

A Woman is Like a Teabag: Poems for Grace and Feminine Energy



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

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Lucinda Matlock

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.



(Image: openclipart.org)

By Edgar Lee Masters, from *Spoon River Anthology*. © Macmillan & Co, 1915.

After Reading There Might Be an Infinite Number of Dimensions

I'm thinking today of how we hold it together,
arrive on time with the bottle of Zinfandel, a six-pack
of Scuttlebutt beer, how we cover our wrinkles
with Visible Lift, shove the mashed winter squash
into the baby's mouth, how we hold it all together
despite clogged rain gutters, cracked
transmissions, a new explanation for gravity's
half-hearted hold. I'm wondering how we do it,
comb the tangles from our hair, trim the unwieldy
camellia, speak to packed crowds about weight loss
or fractals. I'm wondering how we don't
fall to our knees, knowing a hardened pea,
lodged in the throat, can kill, knowing
liquids are banned on all commercial flights.

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Leaves fall. The baby sucks her middle fingers.
Meanwhile, the refrigerator acquires

an unexplainable leak. Meanwhile, we call
the plumber, open wide for the dental hygienist,

check each month, with tentative circlings,
our aging breasts. Somehow, each morning,

the coffee gets made. Somehow, each evening,
the crossing guard lifts fluorescent orange flag,

and a child and her father cross the glistening street.

By Martha Silano, from *The Little Office of the Immaculate Conception*. © Saturnalia, 2011.

Considerations

It was one of those decisions
that had to be made
in a moment. A Puerto Rican girl
walked across the street
in front of my car.

Fifteen or so and well
on her way to beauty, her face
was fired gold in the night.
She was headed uptown
where the streets are scarred
and sad, and I remember
how dangerous it is
for a girl to be beautiful
in some neighborhoods.

I wanted to get out
of the car and run to her
rescue, a Galahad
breaking with middle age
and tired legs and heart.

Before I could do anything, though,
the light changed
and the cars around me roared
their engines and moved out
groping for something
they believed would change things.
Like everyone else,
she would have to save herself.

By Louis McKee, from *River Architecture: Poems from Here and There*. © Cynic Press, 1999.

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**A woman is
like a teabag.**

**She gets
stronger
when she is in
hot water.**



Nineteen-Thirty-Eight

I remember the way my mother
answered when people asked
where she'd gone to school:

South Side High, 1938,
adding the year in the same breath
though I knew

she never graduated,
yanked out
when her father lost his job.

Now it was her turn
to make herself
useful, he told her.

Hadn't he put
food on the table
all her life and all her little sister's?

How necessary
to tell a lie like hers, to answer
South Side High, 1938, and smile

without betraying
the blaze in her chest, her envy
for the questioner who likely met

her own husband at some university.
But wasn't my mother the lucky one,
my grandfather was fond of telling her

even into my childhood, sometimes
in front of my friends, lucky
to have got my father, a college man

who sat beside her at a ballgame
in 1939? Just look at her
who didn't finish high school!

Didn't I tell her then it wouldn't matter?

By Andrea Hollander Budy, from *Woman in the Painting*. © Autumn House Press, 2006.

What Do Women Want?

I want a red dress.
I want it flimsy and cheap,
I want it too tight, I want to wear it
until someone tears it off me.
I want it sleeveless and backless,
this dress, so no one has to guess
what's underneath. I want to walk down
the street past Thrifty's and the hardware store
with all those keys glittering in the window,
past Mr. and Mrs. Wong selling day-old
donuts in their cafe, past the Guerra brothers
slinging pigs from the truck and onto the dolly,
hoisting the slick snouts over their shoulders.
I want to walk like I'm the only
woman on earth and I can have my pick.
I want that red dress bad.
I want it to confirm
your worst fears about me,
to show you how little I care about you
or anything except what
I want. When I find it, I'll pull that garment
from its hanger like I'm choosing a body
to carry me into this world, through
the birth-cries and the love-cries too,
and I'll wear it like bones, like skin,
it'll be the goddamned
dress they'll bury me in.



(Image: www.pinterest.com)

By Kim Addonizio, from *Tell Me*. © BOA Editions, 2000.

I Stop Writing the Poem

to fold the clothes. No matter who lives
or who dies, I'm still a woman.
I'll always have plenty to do.
I bring the arms of his shirt
together. Nothing can stop
our tenderness. I'll get back
to the poem. I'll get back to being
a woman. But for now
there's a shirt, a giant shirt
in my hands, and somewhere a small girl
standing next to her mother
watching to see how it's done.



