**A Work of Artifice**

The bonsai tree  
in the attractive pot  
could have grown eighty feet tall  
on the side of a mountain  
till split by lightning.  
But a gardener  
carefully pruned it.  
It is nine inches high.  
Every day as he  
whittles back the branches  
the gardener croons,  
It is your nature  
to be small and cozy,  
domestic and weak;  
how lucky, little tree,  
to have a pot to grow in.  
With living creatures  
one must begin very early  
to dwarf their growth:  
the bound feet,  
the crippled brain,  
the hair in curlers,  
the hands you  
love to touch.

Marge Piercy

**Home is So Sad**

Home is so sad. It stays as it was left,   
Shaped to the comfort of the last to go   
As if to win them back. Instead, bereft   
Of anyone to please, it withers so,   
Having no heart to put aside the theft   
  
And turn again to what it started as,   
A joyous shot at how things ought to be,   
Long fallen wide. You can see how it was:   
Look at the pictures and the cutlery.   
The music in the piano stool. That vase.

Philip Larkin

**For the Sleepwalkers**

Tonight I want to say something wonderful  
for the sleepwalkers who have so much faith  
in their legs, so much faith in the invisible  
   
arrow carved into the carpet, the worn path  
that leads to the stairs instead of the window,  
the gaping doorway instead of the seamless mirror.  
   
I love the way that sleepwalkers are willing  
to step out of their bodies into the night,  
to raise their arms and welcome the darkness,

palming the blank spaces, touching everything.  
Always they return home safely, like blind men  
who know it is morning by feeling shadows.

And always they wake up as themselves again.  
That's why I want to say something astonishing  
like: Our hearts are leaving our bodies.

Our hearts are thirsty black handkerchiefs  
flying through the trees at night, soaking up  
the darkest beams of moonlight, the music

of owls, the motion of wind-torn branches.  
And now our hearts are thick black fists  
flying back to the glove of our chests.

We have to learn to trust our hearts like that.  
We have to learn the desperate faith of sleep-  
walkers who rise out of their calm beds

and walk through the skin of another life.  
We have to drink the stupefying cup of darkness  
and wake up to ourselves, nourished and surprised.

~ Edward Hirsch ~

**The Secret**

Two girls discover  
the secret of life  
in a sudden line of  
poetry.

I who don't know the  
secret wrote  
the line. They  
told me

(through a third person)  
they had found it  
but not what it was  
not even

what line it was.  No doubt  
by now, more than a week  
later, they have forgotten  
the secret,

the line, the name of  
the poem.  I love them  
for finding what  
I can't find,

and for loving me  
for the line I wrote,  
and for forgetting it  
so that

a thousand times, till death  
finds them, they may  
discover it again, in other  
lines

in other  
happenings.  And for  
wanting to know it,  
for

assuming there is  
such a secret, yes,  
for that  
most of all.

By Denise Levertov

**The Possibility**  
The lizard on the wall, engrossed,  
The sudden silence from the wood  
Are telling me that I have lost  
The possibility of good.  
I know this flower is beautiful  
And yesterday it seemed to be.  
It opened like a crimson hand.  
It was not beautiful to me.  
I know that work is beautiful.  
It is a boon. It is a good.  
Unless my working were a way  
Of squandering my solitude.  
And solitude was beautiful  
When I was sure that I was strong.  
I thought it was a medium  
In which to grow, but I was wrong.  
The jays are swearing in the wood.  
The lizard moves with ugly speed.  
The flower closes like a fist.  
The possibility recedes.

By James Fenton

**The Stolen Branch**

In the night we shall go in  
to steal  
a flowering branch.   
We shall climb over the wall  
in the darkness of the alien garden,  
two shadows in the shadow.  
Winter is not yet gone,  
and the apple tree appears  
suddenly changed  
into a cascade of fragrant stars.  
In the night we shall go in  
up to its trembling firmament,  
and your little hands and mine  
will steal the stars.  
And silently,  
to our house,  
in the night and the shadow,  
with your steps will enter  
perfume's silent step  
and with starry feet  
the clear body of spring.

By Pablo Neruda

**The Well**

At sixteen I believed the moonlight   
could change me if it would.  
          I moved my head  
on the pillow, even moved my bed  
as the moon slowly  
crossed the open lattice.  
  
