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Paradox of Love

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PARADOX OF LOVE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

By

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B.A., University of Wisconsin--Superior, 2006
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2008
Wright State University

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2008

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

May 20, 2008

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED
UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Twyla Dawn Montagne
ENTITLED Paradox of Love BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

Montagne, Twyla Dawn. M.A., Department of English Language and Literatures, Wright State University, 2008. Paradox of Love.

A collection of poems centered on the theme of the paradoxical nature of love.

Within love are oppositional tensions that produce pain as well as joy. This collection explores what it means to live with a heart awakened by love--one that is made whole by being broken. The poems are written in free verse with a simple structure that often takes the form of stanzas. As a whole, this work is an invitation to find deeper meaning in life.

Please let me weep.
My heart must love,
and if my heart loves,
it must also weep.

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FORWARD

"The glory of God is man fully alive."

Saint Irenaeus (from John Elderidge's book Waking the Dead)

Poetry has a way of getting into our blood and flowing with our thoughts with every breath we take. There is something intangibly beautiful about poetry that represents the uninhibited impulses of our hearts and is penned with fingers itching to write. One of our highest callings as human beings, I believe, is to be genuine, and I have kept this goal before me while creating the collection of poems you see on these pages. Our impulse may be to be real, but vulnerability is often too high a sacrifice to make. This simultaneous pull in opposite directions adds further dimension to what it means to love. To love with no reservation is to cry tears while we smile, to love until it breaks us, and to keep on loving. The title I chose for my poems, Paradox of Love, addresses the gravity of love in this light. I invite you to read on and walk with me as I explore what it means to be alive in the midst of tensions initiated by love.

Without inspiration, the thoughts in my head would never have made their way onto paper. Let me pause for a moment to acknowledge those whose lives and writings have helped mold what is in my heart into lines of poetry.

First and foremost, I want to thank the Creator of all life, whose deep love has awakened my heart, and taught my spirit how to soar. Through You I have learned so much about the depth of emotion: the lovesick bliss of knowing I ravish Your heart, the yearnings of Your heart and the tears in Your weeping eyes that You have shared with me, and the complexity of knowing both at the same time.

Second, my thanks goes to the man who has loved me beyond all measure, won my heart, and further moved me to pour out my affections on my Savior. I respect you, Brandon, and treasure you with everything in my heart. Your name is written on every one of my thoughts, it seems, and I couldn't help writing about you.

Third, I give a special thanks to Dr. Gary Pacernick, who is the advisor for my thesis project, and Dr. Martin Maner and Dr. Lynette Jones, who are also on my thesis committee. Thank you, Dr. Pacernick, for your time as well as your invaluable feedback on each of my poems. You often directed my attention to areas in poems that I failed to see as problematic, and your continual appraisal of

my work helped develop me into a more critical reader myself. Thank you, Dr. Maner and Dr. Jones, for your time as well as the ways you have encouraged me both as a student and as a writer.

Fourth, I extend my sincere thanks to my family who has believed in me and supported me through every year of my life, including those I have been in school. Knowing you have faith in me means ever so much, and I wouldn't have the confidence to write without you.

Fifth, I want to thank Louise Glück for showing me the beauty of poetry, the intricacy of choosing where to break lines, and the power an individual word can have in a poem. I first read your book Vita Nova while lying on my stomach on grass, reading aloud, and watching fireflies dance in the paling evening light. It was then that poetry became as necessary as breathing for me, and your work remains a favorite of mine.

Lastly, I would like thank Matthew Arnold for the intricately crafted poem "The Buried Life," which I committed to memory as an undergraduate student studying English. In your poem, the speaker has an intrinsic awareness that there is something deeper to life than anyone is able to uncover. The message of your poem resonated with me because I too see that yearning to know our "genuine self" in every face I peer into. It is because I have found the

answer to my deepest questions in my Creator that your words broke something inside me and remain unforgettable to me.

