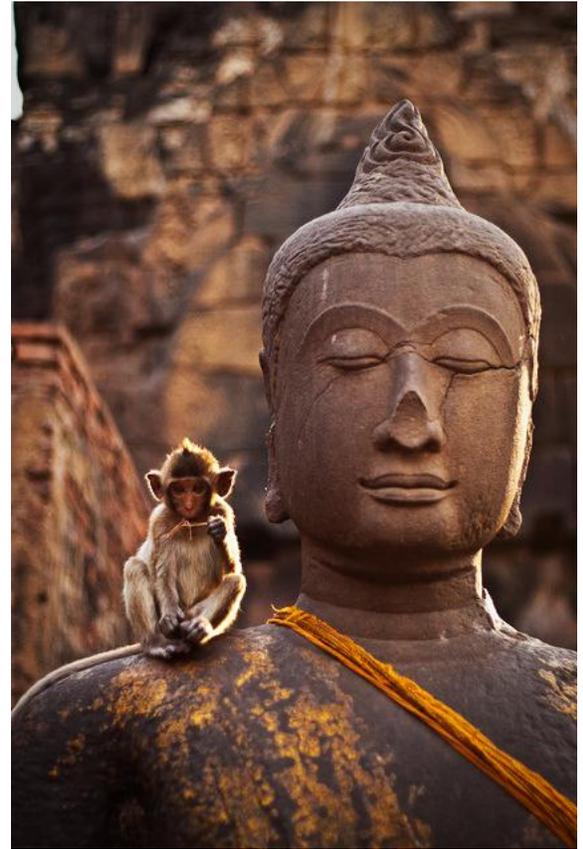
I'm also worried that listening will impair
my driving, as the package label cautions,
but I haven't noticed that, at least so far.

In fact, I may be driving with more care.
There's a sensation of attentive calm
that's part of becoming a Buddhist in your car.

A soothing voice drones on until the car
is transformed into a capsule of wisdom
traveling at high speed, and you feel far

from anywhere but where you really are ...
which is nowhere, really. The biggest problem
is getting the Buddhism *out* of your car
and into your life. I've failed at that so far.

by Jeffrey Harrison, from *Into Daylight*



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