

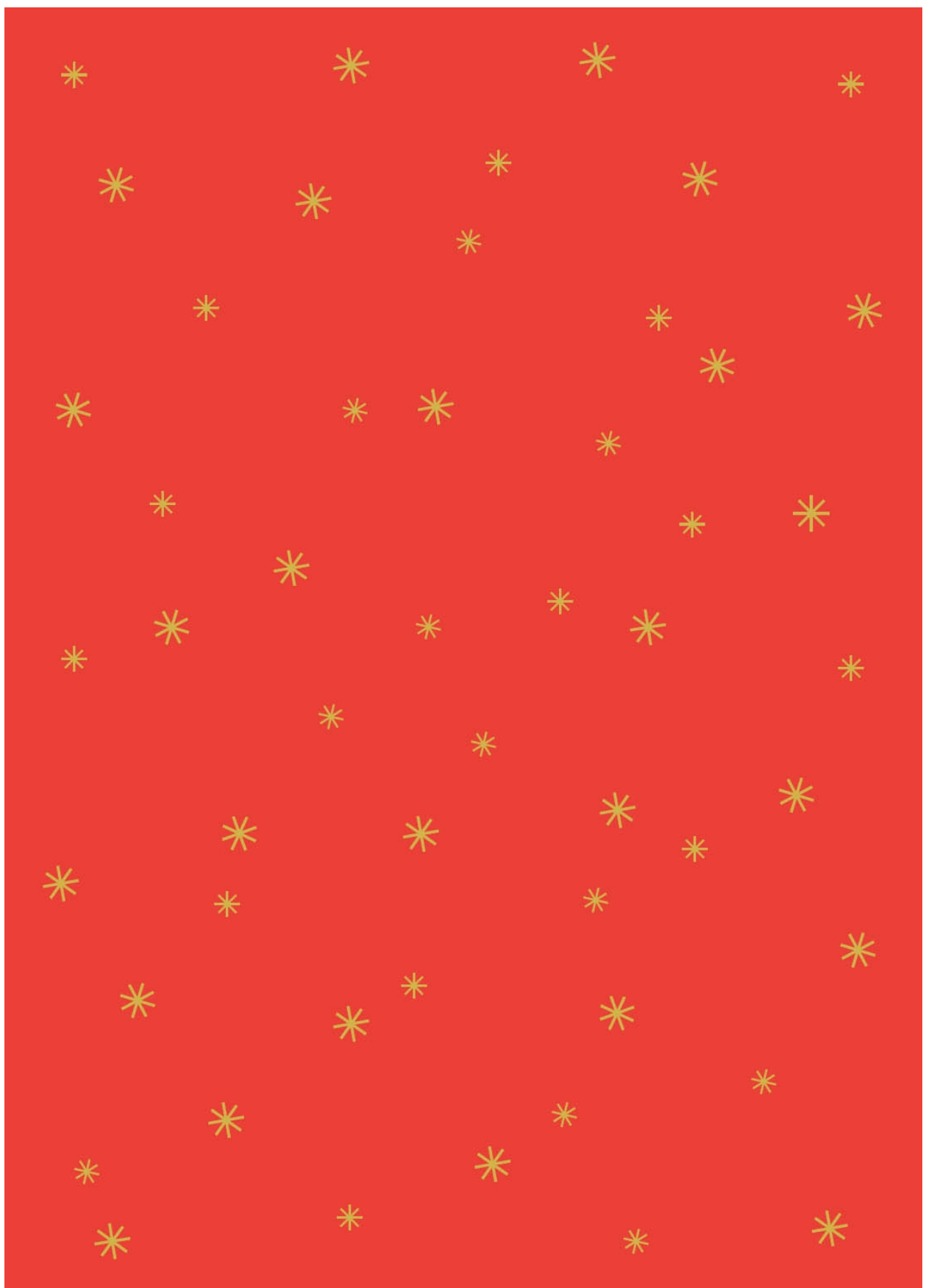


LOVE FOUND

50 CLASSIC POEMS
of DESIRE, LONGING,
and DEVOTION

Edited by Jessica Strand & Leslie Jonath

With Illustrations by Jennifer Orkin Lewis





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CHRONICLE BOOKS
SAN FRANCISCO

*In memory of loves lost and
appreciation of loves found.*



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ISBN: 978-1-4521-5623-1 (epub, mobi)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available.

ISBN: 978-1-4521-5599-9 (hc)

Chronicle Books LLC

680 Second Street

San Francisco, California 94107

www.chroniclebooks.com

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INTRODUCTION

.....
"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity."
.....