At least as is the case with me, writing poetry is mostly a matter of recording on paper what burns inside me, and revising is where the real work begins. There seems to be a single, genuine form of each poem that I must discover, if not through writing the first draft, through the process of revision. I am reminded of a description of writing poetry authored by Louise Glück that could not possibly be truer. She writes:

Always there seems something ahead, the next poem or story, visible, at least, apprehensible, but unreachable. To perceive it at all is to be haunted by it; some sound, some tone, becomes a torment--the poem embodying that sound seems to exist somewhere already finished. It's like a lighthouse, except that, as one swims toward it, it backs away. (Glück 16)

A poem, before it exists in a tangible form on a sheet of paper or a computer screen, exists as a idea, specific enough to give the writer no rest until the idea has been captured correctly and committed to paper, and vague enough to make such an action quite impossible. So we write, and revise, take a break, and revise again, until something inside us responds the same way to the words we have chosen as to the idea pulsing through our heads. Thus speaking, we write

because we must, and as we write, we discover ourselves and what it is we cannot move forward without pausing to say.

Revising, besides helping us discover what drives us to write in the first place, allows us to emphasize beauty in specific places to give shape to a poem. Sometimes this means rearranging the content of a poem; breaking the lines differently; choosing new words to replace stale, lifeless, or overused ones; or cutting or re-writing a stanza or two. Other times the entire approach to a poem needs shifted, as was the case when I wrote the poem titled “My Neighbor.” Responding to the urge to write about my neighbor’s death was no question in my mind, but each revision of this particular poem hit no closer to home than did the first draft of it, which had an awkward shift of perspective halfway through. Mere description of what my neighbor looked like failed to satisfy me, as did the version where the poem sounds as if it is coming from the entire community where I live. It took stepping back for a little while before the words began to exist on paper in a form that truly reflected my motive in writing.

The poem that is my favorite is titled “Alive,” and I placed it first in my collection because it reflects the deep desires of my heart and is central to my interest in Paradox of Love as a theme. I begin with the line “I live with my heart outside of me” to show that my desire is to be genuine despite the necessary

degree of vulnerability that coincides with it. The images of faces captured on the pages of magazines, now on the walls of my room, is an actual description of my room. The pictures remind me to join with the heart of God in loving people from nations all over the world, and when my face is pressed into the carpet as I pray, believing that the heart of my heavenly Father is moved at the sound of my voice, the paradox of love is never more real to me.

The journey of learning to live with our hearts truly alive looks different for each of us. My hope is that my words can somehow awaken something inside you and renew your desire to continue your own journey. Blessings, and best wishes as you search for the depth of love that can simultaneously break your heart and make you whole.

ALIVE

I live with my heart outside of me,
plastered on the walls of my room
like magazine cut-outs, lip-pressed,
and glued with my own tears.
These faces stare through my dreams,
ebb and flow like my life-blood,
familiar, though not static, as they
change, reflect the seasons,
the unchecked groanings, the hyper-
active impulses of my beating heart.

What do you see?
The eyes of the child haunt me.
They give me life.
I see no hope.
I see hope that can be restored.

The colors swirl around me
as carefully as the blood moving
through my veins. Even when I
close my eyes, I cannot stop seeing.

NO LENGTH OF TIME

*I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts,
there is no hurt, only more love.*

-Mother Theresa

My heart
is in the center of a revolving restaurant
on display for sunburned, staring faces.
My heart is a red Persian carpet
moving beneath feet frozen in dance.
My heart is stretched like a rubber band
over the Grand Canyon,
playing bagpipes for a trapeze artist.
My heart is a raindrop swept across
a windshield, reflecting the glare
of London at night.

I travel
propelled forward on my knees
leaving make-up stains from my
forehead pressed into the carpet.

Motion.

But not the sea-sick swirls of a journey
ill-regarded or unfashionably sated.
Not the pompous plume
on a gentleman's hat,
waving insidious remarks
at the wearer's unchanged face,
nor the faded bus ticket
stamped for Detroit,

my heart
is a red flag at the top of Everest
to let others know that where I've been,
I am no more.

YOU HAVE A BOYFRIEND???

Is he a dude?

Her upturned face was small,
her eyes inquisitive and wide.
She raised a hand to brush
a curl away from her forehead,
my great-grandmother's
wide metal bracelet
with the Peruvian animals
siding up her slender arm.

Dudes smoke, talk rough,
and wear their pants falling off.
Her voice assumed a grown-up
sincerity as she slowly
rocked back and forth.

