

Seeds

poems

by
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For Sasha
&
all fellow seekers

A Note on the Collection

I began reading poetry in 2017 (with Mary Oliver's *Wild Geese* as my gateway drug) but didn't seriously start writing my own until early 2020. This was spurred in part by curiosity, though mostly it was desire: a desire to slow time in its tracks, and to give better attention to the daily minutia.

Once, I was in the MRI room of the hospital (where I work) waiting to start a child's scan. The main operator – a friend of mine – walked in a few minutes later, plopped his things down, and settled himself into his chair. He seemed tired and somewhat disgruntled, and I asked him about it. "Nothing out of the ordinary," he said. "Just another day! It isn't Rome, that's for sure (referring to our lab trip)."

I agreed, it was just another day, though comments like this tend to put me off. They suggest that what one has in front of them is insufficient; that life, unless experienced in ideal circumstances, is best resigned to the hand of time, to the false certainties of the future, while the ground beneath you is left fertile. Once the scanner was running, the technician drew out his phone, chuckled, and whispered to himself "Time to collect that time off again."

It wasn't long before COVID-19 began ravaging the world, leaving us without nothing more than slowed time, broken promises, and the minutia in its wake. What followed were weeks spent wandering. Daily I walked the same route on the same path by the lake, not really sure what to make of it all. So much of our thoughts hinge on the prospect of the future in the winter of our struggles, but that was no longer an option.

Writing poetry, then, became an act of survival and defiance against circumstance. It was the untarnished thread that pulled me through the despondence and existential loneliness that

inevitably came to accompany my days. Often pulling the line on the other side was my dear Ukrainian penpal, Sasha. We connected online early in the pandemic via the first four lines of William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

I sent these lines not knowing how well they would capture the nature of our correspondence and the development of our companionship. We wrote and sent poems to each other daily, even hourly early on. Poems were our lifeline in the midst of the surrounding upheaval, our shared bed of infinities and eternities on which sand grains crystallized and wild flowers bloomed. It was because of her that I gave more attention and soul to my poems. Writing poetry then, too, was an act of love.

The result is this handpicked collection of 20 poems. Chosen are the ones I enjoyed writing most. They are the result of a continual attempt to make sense of and find meaning in 2020. They are also my way of cashing in on life without leaning on time collected and the precarious promise of the future.

BLUE

I walked to the lake
to skip
stones
the way people do

with their thoughts
when they at last notice
that their pockets
are full.

Then you honked at me
in your hurried voice
Good morning - Good morning!
and invited me to linger

as your webbed feet waltzed
toe by toe
across the sand
into the wild open blue

while loneliness waited
by the rocks
and I,
I drowned in delight.

REFUGE

Find refuge in my Harbor
the water Here is clear,
The Storm is over now
Rest easy now, my Dear.

Let your Anchor reach
the depths of my Sea,
Let it Sink with Time
while you set yourself Free.

Strip the worn Sails
and cast them to new Hands,
Let them—Taste—again
the Salt of warm Sands.

Turn the Whites into Doves
that soar the open sky,
Turn the Kites into Loves
who Fly you through Night.

LADY IN RED

While the yellow-jackets mingle with
the Azaleas and the sunflowers,
and the people with each other,
you were there in the sky
on a young branch navigating
the heights of which
far too few have seen,
crawling toward the sun.
You weaved through the leaves
and fought against the voice of Mother,
and finally, finally,
you reached the peak.
Then, just like the robins,
just like the timid sparrows
singing without the need for recognition,
you opened the crimson shell
housing your weightless wings
and flew to the only place you knew
was home.

KNOWLEDGE

She sits in her lab
with a handful of instruments
and a head full of clues.
Surrounding her are guesses,
and things she already knew.
If only she could see it,
if only she could understand
how it all fits together
in the grand master plan.
The past always resolves the future,
so she's learned,
in the present of her time,
but still, she feels,
there is still so much left to find,
there is still so much to know.

TO THE SKY

There I threw my sorrows
in hopes that they would stay.
Instead you returned tomorrow
with the weight of yesterday.

Forgive me for asking twice,
I've already begged in prayer—
He returned a palm full of ice,
a reminder that life isn't fair.

The crows made their sighs
and the sunflowers bowed,
I screamed shouted and cried
while you stood tall and proud.

The grass gleamed with dew
as I endured the cold pain,
while the earth smiled, renewed,
and thanked me for the rain.