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

.....
The beauty of a great poem is that it gives language to an emotion that we're unable to express otherwise. I can't think of another art form where words are the medium to crystallize the depths of our emotional life. Poetry at its best makes us feel understood. In this anthology, we focus on the endless territory of our hearts; we focus on love. These poems look at every incarnation of our affection, from the moment Eros strikes to the sickening rootless feeling of a broken heart. The book is divided into three sections: Desire & Longing, Heartbreak & Loss, and Passion & Partnership. By organizing the anthology this way, it will help you find poems that fit the sentiment you're trying to convey, or the emotions you're trying to understand—or it might just make it easier and more fun to read. The book contains fifty poems from different cultures and time periods, each charting the zigzagging road of love. From Wislawa Szymborska's "Openness," in which the first few lines throw us into the raw fervor of desire: "Here we are, naked lovers / beautiful to each other—and that's enough— / the leaves of our eyelids our only covers, / we're lying amidst deep night." To the whimsical, crazy passion found in Joseph Brodsky's "Love Song": "If you were drowning, I'd come to the rescue, / wrap you in a blanket and pour hot tea. / If I were a sheriff, I'd arrest you / and keep you in the cell under lock and key." To the more cynical humor of Ogden Nash's "A Word to Husbands": "To keep your marriage brimming, / With love in the loving cup, / Whenever you're wrong, admit it; / Whenever you're right, shut up." Love is the main emotion that defines so many other things in our lives: age (our first great love), death (I loved him/her), friendship (s/he was a loving friend), or the way we look at someone's character (such a loving person). Thinking about this collection, I realized that love defines our view and experience of the world. Without love we have no sense of ourselves, we're adrift. With love, all relationships, reasons for our actions, and choices that we make are clearer. We live striving to be loved—and wanting, hoping to show love to others. Without love, life feels un-lived. As Alfred Lord Tennyson said so aptly, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." With a world so full of love poems, how did I decide to choose these fifty? It took time. Time recalling poems I loved in college and pinned up on my wall; poems I recited to friends, to lovers, to my son; poems I read at weddings and funerals—and also to myself, over and over again, when nothing made sense but the poem in front of me. There are so many beautiful poems about love that to whittle it down to fifty is nearly impossible. I hope I've chosen poems that will resonate with you. You could pick those ten, fifteen, or twenty that ring true for you—or you may find just one, one poem that speaks to you and helps you understand that feeling you've never been able to put into words.
.....

—Jessica Strand

DESIRE & LONGING

THIS MUCH AND MORE

by Djuna Barnes

.....
If my lover were a comet

Hung in air,

I would braid my leaping body

In his hair.

Yea, if they buried him ten leagues

Beneath the loam,

My fingers they would learn to dig

And I'd plunge home!

DITTY OF FIRST DESIRE

by Federico García Lorca

In the green morning

I wanted to be a heart.

A heart.

And in the ripe evening

I wanted to be a nightingale.

A nightingale.

(Soul,

turn orange-colored.

Soul,

turn the color of love.)

In the vivid morning

I wanted to be myself.

A heart.

And at the evening's end

I wanted to be my voice.

A nightingale.

Soul,

turn orange-colored.

Soul,

turn the color of love.

OPENNESS

by Wislawa Szymborska

.....
Here we are, naked lovers,
beautiful to each other—and that's enough—
the leaves of our eyelids our only covers,
we're lying amidst deep night.
But they know about us, they know,
the four corners, and the stove nearby us.
Clever shadows also know
the table knows, but keeps quiet.
Our teacups know full well
why the tea is getting cold.
And old Swift can surely tell
that his book's been put on hold.
Even the birds are in the know:
I saw them writing in the sky
brazenly and openly
the very name I call you by.
The trees? Could you explain to me
their unrelenting whispering?
The wind may know, you say to me,
but how, is just a mystery.
A moth surprised us through the blinds,
it's wings a fuzzy flutter.
It's silent path—see how it winds
in a stubborn holding pattern.
Maybe it sees where our eyes fail
with an insect's inborn sharpness.
I never sensed, nor could you tell
that our hearts were aglow in the darkness.



TWENTY-ONE LOVE POEMS (POEM II)

by Adrienne Rich

.....
I wake up in your bed. I know I have been dreaming.
Much earlier, the alarm broke us from each other,
you've been at your desk for hours. I know what I dreamed:
our friend the poet comes into my room
where I've been writing for days,
drafts, carbons, poems are scattered everywhere,
and I want to show her one poem
which is the poem of my life. But I hesitate,
and wake. You've kissed my hair
to wake me. *I dreamed you were a poem,*
I say, *a poem I wanted to show someone . . .*
and I laugh and fall dreaming again
of the desire to show you to everyone I love,
to move openly together
in the pull of gravity, which is not simple,
which carries the feathered grass a long way down the
upbreathing air.

POEM FROM THE DESERT ROAD (KURUNTOKAI, VERSE 237)

by Allur Nanmala

Talaivan says—

Fearlessly, my heart has departed
to embrace my beloved.

If its arms are too slack to hold her
what use is it?

The distances between us stretch long.

Must I think of the many forests
where deadly tigers rise up roaring
like the waves of the dark ocean
standing between us? I don't dare.



POEM FROM THE JASMINE-FILLED WOODS (KURUNTOKAI, VERSE 220)

by Okkur Macatti

Talaivi says—

The rains have come and gone.