*My man does not smoke, and no,
his pants are not falling off.*

With a nod, she gravely
declared her judgment that
he must be a good guy.

You look like you're married,
she said, fingering the ring
on my right hand. When did
he say he loves you? Her eyes

were ready to drink my words
and swallow them whole.
Does he kiss you? On the cheek?
Her face crinkled in disgust
as she braced herself to ask
the next question. On the lips???
Someday you can meet him.
He's very tall, he likes to pray,
and he loves Jesus.
Does he celebrate Christmas?
Yes, he does, but so do I.
How can he if he loves Jesus?
That was a moot point.
Like adults we agreed to disagree.
Does he look like you? *Not really,*
but his hair is dark. Show me again
how tall he is. Do you rub his head?
How can you if he is so tall?

She slipped my bracelet on my arm,
squeezing the metal to make it fit.
It's a little big for you, yes?
It's big even on me. She was content
to have our conversation end,
and I never told her that my man
is from Kentucky, where all men
are called dudes.

YOUR EYES

Early on I knew it likely
you did not exist,
yet still I read the faces,
pausing to find
the eyes I would recognize.

Men walked past me,
some flashing smiles,
others looking back at me
over their shoulders.
With some I talked for a spell.
To some I gave only
the quickest glance.
Every so often there would be
eyes I admired,
but not recognize.

I kept looking for you, love—
kept looking for something alive
that your eyes would not
be able to hide,
for a burning passion
that would drive
you to your knees,
for something soft

that would cry
over an orphan child,
and something bold
that would ride a bamboo
raft down a river.

I saw inside you already, love.
I needed eyes that were
not a window, but a bridge
to join my heart to yours.
When I stopped looking,
there you were.

GETTING MY CAR FIXED

Blue vinyl chairs remind me of the waiting room in my dad's chiropractic office, back when I was little. I am alone today, sitting at a local automobile garage while they do brake work on my car.

I remember the way dad smelled after cleaning the spark plugs in the Ford Tempo he found for me to purchase when I was sixteen; the goofy half-smile and the pale blue eyes that almost disappeared when he got excited about recounting the story.

I draw circles in the blue, breathe deeply, and wish I could again be daddy's girl, hop-skipping through Menards, letting him drive me to Panda Buffet for occasional father-daughter dates, holding the torchlight while his fingers and Carhartt suit turned greasy as my car.

SHIP OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN WINDOW

I remember plump strawberries
churned into homemade ice cream;
metal teaspoons reaching into bowls,
coaxing mouthfuls of pink-hued cream
away from the rock-hard dollops;
the ice cream container
on your side of the table.

Your fingers curled round your spoon
as naturally as if it were
a golf club or a granddaughter's hand.
I can see the age spots on your hands,
and the wrinkles running
like rivers over your skin.

The corners of your mouth squinched
upwards, even when the spoon
disappeared between your lips
and then returned. And when your tongue
slowly moved around the ice cream,
and you swallowed,
I saw you were still smiling.

Your eyes, intent upon your bowl,
moved suddenly upwards.

I looked the direction your spoon
was pointing, but I never
saw the ship you said was outside
the kitchen window.

And when I turned back around
you sat like a king with two
bowls of strawberry ice cream.

LEAVING THAILAND

Noses press against a wall of glass
while tears, squeezed between
quivering skin and the smudged
surface, now seep down in little
riverlets. Sweaty palms join the noses
pushed hard against the glass, and
fingers curl and stretch and curl again.

A boy with a rose drooping from
his fist turns in a circle, sad eyes
looking for an open space against
the glass. My girl, Saawali, catches
my eye and waves. I watch her
lips say, *No go! No go!* The glass
beneath her face is drenched.

We must walk out, turning our backs
to the children, cradling the small
bunches of roses in our own
trembling hands. The flight attendant
forces a smile. *You no cry*, he says.
And then we are outside, walking
toward the plane, but looking backwards,
hot tears obscuring the faces in the glass.

COMPOSITION ENGLISH CLASS

Everyone notices
the reddish curls of his mullet-cut
as he stares full-face
into a computer screen,
his back to the world.

The dark-eyed girl
and the athlete in the yellow shorts
speak towards his downcast eyes
and say nothing
of his strained stutters.