DWELL

What rooms of the soul
have been left unchecked
Forgotten and locked away
With the key nowhere to be found?
Don't worry.
The door is still open.
Climb the creaking stairs
Open the dust-covered drawers and look in
Run your fingers along the wooden shelves
now draped in darkness,
somewhere in the attic of your mind.
Once there you may rediscover
the very thing
You have been searching for
Your entire life.
Prepare yourself:
The ghosts will cry and beckon.
But don't run.
Sit and stay awhile.
Get to know yourself.
Offer light
and accept the forgiveness
that soon follows.

EXHALATION

Before there was you
Before there was you and your billowing laugh
Your callused hands and crooked smile
waiting for me at the end of the night
like temptation drunk on cherry wine

Before there was the oak that introduced us
Before there were the stars we claimed as ours
Before love and wonder were forces we would never tame
Before time had entered the fray
Before there was the story of everything, waiting to unfold,
Nothing was the only thing
And that was enough for a universe.

VULNERABILITY

You opened up
like a lotus in the night
and allowed me
to feel the shy rhythm
of your untouched
heartbeat
with my callused fingers.
They traced the surface
of your little life
as you guided me
over the eight scars
dotting your body
like flower petals
on the surface
of a boundless lake.

TRAPEZE

The only way this works
is if we catch each other.
We're experienced, yes, but your hand
is never guaranteed, even after all these years.
The nets below don't carry
the weight of our selfish love,
nor does the crowd.
They wonder how we do what we do,
why we take the risks we take,
but we're just doing our job,
putting on a performance
for an audience of one.
Sometimes we fall
but that's a part of the deal –
We're acrobats of the dark, she said,
two loose cannons
shooting for the stars,
two trapeze artists vaulting
over loneliness,
two unhinged orbits
ready to collide.

WAITING

The news came over you
the way winter

does, like a wave crawling
up your spine,

every goosebump a sign
that the story

you lived by would soon
come to its

end. The fire warming
your heart makes

way for the embers
and ashes,

for all that's left, black
scars and burn

marks, a house without
a roof, memories

forever frozen
in place. You'll

Know he's gone when
the silence

settles like
dust.

KINTSUGI,
the Japanese Art of repairing broken pottery

I. Summer of COVID-19

This time around
the antagonist is a consequence

of randomness
and stupidity;

Not the usual trail of mosquito bites
lining my ankles after a night by the lake—

Not the flakey crust of sunburned shoulders
and sun-spoiled cider roiling in the drunk sand—

Not the hurried kiss of a summer love
meant to be a memory—

No instead I am accompanied by an unfounded certainty,
a future I cannot yet begin to imagine

without compromising the numerous stitches
already upholding the architecture

of a life once mine.

II. In the Dark

Oscillating between

despair and
restlessness;

newsfeeds
and skin—

poems and
music;

pasts and
a reality

running from reach.

III. Falling

Your face in the bathroom mirror
again staring back at someone
something unknowable
wondering how long
it takes for regret
to leave
the
body

IV. How

To move forward?

To get over myself?

To save myself

when I myself

lack myself

the smiling

confidence

of an untouched life?

V. Kintsugi

Begin with love
and generous fingertips,
yours. Lace the roiled sand
between the cracks
and piece together
the moments
one by one.

Hold them still
as if your life
depended on
it—it does—
and wait.

Growth requires
time. Meaning
demands patience.

A PRAYER

I.

In the riptide
 of
 this moment
may I act out of goodwill,
may I rediscover
the goodness of others
 made obfuscate
by timelines and party lines
 and tighten the loosened thread
that ties us all
 together.

II.

The gift is knowing
what ails you

the privilege is holding that truth
without turning away—

what I fear most is not that you will hurt me
because in many ways you already have
but that I may never understand why

III.

What I fear
most is not that my side is losing
but that we
 are lost.

IV.

May I summon the courage to speak
not out of hate or righteousness
not out of the pain I've held for so long
both for myself and for others,

but with the soft palpitations of a heart
in search of redemption,
with the hushed voice of a nation
dying for reconciliation.

V.

May our differences
sharpen our similarities.

May I be bold enough
to witness your suffering

and subsequently illuminate
the shape of my own.

May we surf the edges with evermore grace
so that we can rise above the inevitable tide,

swim ashore and dance
to the drumming of a fragile anthem

celebrating
the birth of a nation.

WAITING

Will you start the day now?
Time can only cradle you
for so long, your body so
heavy with duty and obligation.

The questions tugging at your soul
can wait; she will be there
at the end of the day, and if not
perhaps tomorrow – well at least
you have yourself.

And if not that, well,
time will be waiting,
poised like the sliver of a grin,
ready to swing your life away.