The millet grew and now is stubble

nibbled by stags while jasmine blossoms flourish
alongside, their buds unfolding to show white petals
like a wildcat's smile.

Evening comes, scented with jasmine

bringing bees to the buds,

but see, he hasn't come,

he who left for other riches.



LOVE SONG FOR LUCINDA

by Langston Hughes

Love

Is a ripe plum

Growing on a purple tree.

Taste it once

And the spell of its enchantment

Will never let you be.

Love

Is a bright star

Glowing in far Southern skies.

Look too hard

And its burning flame

Will always hurt your eyes.

Love

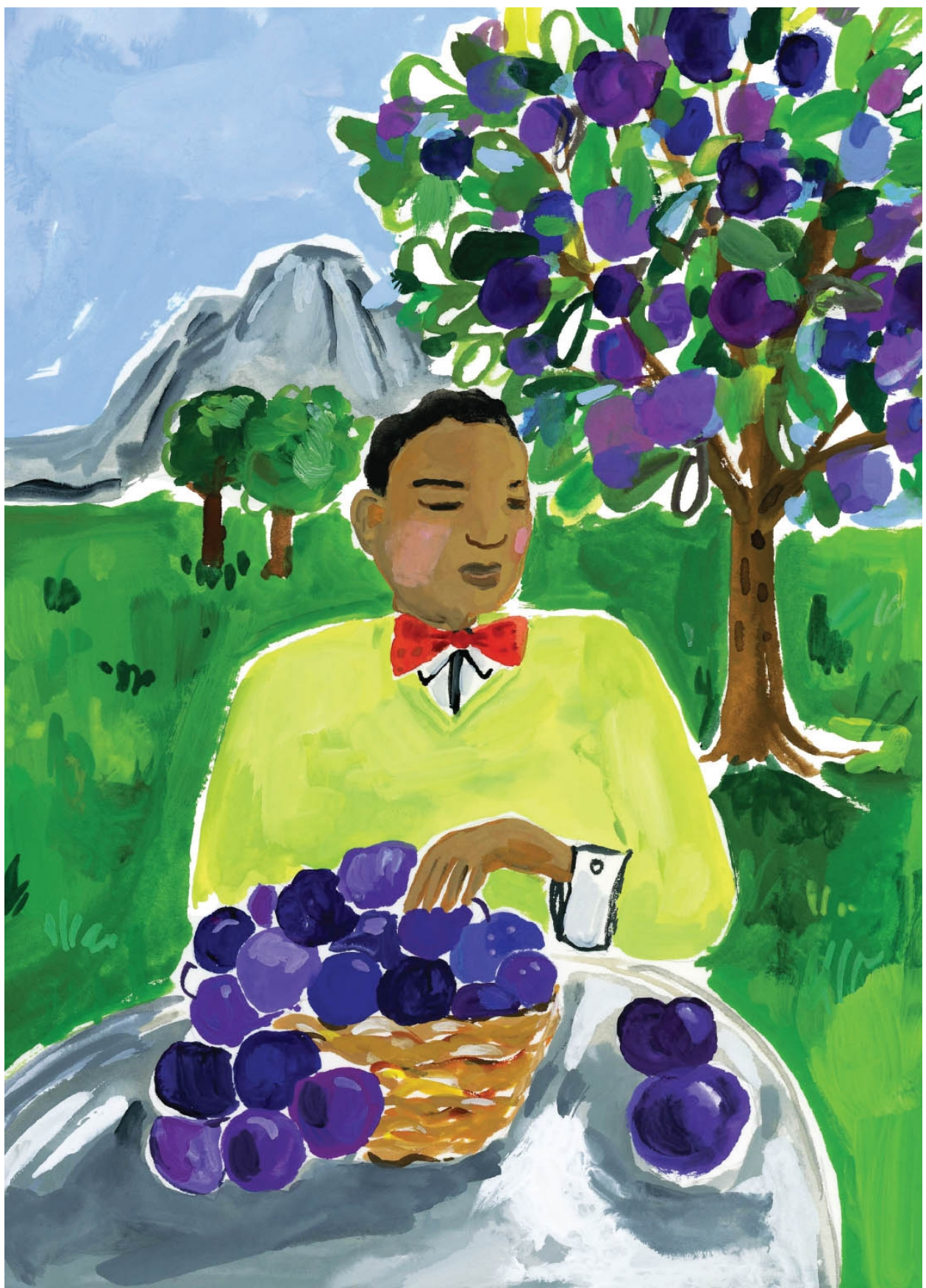
Is a high mountain

Stark in a windy sky.

If you

Would never lose your breath

Do not climb too high.