I wish they knew his artful
command of words
when paper stretches before him
and classmates
fade from his mind.

Every day he sits like an oil painting
in a room of black and white
photography or a red
maple in a pine tree forest,
and we all remember the time
he smiled.

THE ROSE I ONCE THREW INTO A DITCH

Discarded red, lying limp, alone.
Between blades of grass and scorching sun,
remnant petals spell a name I would not own:

Rose.

But not his rose,
never his Rose.

THE BEADS

She tugs on my hands,
leaning backward
with all the weight
of her seven-year-old body.
She wants me to lift her,
so I let her pull herself up,
doing half the work.

Next, she jumps,
and I catch her in my arms,
surprised that her legs
are now dangling in the air,
kicking gently against me.
I settle her on my hip,
watching her eyes as they
are drawn to my necklace
of large clear and white beads.

She moves the beads
up and down, and I feel them
sliding on the string
at the back of my neck.
Balancing her with one hand
on her back, I reach for my
necklace with my other hand,

and lift it over my head.

Do you want to wear it? I ask.

She grins, an endearing
school-age grin of missing teeth
and chapped lips. The beads
drape down past the bottom
of her shirt, reflecting light
from their multi-faceted angles.

She leans back, proudly.

You look just like me! I tell her.

GOING TO THE PARK AFTER A RAIN

The mud squelches up the sides
of my brown heels as I tip-toe
across the lawn. She holds my hand,
pulling me closer to the park,
asking why I can't walk any faster.

Dropping my hand, she takes off running,
splattering mud up the back of her jeans
and soft green hoodie. The mud wraps
like a suction cup around my heels
when I set my foot down too hard,
so I don't speed up, and I arrive
after she has already selected her swing.

Push me, she shouts. The bottoms
of her muddy shoes come flying at me
as her swing moves backwards.
Push me harder! she insists, leaning back
until her face is upside down. Her grin
and puppy-dog eyes are irresistible
so I grab her swing, take a step back,
ask if she is ready, and let go.
Laughing, she flies through the air.

HOW WE SHOW OUR AGE

She blinks as if unaccustomed
to the weight of mascara-laden
lashes. Delicate fingers reach
inside her star-patterned purse
and select a bottle of apple-scented,
glitter hand sanitizer. Across their
square table in the food court
sits her mother, small-framed,
dark-haired, and beautiful.

The daughter is four-foot-five
and no older than ten, but her
touch of blush and golden streaks
in her stylish bob cut could pass her
for a miniature twenty-year-old.

I wonder if she is any wiser now
than she will be at twenty, when her
discarded make-up and bottles
of hair products could fill a closet.
Will the slow blink of her eyes
lose any more of its innocence,
the price tags for her purses
grow steadily more expensive?

LOVE

Hunger etched in your eyes
the color of a cloudless sky—
the vast openness of possessing
nothing but the intent gaze
of a flaming ball of fire.

That fire touched your hair,
as the sky did your eyes,
and turned it a golden brown.

Your hands still drip with water
from the rushing stream,
skin smooth as the washed
ashore stones lying beneath
your dancing feet. Your voice
is like the laughter of water,
and I see in your smile
that you need not see my arms
to know they hold you close.

JEALOUSY

I see in your blue-gray eyes
the cold fire of ice, freezing,
glazing your pupils,
stretching like a knife-sharp
icicle down towards your heart.

You buried jealousy inside you
and thought it wouldn't grow,
but I watch as your line of shoes
stretches forever longer,
and your pile of shirts,
once worn, now discarded,
grows like a pile of rotting trash.

Your face is losing its color,
hardening like a mask
that cannot hide you,
only betray the cold inside.

You seem not to know
the chilly glare you send
with every flirtatious
lift of your chin,
but men are mere mirages

and women hurry past you.

The icicle is closer to your heart,
and your blue-gray eyes
are now frozen solid as glass
Tears alone can melt them.

INTRICATE FASCINATION

Glistening drops
fall past parted lips
float down red crystal
whisper the breath
of wind intoxicated
with perfume and touch
the open palm
of a man's hand.

Drawn toward
desire-born feet
whirling like silk
around a delicate figure
tears find an ache
deep enough for
passion to burrow
and in agony of love
be more than alive.