POSSIBILITIES (with apologies to Szymborska)

I prefer chocolate.
I prefer music.
I prefer facts dancing with feelings.
I prefer Dandelion to Cherry Wine.
I prefer trees dressed in autumn.
I prefer keeping a notebook and pen on hand, just in case.
I prefer the quiet of silence
to the silence of absence.
I prefer the color green.
I prefer rebels.
I prefer not to maintain
that convenience is always convenient.
I prefer to wake early.
I prefer to sleep late when it's wrong.
I prefer talking to therapists about something else.
I prefer used books.
I prefer the absurdity of kids
to the absurdity of adults.
I prefer, where love's concerned, nonspecific anniversaries
that can be celebrated every moment.
I prefer friends
who promise me nothing.
I prefer bittersweet compassion to everyday kindness.
I prefer surprises.
I prefer the earth in hand-me-downs.
I prefer bordering countries to bordered ones.
I prefer the hell of questions to the hell of answers.
I prefer cats.
I prefer dogs unleashed.
I prefer the creased line of a Szymborska
to the headline of a newspaper.
I prefer the thrill of knowing to the thrill of believing.
I prefer light eyes, since mine are dark.

I prefer laughter.

I prefer joy to happiness.

I prefer things I've forgotten to say
to things I've left unsaid.

I prefer the time of seasons to the time of stars.

I prefer to have faith.

I prefer ideas to movements.

I prefer keeping in mind even the possibility
that existence has its own *raison d'être*.

27 YEARS

older
and still no closer
to heaven. But please,
leave me—

Leave me here where
my prayers are answered
in the rhyme of a Dickinson
or the riff of a Sultana—

Leave me here on the breast
of the earth where angels
kiss sinners like me
over tea and late night memories
on Sunday mornings—

Leave me here where the blessing
of caressing hands is enough
to bend a celibate to his knees
over the pulpit of her body
as they mouth Hallelujah—

Leave me here alone
in the bedroom of midnight
so I may wake drenched
in the sweat of stars
and surrendered dreams—

Leave me here where salvation
can be found on a coastline
under hails of light bursting
through the winged cathedral
of a redwood canopy—

Leave me here where the mind
is wider than the sky
and contains so much
more
than I—

Leave me here
and heaven forbid
the day I arrive
at the holy promenade
without my return ticket—

Leave me here
to dwell in possibility—

—in the only promise
guaranteed.

INGREDIENTS

One pinch of fun, well enough for two.
Two cups of trust – three for the adventurous.
Four cloves of love, more for good measure.
Five pounds of respect for a firm foundation.
Six licks to taste, just in case things turn sour.
Eight hints of promises, so seven can be broken
and forgiven. Nine gallons of luck
because life always gets messy.
Ten drops of honey, to top things off.

MY LIGHT

When someone dies
are they really gone?

The apples in the garden
miss your callused touch,

and the Earth, it seems,
can't weep enough.

Forever feels
more real

than the rain does.
You're gone

but the story
lives on

in a bed
of neurons

you once said,
electrical impulses

with enough power
to light

entire universes.
I wish you were here

but you are there
where stars like you

are meant to burn

like diamonds studded

in the sky,
your bright

presence
forever my light.

WHILE THE WORLD SLEEPS

While the world sleeps
I wake
into the soft unfolding
of morning.

Between stanzas I've suddenly
forgotten (forgive me Szymborska)
is clasped
a single thread

of auburn.
It's been months since
I last found you
rising

and falling
like a fawn yet nuzzled
by the cold breath
of winter

and demands
beside me
beneath familiar sheets.
My poems miss

your eyes,
my fingers
your scars,
my world

your gravity.
The strand still lingers
and dresses herself daily
in the same sunlight

and the same unturned pages
I still can't remember,
still waits for her sisters
to come again, loosen up

and curl themselves
around words, lines, and stories
that have yet to be read
by more than my eyes

alone.

PAPA

Hunched over in your garden
like a daylily on the boardwalk watching
the world spin faster
and faster on its slant axis,
you still water the plants we bought for you
three summers ago, as if
you were still showering us
with your wordless love,
with your thankless devotion,
praying one day that
we will eventually grow
back in your direction.

EVANESCENT

so many years left
by the measure of things

though memory and circumstance
don't seem to agree with me.

they only see
the distance

between who we were then
and who we are now.

i can't tell if you're smiling
or if that's the wrinkle

in your eye
reminding me

of where we've been
and where we're still going.

there's not much
of that for us anymore,

we've had our fair share
of looking ahead,

but you're still surprised
when you find my fingers

in the thicket of your silver threads,
grazing on skin

now deliciously peppered

with time.