CHOICE

by Angela Morgan

.....
I'd rather have the thought of you
To hold against my heart,
My spirit to be taught of you
With west winds blowing,
Than all the warm caresses
Of another love's bestowing,
Or all the glories of the world
In which you had no part.
I'd rather have the theme of you
To thread my nights and days,
I'd rather have the dream of you
With faint stars glowing,
I'd rather have the want of you,
The rich, elusive taunt of you
Forever and forever and forever unconfessed
Than claim the alien comfort
Of any other's breast.
O lover! O my lover,
That this should come to me!
I'd rather have the hope for you,
Ah, Love, I'd rather grope for you
Within the great abyss
Than claim another's kiss —
Alone I'd rather go my way
Throughout eternity.

THE DREAM

by Edna St. Vincent Millay

Love, if I weep it will not matter,
And if you laugh I shall not care;
Foolish am I to think about it,
But it is good to feel you there.
Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking, —
White and awful the moonlight reached
Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere,
There was a shutter loose, —it screeched!
Swung in the wind, —and no wind blowing! —
I was afraid, and turned to you,
Put out my hand to you for comfort, —
And you were gone! Cold, cold as dew,
Under my hand the moonlight lay!
Love, if you laugh I shall not care,
But if I weep it will not matter, —
Ah, it is good to feel you there!



LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

.....
The fountains mingle with the river
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle—
Why not I with thine?
See the mountains kiss high heaven
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdain'd its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What is all this sweet work worth
If thou kiss not me?

A LOVE SONG

by William Carlos Williams

What have I to say to you

When we shall meet?

Yet—

I lie here thinking of you.

The stain of love

Is upon the world.

Yellow, yellow, yellow,

It eats into the leaves,

Smears with saffron

The horned branches that lean

Heavily

Against a smooth purple sky.

There is no light—

Only a honey-thick stain

That drips from leaf to leaf

And limb to limb

Spoiling the colors

Of the whole world.

I am alone.

The weight of love

Has buoyed me up

Till my head

Knocks against the sky.

See me!

My hair is dripping with nectar—

Starlings carry it

On their black wings.

See, at last

My arms and my hands

Are lying idle.

How can I tell

If I shall ever love you again

As I do now?



THE THREE JAPANESE TANKAS

by Ono no Komachi

1

Should the world of love
end in darkness,
without our glimpsing
that cloud-gap
where the moon's light fills the sky?

2

Since my heart placed me
on board your drifting ship,
not one day has passed
that I haven't been drenched
in cold waves.

3

How sad that I hope
to see you even now,
after my life has emptied itself
like this stalk of grain
into the autumn wind.

THE GARDEN

by Jacques Prévert

Thousands and thousands of years

Would not suffice

To tell of

The sweet moment of eternity

When you kissed me

When I kissed you

One moment in the light of winter

In Montsouris Park in Paris

In Paris

Upon this Earth

This Earth which is a star.

(I CARRY YOUR HEART WITH ME)

by E. E. Cummings

.....
i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go, my dear;and whatever is done
by only me is your doing,my darling)
 i fear
no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you
here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)



BOND AND FREE

by Robert Frost

.....
Love has earth to which she clings
With hills and circling arms about—
Wall within wall to shut fear out.
But Thought has need of no such things,
For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings.
On snow and sand and turf, I see
Where Love has left a printed trace
With straining in the world's embrace.
And such is Love and glad to be.
But Thought has shaken his ankles free.
Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom
And sits in Sirius' disc all night,
Till day makes him retrace his flight,
With smell of burning on every plume,
Back past the sun to an earthly room.
His gains in heaven are what they are.
Yet some say Love by being thrall
And simply staying possesses all
In several beauty that Thought fares far
To find fused in another star.

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

by William Butler Yeats

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;
How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;
And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.



THE HEART'S MEMORY OF THE SUN GROWS FAINT

by Anna Akhmatova

.....
The heart's memory of the sun grows faint.

The grass is yellower.

A few early snowflakes blow in the wind,

Barely, barely.

The narrow canals have stopped flowing—

The water is chilling.

Nothing will ever happen here—

Oh, never!

The willow spreads its transparent fan

Against the empty sky.

Perhaps I should not have become

Your wife.

The heart's memory of the sun grows faint.

What's this? Darkness?

It could be! . . . One night brings winter's first

Hard freeze.



NEUTRAL TONES

by Thomas Hardy

.....
We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
—They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.
Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.
The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .
Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

ABSOLUTELY CLEAR

by Shams al-Din Hafiz Shirazi

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.

THE LESSON OF THE FALLING LEAVES

by Lucille Clifton
the leaves believe
such letting go is love
such love is faith
such faith is grace
such grace is god.
i agree with the leaves.



A COMPLAINT

by William Wordsworth

There is a change—and I am poor;
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.
What happy moments did I count!
Blest was I then all bliss above!
Now, for that consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well.
A well of love—it may be deep—
I trust it is,—and never dry:
What matter? if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
—Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

THE SMILE

by William Blake

.....
There is a Smile of Love
And there is a Smile of Deceit
And there is a Smile of Smiles
In which these two Smiles meet
And there is a Frown of Hate
And there is a Frown of disdain
And there is a Frown of Frowns
Which you strive to forget in vain
For it sticks in the Hearts deep Core
And it sticks in the deep Back bone
And no Smile that ever was smild
But only one Smile alone
That betwixt the Cradle & Grave
It only once Smild can be
But when it once is Smild
Theres an end to all Misery

ONE ART

by Elizabeth Bishop

.....
The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.
Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.
Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.
I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.
I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.
—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write* it!) like disaster.