TOGETHER

A bright flash explodes in our eyes,
held wide for moment.

My forehead touches his cheek.
His eyebrows are a zigzag line,
my lips are turned outward.

The camera in my hand moves
up and down as I raise my head,
nestling my cheek against his.

He half-winks with one eye
and purses his lips. I blow a kiss
and arch my eyebrows. Another
streak of illumination blinds us.

Next, we are walking hand in hand,
the lights in the outdoor mall
reminding me of Christmas.

It's cold, and my fingers curl around
my Starbuck's cup, as chilled
as the café vanilla frappachino inside.

A small army of outdoor patio heaters
glows red-hot with warmth, and we push
through the short wooden door
left ajar by the last restaurant guests.

We roast our faces and the
tops of our heads, turning slowly
like marshmallows taunting fire,
and then move on, walking in step
on the empty sidewalk, stopping
to peer through lighted shop windows
as if the moment was made just for us.

MY QUESTION

*Thirty pieces of silver drop to the floor
and lie among shards of perfume-laden glass.
Then I am on my knees, fingering cold metal
as fragrant liquid seeps through my jeans.*

I wake with my face buried in a pillow
wet with tears. Beside my bed is my Bible.
It is open to the account of Mary anointing
the feet of her Lord with costly perfume.
A few verses further down the page
describes Judas betraying Jesus,
selling His life for the price of a slave.

I wipe the tears from my eyes,
but my question remains:
*How could my Lord, so treasured by Mary,
be disowned by Judas a short time after?*

Lord, and still, You never stopped loving Judas.

HOW IS YOUR HEART MOVED, GOD?

*Why did You let me feel the wetness of Your tears?
I see now, and my heart also is moved.
Show me again how Your eyes cry for the least of these.*

Water swirls past her ankles,
muddied, transporting splintered
pieces of wood, plastic bags
with remains of rotting food.
She cries no tears,
stands with her back straight
until she stoops to fill her bucket.

Show me how Your heart beats for the least of these.

The skin on his face stretches
thin, unflinching. Ribs protrude
from a tattered red shirt.
His eyes are large and hollow,
but they cry no tears.
He stands with arms limp
and round belly protruding.

Show me how Your eyes burn for the least of these.

Roving eyes look behind her,
but there is no one there.
Her brown hair is tousled,
and her lip quivers,
but her eyes are dry.
She stands with shoulders tense
and writes her father's name
with her toe.

And how Your heart yearns for the least of these.

HER CHOICE

Her pale skin looked blank,
like a river with no water
or a mirror with no image
to reflect.

The corners of her mouth
quivered, but did not
pull her lips into a smile.

*Please pray, she said.
I have an important
decision tomorrow.*

We embraced her,
though her thin arms
hung limply at her sides.

*It's just a procedure.
It's probably my best option.*

But I felt her heart beating
heavy when I hugged her,
and now her eyes
contradicted her brave words.

*It will be hard.
I may need therapy later on.
Please pray for me,
she repeated, as her hand*

stretched softly over her belly.

Cynthia said she would
go with her to the clinic
if she wanted.

But I watched Cynthia's heart
shatter inside her, and the
pieces litter the ground around us.

I'll probably regret it,
the girl said, but she went,
and Cynthia went with her
so she could embrace the girl
when the tears finally came.

WOMEN CHEWING BEETLENUT IN THAILAND

I remember
purple
drips
staining teeth,
the smell
of unwashed bodies,
and hear
the bangles
jangling
and the voices
playful,
lined with something hard
but almost broken.
I know the clouded eyes.
I looked into them,
and then I bought
their bracelets.

THERE IN DARFUR

She saw herself, in the village.
Her stomach convulsed as gnawing
hunger burned her like fire.

She was as young as the girl,
and thin, now, like the skeleton
ghost figure beside her.

I could not look into their faces.

Her tears dropped on the cover
of the book, ran down its sides,
and softened the edge
of the photograph inside.

PENCIL SKETCH OF AN INDIAN WOMAN PRAYING

She stares through
scratched lines of lead,
patient
while I create what I see
in white paper.

My pencil presses firmly
into the wrinkles
on her brow,
moves cautiously
over her skin
where wrinkles unbraided
into threadlike lines,
streaks downward
into two tears
falling from her eye.