(Image: www.pixabay.com)

By Tess Gallagher, from *Moon Crossing Bridge*. © Graywolf Press, 1992.

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What I Learned From My Mother

I learned from my mother how to love
the living, to have plenty of vases on hand
in case you have to rush to the hospital
with peonies cut from the lawn, black ants
still stuck to the buds. I learned to save jars
large enough to hold fruit salad for a whole
grieving household, to cube home-canned pears
and peaches, to slice through maroon grape skins
and flick out the sexual seeds with a knife point.
I learned to attend viewing even if I didn't know
the deceased, to press the moist hands
of the living, to look in their eyes and offer
sympathy, as though I understood loss even then.
I learned that whatever we say means nothing,
what anyone will remember is that we came.
I learned to believe I had the power to ease
awful pains materially like an angel.
Like a doctor, I learned to create
from another's suffering my own usefulness, and once
you know how to do this, you can never refuse.
To every house you enter, you must offer
healing: a chocolate cake you baked yourself,
the blessing of your voice, your chaste touch.

By Julia Kasdorf, from *Sleeping Preacher*.
© University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.

Down on My Knees

cleaning out my refrigerator
and thinking about writing a religious poem
that somehow combines feeling sorry for myself
with ordinary praise, when my nephew stumbles in for coffee
to wash down what looks like a hangover
and get rid of what he calls hot dog water breath.
I wasn't going to bake the cake

now cooling on the counter, but I found a dozen eggs tipped
sideways in their carton behind a leftover Thanksgiving Jell-O dish.
There's something therapeutic about baking a devil's food cake,
whipping up that buttercream frosting,
knowing your sisters will drop by and say Lord yes
they'd love just a little piece.

Everybody suffers, wants to run away,
is broke after Christmas, stayed up too late
to make it to church Sunday morning. Everybody should

*Phyllis McGinley
wrote,
"A Mother's
hardest to forgive.
Life is the fruit she
longs to hand you,
Ripe on a plate.
And while you live,
Relentlessly she
understands you."*

Her collection *Times Three: Selected Verse from Three Decades* became the first book of light verse to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry.

drink coffee with their nephews,
eat chocolate cake with their sisters, be thankful
and happy enough under a warm and unexpected January sun.

By Ginger Andrews, from *An Honest Answer*. © Story Line Press, 1999.

People Who Take Care

People who take care of people
get paid less than anybody
people who take care of people
are not worth much
except to people who are
sick, old, helpless, and poor
people who take care of people
are not important to most other people
are not respected by many other people
come and go without much fuss
unless they don't show up
when needed
people who make more money
tell them what to do
never get shit on their hands
never mop vomit or wipe tears
don't stand in danger
of having plates thrown at them
sharing every cold
observing agonies
they cannot tell at home
people who take care of people
have a secret
that sees them through the double shift
that moves with them from room to room
that keeps them on the floor
sometimes they fill a hollow
no one else can fill
sometimes through the shit
and blood and tears
they go to a beautiful place, somewhere
those clean important people
have never been.

By Nancy Henry, from *Hard*. © Musclehead Press, 2003.

God Says Yes To Me

I asked God if it was OK to be melodramatic
and she said yes

I asked her if it was OK to be short
and she said it sure is

I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish

and she said honey

she calls me that sometimes

she said you can do just exactly

what you want to

Thanks God I said

and is it even OK if I don't paragraph my letters

Sweetcakes God said

who knows where she picked that up

what I'm telling you is

Yes Yes Yes

By Kaylin Haught, from *The Palm of your Hand*. © Tilbury House, 1995.

The Buddha's Last Instruction

"Make of yourself a light"
said the Buddha,
before he died.
I think of this every morning
as the east begins
to tear off its many clouds
of darkness, to send up the first
signal—a white fan
streaked with pink and violet,
even green.
An old man, he lay down
between two sala trees,

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and he might have said anything,
knowing it was his final hour.
The light burns upward,
it thickens and settles over the fields.
Around him, the villagers gathered
and stretched forward to listen.
Even before the sun itself
hangs, disattached, in the blue air,
I am touched everywhere
by its ocean of yellow waves.
No doubt he thought of everything
that had happened in his difficult life.
And then I feel the sun itself
as it blazes over the hills,
like a million flowers on fire-
clearly I'm not needed,
yet I feel myself turning
into something of inexplicable value.
Slowly, beneath the branches,
he raised his head.
He looked into the faces of that frightened crowd.

By Mary Oliver, from *House of Light*. © Beacon Press, 1990.



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