DO NOT ASK ME FOR THAT LOVE AGAIN

by Faiz Ahmed Faiz

.....
That which then was ours, my love,
don't ask me for that love again.

The world then was gold, burnished with light—and only
because of you. That's what I had believed.

How could one weep for sorrows other than yours?

How could one have any sorrow but the one you gave?

So what were these protests, these rumours of injustice?

A glimpse of your face was evidence of springtime.

The sky, whenever I looked, was nothing but your eyes.

If you'd fall into my arms, Fate would be helpless.

All this I'd thought, all this I'd believed.

But there were other sorrows, comforts other than love.

The rich had cast their spell on history:

dark centuries had been embroidered on brocades and
silks.

Bitter threads began to unravel before me as I went into
alleys and in open markets saw bodies plastered with ash,
bathed in blood.

I saw them sold and bought, again and again.

This too deserves attention. I can't help but look back when

I return from those alleys—what should one do?

And you are still so ravishing—what should I do?

There are other sorrows in this world,

comforts other than love.

Don't ask me, my love, for that love again.

MUSIC WHEN SOFT VOICES DIE (TO—)

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

.....
Music, when soft voices die,

Vibrates in the memory

Odours, when sweet violets sicken,

Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,

Are heaped for the beloved's bed;

And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,

Love itself shall slumber on.

LOVE AFTER LOVE

by Derek Walcott

The time will come

when, with elation

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror

and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was your self.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart

to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored

for another, who knows you by heart.

Take down the love-letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,

peel your own image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life.

THE WEeping GIRL (LA FIGLIA CHE PIANGE)

by T. S. Eliot

.....
Stand on the highest pavement of the stair—

Lean on a garden urn—

Weave, weave the sunlight in your hair—

Clasp your flowers to you with a pained surprise—

Fling them to the ground and turn

With a fugitive resentment in your eyes:

But weave, weave the sunlight in your hair.

So I would have had him leave,

So I would have had her stand and grieve,

So he would have left

As the soul leaves the body torn and bruised,

As the mind deserts the body it has used.

I should find

Some way incomparably light and deft,

Some way we both should understand,

Simple and faithless as a smile and a shake of the hand.

She turned away, but with the autumn weather

Compelled my imagination many days,

Many days and many hours:

Her hair over her arms and her arms full of flowers.

And I wonder how they should have been together!

I should have lost a gesture and a pose.

Sometimes these cogitations still amaze

The troubled midnight, and the noon's repose.



BREAD AND MUSIC

by Conrad Potter Aiken

.....
Music I heard with you was more than music,
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;
All that was once so beautiful is dead.
Your hands once touched this table and this silver,
And I have seen your fingers hold this glass.
These things do not remember you, beloved:
And yet your touch upon them will not pass.
For it was in my heart you moved among them,
And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes.
And in my heart they will remember always:
They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.

DO NOT STAND BY MY GRAVE AND WEEP

by Mary Elizabeth Frye

Do not stand at my grave and weep

I am not there; I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow,

I am the diamond glints on snow,

I am the sun on ripened grain,

I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush

I am the swift uplifting rush

Of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry,

I am not there; I did not die.



SORROWS OF THE MOON

by Charles Baudelaire

.....
Tonight the moon dreams in a deeper languidness,
And, like a beauty on her cushions, lies at rest;
While drifting off to sleep, a tentative caress
Seeks, with a gentle hand, the contour of her breast;
As on a crest above her silken avalanche,
Dying, she yields herself to an unending swoon,
And sees a pallid vision everywhere she'd glance,
In the azure sky where blossoms have been strewn.
When sometimes, in her weariness, upon our sphere
She might permit herself to shed a furtive tear,
A poet of great piety, a foe of sleep,
Catches in the hollow of his hand that tear,
An opal fragment, iridescent as a star;
Within his heart, far from the sun, it's buried deep.

DREAMING OF LI PO

by Tu Fu

1.

Parted by death, we'd strangle on our tears;
parting in life, we've memories to cling to.
There is pestilence south of the river,
you are exiles, and I have not a word.
Old friend, I see you only in dreams,
but you know my heart is with you.
It's not the same as having your living spirit:
that road's too long to be measured.
Your spirit is in the heart of green maple,
your spirit returns to the dark frontier.
Tangled in the nets of law, tell me,
how can the spirit soar?
Moonlight fills my room. Your poor face
shines, reflected in the rafters.
The waters are deep, the waves wide.
May peaceful serpents pass you by.

2.