I sweep her coarse,
dark hair beneath
the embroidered cloth
draped from the crown
of her head;
soften lines
hatching ridges
into her fingers,

bent by arthritis;
situate her hands,
palm touching palm,
so her fingertips rest
on her bottom lip;
listen while her story
emerges:

A little white petal
tumbled through
dirt,
lay weakened
by the sun,
edges torn
beneath bare feet
trodding to
the village well.

A withered petal
feels drops
of water,
the last before
the clay jar
is broken.

A muddied petal
trampled
as Untouchables still wait--
barefoot
and with no water.

LOVE IN SHADES OF PINK

The arrangement of pink and white flowers
Grandma made for my high school
graduation party that has moved with me
to two different states; the floral-patterned
fuchsia blanket my friend brought me
from Guatemala that now adorns my bed;
the black-accented, deep plum-colored scarf
she mailed me after her recent excursion
to Austria; the dollar store string of pink lilies
wrapped around the edge of my bookshelf,
reminiscent of photo-op moments
with a dear roommate from my undergrad;
pink leather slippers, given to me by my sister
several Christmases ago and often worn
on late night Wal-Mart excursions;
the close-up of a pink rose on the front
of the first Valentines Day card I received
from the man who has captured my heart.

SUNDAY EVENING DATE

Leaning out over the cat walk
in the air control tower,
the rush of wind lifts my scarf
as planes take off and land
at the Cincinnati airport.
I shiver despite the scarf
because the wind turbulence
from the planes accentuates
the chill of an early spring evening.

I watch as Brandon props
his elbows on the cement
and peers down at the runway.
The angular turn of his chin
and his high-set cheek bones
contrast against the gray sky,
so I solicit his attention
and click my camera's shutter.

His eyes cannot hide anything,
and tonight they are full
of pleasure as he takes in
the rush of motion,
the power of the planes,

and the complexity involved
in directing air traffic.

WITHOUT WORDS

I like the way you listen
with your ear close to my heart,
your arm lying across my stomach.

I feel your warmth press
closer to me as you breathe deeply
of my perfume in response.

To answer, I caress your face,
smooth your eyebrows,
run my fingers over your lips
and your closed eyelids.

ONLY YOU

You touch me softly as a whisper
as if I am a bottle of exquisite perfume.

The look in your eyes woos me
like the gentle ocean swells.

And my lips form your name
that burns like fire in my bones.

MY HEART STILL YEARNS FOR YOU

Distance subtracts
nothing from love,
only makes the heart
beat faster,
the lips softly tremble,
the long lashes
slowly blink—
for love must then
climb the greater height,
take the further leap,
and it is stronger, truer,
and it stays longer.

READY TO RECEIVE YOU

There is pain in the tears
rolling from her downcast eyes.
The colorful cloth draped
around her delicate frame
has been muddied and torn.
Bruises mark her slender arms,
and a jagged scar runs vertical
to her cheekbone.

*How tenderly I have spoken to you
and yet you would not respond.
You left Me for your other lovers
though I am married to you.
Yet I say to you, return to Me
and I will again embrace you.*

Her eyes no longer look
towards the men she has loved,
but she follows mechanically.
Her hair is wild, her skin
darkened by the sun,
her feet bare, and the sash
around her waist loosely tied.

*I sought you in the places
where you turned your heart.
I called with My voice,
but you did not turn your ear.
Return, for you are beloved to Me.*

ABANDONING MYSELF TO MY FATHER'S EMBRACE

My toes feel the breeze beneath them,
grass tickling in mock concern,
a revengeful bite from a roused ant.

Below miles of endless cliffs
I see Your eyes, a radiant stream of fire.
Your voice floats to the top of this
amphitheatre and Your words
are a fountain dripping in fragrance.

Dirt clods unearthed by my trembling feet
plummet to the depth, width, length, height
of known giving way to the unknown.
With one leap, I follow and fall into Your arms.

FROM MY PRAYER CLOSET

I want not just to whisper
prayers in Your ear, Lord,
as I lie curled up in Your lap,
but to join You as You kneel,
face down, tears streaming
as Your whole being groans
on behalf of Your children
who You long to comfort
in Your embrace.

