

# **The Man Watching**

by Rainer Maria Rilke

I can tell by the way the trees beat, after  
so many dull days, on my worried windowpanes  
that a storm is coming,  
and I hear the far-off fields say things  
I can't bear without a friend,  
I can't love without a sister

The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on  
across the woods and across time,  
and the world looks as if it had no age:  
the landscape like a line in the psalm book,  
is seriousness and weight and eternity.

What we choose to fight is so tiny!  
What fights us is so great!  
If only we would let ourselves be dominated  
as things do by some immense storm,  
we would become strong too, and not need names.

When we win it's with small things,  
and the triumph itself makes us small.  
What is extraordinary and eternal  
does not want to be bent by us.  
I mean the Angel who appeared  
to the wrestlers of the Old Testament:  
when the wrestler's sinews  
grew long like metal strings,  
he felt them under his fingers  
like chords of deep music.

Whoever was beaten by this Angel  
(who often simply declined the fight)  
went away proud and strengthened  
and great from that harsh hand,  
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.  
Winning does not tempt that man.  
This is how he grows: by being defeated, decisively,  
by constantly greater beings.