All day, huge clouds roll by.
You, exile, must travel.
Three nights I dreamed of you,
I dreamed we were together.
"I try, I try," you say, "but
this bitter road is difficult to travel:
winds drive lakes and rivers into waves,
my boat and oars would fail."
Leaving, you smoothed your long white hair
like a man who embraced his failures.
In Ch'ang-an, they lavish praise on bureaucrats
while you endure and endure.
They say that heaven's net is wide.
We're tangles in the web of aging.
Your fame will last ten thousand years
though you are silent, vanished from this world.



TOMORROW

by Victor Hugo

.....
Tomorrow morn, what time the fields grow white,
I shall set off; I know you look for me,
Across the forest's gloom, the mountain height:
I can no longer dwell away from thee.
I'll walk with eyes upon my thoughts intent,
Hearing no outer noise, seeing no sight;
Alone, unknown, hands clasped, and earthward bent,
Sad, and the day for me shall be as night.
On evening's golden hues I shall not gaze,
Nor on the vessels that to Harfleur come;
But my quest o'er, upon thy grave shall place
A wreath of holly green, and heather bloom.

LOVE SONG

by Joseph Brodsky

.....
If you were drowning, I'd come to the rescue,
wrap you in my blanket and pour hot tea.
If I were a sheriff, I'd arrest you
and keep you in the cell under lock and key.
If you were a bird, I'd cut a record
and listen all night to your high-pitched trill.
If I were a sergeant, you'd be my recruit,
and boy I can assure you you'd love the drill.
If you were Chinese, I'd learn the languages,
burn a lot of incense, wear funny clothes.
If you were a mirror, I'd storm the Ladies',
give you my red lipstick and puff your nose.
If you loved volcanoes, I'd be lava
relentlessly erupting from my hidden source.
And if you were my wife, I'd be your lover
because the church is firmly against divorce.



FINAL SOLILOQUY OF THE INTERIOR PARAMOUR

by Wallace Stevens

Light the first light of the evening, as in a room

In which we rest and, for small reason, think

The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous.

It is in that thought that we collect ourselves,

Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl

Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a warmth,

A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.

We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,

A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.

We say God and the imagination are one . . .

How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,

We make a dwelling in the evening air,

In which being there together is enough.

by D. H. Lawrence

The little river twittering in the twilight,
The wan, wondering look of the pale sky,
This is almost bliss.

And everything shut up and gone to sleep,
All the troubles and anxieties and pain
Gone under the twilight.

Only the twilight now, and the soft "Sh!" of the river
That will last forever.

And at last I know my love for you is here,
I can see it all, it is whole like the twilight,
It is large, so large, I could not see it before
Because of the little lights and flickers and interruptions,
Troubles, anxieties, and pains.

You are the call and I am the answer,
You are the wish, and I the fulfillment,
You are the night, and I the day.

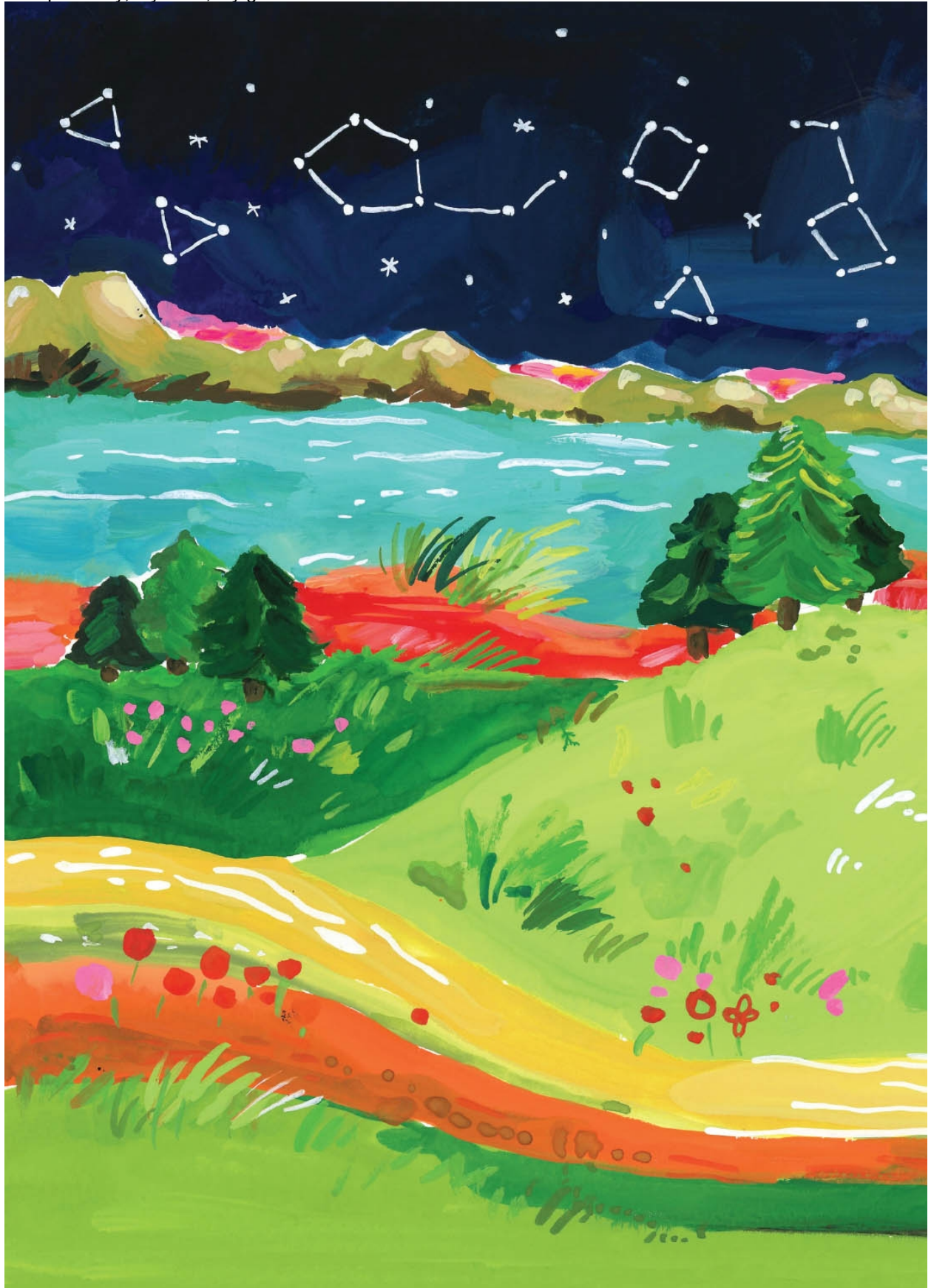
What else—it is perfect enough,
It is perfectly complete,
you and I.