Lord, when Your agony is great
and Your heart,
like in Gethsemane,
is literally being broken in two,
I want to find my place
right beside You—
face down,
heartbeat matching heartbeat,
groan matching groan.

MY NEIGHBOR

I want to weep your death,
but I barely knew you.

I often saw your silver-gray hair
straying from your pony-tail
when I walked past the bench
where you always sat.
Your worn Wright State jacket
and deep, husky voice
were as familiar to me as the path
between my apartment
and the lower part of campus,
which I walk at least once a day.

You never missed a hello,
but I regularly backed away
while you continued to talk.
The smoke of your cigarettes
felt heavy in my lungs,
and many times I felt trapped
inside your conversation,
as if you allowed me room
to agree but not be myself.

You were patient
while I prayed for you,
the day I stopped to hear
about the pain in your knee,
but you professed
to have found enough of God
to supplement your concoction
of various religions.

Once, when you were meditating,
I watched the sun stream
through your hair and warm
the palms of your hands.
You seemed peaceful then,
but when you talked,
I could not look deep enough
to find peace in your eyes.

Even though you are now gone,
I do not walk past your bench
without pausing,
and I weep inside
because I barely knew you.

YOU CAPTIVATE ME

How tenderly you touch me!
How immeasurably you move me!
Your eyes, love—I like
to watch them gently flutter
open while you kiss me.

Your hands fascinate me,
especially when you cup them
around my face and lower
your lips towards mine.

I can close my eyes now
and remember the spicy,
citrus scent of your cologne
and the softness of your skin
when your cheek presses
against my neck.

If you were here today,
I would let you pull me close
so you could feel the pulse
of my heart spell your name.

THE WAY I REMEMBER

Sometimes I touch
my finger to my lips
when I think,
absorbing energy
from the contemplative
look I assume.

My thoughts easily
turn to you, love.

When my lips
form your name,
I feel the motion
against my skin,
feel warmth spreading
around my finger,
and remember
the softness of your lips
when I trace them
with my finger.

BUTTERFLY KISSES

I used to give you butterfly kisses,
Dad. Standing on my tip toes,
bending your face closer to mine,
I would blink so my eyelashes
brushed against your cheek.
You always smiled, then gave me
a great big hug that only dads
know how to give.

I remembered butterfly kisses
the night I got my first real kiss.
I stood a stair up from my man,
felt his hands running the length
of my back, tensed slightly
when he leaned towards me
with parted lips.

Someday you will give me away
to the man I love, but before you
walk me down the aisle, Dad,
I want to pause for a moment,
and give you a butterfly kiss.

DISTANCE

My heart, distracted by love,
looks with sideways glances
to see a your dark eyebrows,
your gentle, disarming eyes,
and warm smile that invites
a kiss. Your face, beloved,
appears on every empty
doorway and white wall.

I trace your lips from memory,
breathe remnant traces
of your cologne, drink the words
last uttered between us,
and melt with inward
yearning when your voice
speaks through my dream.

THE BURIED LIFE

BY MATTHEW ARNOLD

Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!
I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.
Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,
We know, we know that we can smile!
But there's a something in this breast,
To which thy light words bring no rest,
And thy gay smiles no anodyne.
Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,
And turn those limpid eyes on mine,
And let me read there, love! thy inmost soul.

Alas! is even love too weak
To unlock the heart, and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?
I knew the mass of men conceal'd
Their thoughts, for fear that if reveal'd
They would by other men be met
With blank indifference, or with blame reprov'd;
I knew they lived and moved
Trick'd in disguises, alien to the rest
Of men, and alien to themselves--and yet
The same heart beats in every human breast!

But we, my love!--doth a like spell benumb
Our hearts, our voices?--must we too be dumb?

Ah! well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free
Our heart, and have our lips unchain'd;
For that which seals them hath been deep-ordain'd!

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be--
By what distractions he would be possess'd,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity--
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite his being's law,
Bade through the deep recesses of our breast
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying at large in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally.

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us--to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas! none ever mines.
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown, on each, spirit and power;
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves--

Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpress'd.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well--but 'tis not true!
And then we will no more be rack'd
With inward striving, and demand

Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupefying power;
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call!
Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

Only--but this is rare--
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd--
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,

And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

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