Strange, how we suffer in spite of this!

SONNET XVI

by Pablo Neruda

I love the handful of the earth you are.
Because of its meadows, vast as a planet,
I have no other star. You are my replica
of the multiplying universe
Your wide eyes, are the only light I know
from extinguished constellations;
your skin throbs like the streak
of a meteor through rain.
Your hips were that much of the moon for me;
your deep mouth and its delights, that much sun'
your heart, fiery with its long red rays,
was that much ardent light, like honey in the shade.
So I pass across your burning form, kissing
you—compact and planetary, my dove, my globe



WILD NIGHTS – WILD NIGHTS!

by Emily Dickinson

Wild nights - Wild nights!

Were I with thee

Wild nights should be

Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -

To a Heart in port -

Done with the Compass -

Done with the Chart.

Rowing in Eden -

Ah - the Sea!

Might I but - moor - tonight -

In thee!

DEEP IN LOVE

by Bhavabhuti

Deep in love

cheek leaning on cheek we talked

of whatever came to our minds

just as it came

slowly oh

slowly

with our arms twined

tightly around us

and the houses passed and we

did not know it

still talking when

the night was gone

A GLIMPSE

by Walt Whitman

A glimpse through an interstice caught,
Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room around
the stove late of a winter night,
and I unremark'd seated in a corner,
Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently
approaching and seating himself near,
that he may hold me by the hand,
A long while amid the noises of coming and going, of
drinking and oath and smutty jest,
There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking
little, perhaps not a word.



LET ME NOT TO THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS (SONNET 116)

by William Shakespeare

.....
Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove,

O no! it is an ever-fixed mark

That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;

It is the star to every wandering bark,

Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come;

Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error and upon me prov'd,

I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? (SONNET 43)

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of being and ideal grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for right.

I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

MEETING AT NIGHT

by Robert Browning

I
The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
and quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II
Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!



HARMONY IN THE BOUDOIR

by Mark Strand

After years of marriage, he stands at the foot of the bed and tells his wife that she will never know him, that for everything he says, there is more he does not say, that behind each word he utters, there is another word, and hundreds more behind that one. All those unsaid words, he says contain his true self, which has been betrayed by the superficial self before her. "So you see," he says, kicking off his slippers, "I am more than what I have led you to believe I am." "Oh, you silly man," says his wife, "of course, you are. I find that just thinking of you having so many selves receding into nothingness is very exciting. That you barely exist as you are couldn't please me more."

LOVE SONG

by Rainer Maria Rilke

How shall I maintain my soul in order
that it might not mix with yours? How shall
I lift it over you toward other things?
Ah, but I would gladly give it shelter
with something lost in the dapplings
of a strange and quiet place that will
not waver with your deepest shudder.
Yet all that brings the two of us low
takes us together like the stroke of a bow
that from two strings draws one harmony.
On what instrument are we splayed?
And what player's hand has played?
Oh sweet melody.

THE OWL AND THE PUSSY-CAT

by Edward Lear

I
The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to the sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey, and plenty of money,
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The Owl looked up to the stars above,
And sang to a small guitar,
"O lovely Pussy! O Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are,
You are,
You are!
What a beautiful Pussy you are!"

II
Pussy said to the Owl, "You elegant fowl!"
How charmingly sweet you sing!
O let us be married! too long have we tarried:
But what we shall do for a ring?"
They sailed away, for a year and a day,
To the land where the Bong-Tree grows
And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood
With a ring at the end of his nose,
His nose,
His nose,
With a ring at the end of his nose.

III
"Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling
Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will."
So they took it away, and were married next day
By the Turkey who lives on the hill.
They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon;
And hand in hand, on the edge of the sand,
They danced by the light of the moon,
The moon,
The moon,
They danced by the light of the moon.



A WORD TO HUSBANDS

by Ogden Nash

To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

CAMOMILE TEA

by Katherine Mansfield

.....
Outside the sky is light with stars;
There's a hollow roaring from the sea.
And, alas! for the little almond flowers,
The wind is shaking the almond tree.
How little I thought, a year ago,
In the horrible cottage upon the Lee
That he and I should be sitting so
And sipping a cup of camomile tea.
Light as feathers the witches fly,
The horn of the moon is plain to see;
By a firefly under a jonquil flower
A goblin toasts a bumble-bee.
We might be fifty, we might be five,
So snug, so compact, so wise are we!
Under the kitchen-table leg
My knee is pressing against his knee.
Our shutters are shut, the fire is low,
The tap is dripping peacefully;
The saucepan shadows on the wall
Are black and round and plain to see.



FOR LOVE

by Robert Creeley

.....
Yesterday I wanted to
speak of it, that sense above
the others to me
important because all
that I know derives
from what it teaches me.
Today, what is it that
is finally so helpless,
different, despairs of its own
statement, wants to
turn away, endlessly
to turn away.
If the moon did not . . .
no, if you did not
I wouldn't either, but
what would I not
do, what prevention, what
thing so quickly stopped.
That is love yesterday
or tomorrow, not
now. Can I eat
what you give me. I
have not earned it. Must
I think of everything
as earned. Now love also
becomes a reward so
remote from me I have
only made it with my mind.
Here is tedium,
despair, a painful
sense of isolation and
whimsical if pompous
self-regard. But that image
is only of the mind's
vague structure, vague to me
because it is my own.
Love, what do I think
to say. I cannot say it.
What have you become to ask,
what have I made you into,
companion, good company,
crossed legs with skirt, or
soft body under
the bones of the bed.
Nothing says anything
but that which it wishes
would come true, fears
what else might happen in
some other place, some
other time not this one.
A voice in my place, an
echo of that only in yours.
Let me stumble into
not the confession but
the obsession I begin with
now. For you
also (also)
some time beyond place, or
place beyond time, no
mind left to
say anything at all,
that face gone, now.
Into the company of love
it all returns.

TO MY DEAR AND LOVING HUSBAND

by Anne Bradstreet

.....
If ever two were one, then surely we.

If ever man were loved by wife, then thee;

If ever wife was happy in a man,

Compare with me ye women if you can.

I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold,

Or all the riches that the East doth hold.

My love is such that rivers cannot quench,

Nor ought but love from thee give recompense.

Thy love is such I can no way repay;

The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.

Then while we live, in love let's so persever,

That when we live no more we may live ever.

OUR MASTERPIECE IS THE PRIVATE LIFE

by Mark Strand

I
Is there something down by the water keeping itself from us,
Some shy event, some secret of the light that falls upon the deep,
Some source of sorrow that does not wish to be discovered yet?
Why should we care? Doesn't desire cast its rainbows over the
coarse porcelain
Of the world's skin and with its measures fill the air? Why look
for
more?

II
And now, while the advocates of awfulness and sorrow
Push their dripping barge up and down the beach, let's eat
Our brill, and sip this beautiful white Beaune.
True, the light is artificial, and we are not well-dressed.
So what. We like it here. We like the bullocks in the field next
door,
We like the sound of wind passing over grass. The way you
speak,
In that low voice, our late night disclosures . . . why live
For anything else? Our masterpiece is the private life.

III
Standing on the quay between the Roving Swan and the Star
Immaculate,
Breathing the night air as the moment of pleasure taken
In pleasure vanishing seems to grow, its self-soiling
Beauty, which can only be what it was, sustaining itself
A little longer in its going, I think of our own smooth passage
Through the graded partitions, the crises that bleed
Into the ordinary, leaving us a little more tired each time,
A little more distant from the experiences, which, in the old
days,
Held us captive for hours. The drive along the winding road
Back to the house, the sea pounding against the cliffs,
The glass of whiskey on the table, the open book, the questions,
All the day's rewards waiting at the doors of sleep . . .

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

.....
Making a book is always a collaboration. For their generous help putting the manuscript together, we would like to thank Maggie Gallagher, Katje Richstatter, and permissions expert Fred Courtright. We would also like to thank our editor Bridget Watson Payne, Ana Mendez-Villamil, art director Kristen Hewitt, and the team at Chronicle Books for their wonderful work. A special thanks to Jennifer Orkin Lewis for her gorgeous illustrations.

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