I wanted beauty, a dangerous  
gleam of steel, my body thinner,  
my pale face paler.  
          I moonbathed  
diligently, as others sunbathe.  
But the moon's unsmiling stare  
kept me awake. Mornings,  
I was flushed and cross.  
  
It was on dark nights of deep sleep  
that I dreamed the most, sunk in the well,  
and woke rested, and if not beautiful,  
filled with some other power.

By Denise Levertov

**Making a Fist**

For the first time, on the road north of Tampico,

I felt the life sliding out of me,

a drum in the desert, harder and harder to hear.

I was seven, I lay in the car

watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.

My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

“How do you know if you are going to die?”

I begged my mother.

We had been traveling for days.

With strange confidence she answered,

“When you can no longer make a fist.”

Years later I smile to think of that journey,

the borders we must cross separately,

stamped with our unanswerable woes.

I who did not die, who am still living,

still lying in the backseat behind all my questions,

clenching and opening one small hand.

By Naomi Shihab Nye

**Famous**

The river is famous to the fish.

The loud voice is famous to silence,

which knew it would inherit the earth

before anybody said so.

The cat sleeping on the fence is famous to the birds

watching him from the birdhouse.

The tear is famous, briefly, to the cheek.

The idea you carry close to your bosom

is famous to your bosom.

The boot is famous to the earth,

more famous than the dress shoe,

which is famous only to floors.

The bent photograph is famous to the one who carries it

and not at all famous to the one who is pictured.

I want to be famous to shuffling men

who smile while crossing streets,

sticky children in grocery lines,

famous as the one who smiled back.

I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,

or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,

but because it never forgot what it could do.

By Naomi Shihab Nye

**The Garden of Love**

I went to the Garden of Love,

And saw what I never had seen:

A Chapel was built in the midst,

Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,

And Thou shalt not' writ over the door;

So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,

That so many sweet flowers bore,

And I saw it was filled with graves,

And tomb-stones where flowers should be:

And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,

And binding with briars my joys and desires.

By William Blake

**To pull the metal splinter from my palm**

**my father recited a story in a low voice.**

**I watched his lovely face and not the blade.**

**Before the story ended, he’d removed**

**the iron sliver I thought I’d die from.**

**I can’t remember the tale,**

**but hear his voice still, a well**

**of dark water, a prayer.**

**And I recall his hands,**

**two measures of tenderness**

**he laid against my face,**

**the flames of discipline**

**he raised above my head.**

**Had you entered that afternoon**

**you would have thought you saw a man**

**planting something in a boy’s palm,**

**a silver tear, a tiny flame.**

**Had you followed that boy**

**you would have arrived here,**

**where I bend over my wife’s right hand.**

**Look how I shave her thumbnail down**

**so carefully she feels no pain.**

**Watch as I lift the splinter out.**

**I was seven when my father**

**took my hand like this,**

**and I did not hold that shard**

**between my fingers and think,**

**Metal that will bury me,**

**christen it Little Assassin,**

**Ore Going Deep for My Heart.**

**And I did not lift up my wound and cry,**

**Death visited here!**

**I did what a child does**

**when he’s given something to keep.**

**I kissed my father.**

**The Gift**

To pull the metal splinter from my palm

my father recited a story in a low voice.

I watched his lovely face and not the blade.

Before the story ended, he’d removed

the iron sliver I thought I’d die from.

I can’t remember the tale,

but hear his voice still, a well

of dark water, a prayer.

And I recall his hands,

two measures of tenderness

he laid against my face,

the flames of discipline

he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon

you would have thought you saw a man

planting something in a boy’s palm,

a silver tear, a tiny flame.

Had you followed that boy

you would have arrived here,

where I bend over my wife’s right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down

so carefully she feels no pain.

Watch as I lift the splinter out.

I was seven when my father

took my hand like this,

and I did not hold that shard

between my fingers and think,

Metal that will bury me,

christen it Little Assassin,

Ore Going Deep for My Heart.

And I did not lift up my wound and cry,

Death visited here!

I did what a child does

when he’s given something to keep.

I kissed my father.

By Li-Young Lee

**Harlem**

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

By Langston Hughes

**God's Grandeur**

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

### SONNET 116

### 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 proved,    I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

By William Shakespeare

**Diving into the Wreck**

First having read the book of myths,

and loaded the camera,

and checked the edge of the knife-blade,

I put on

the body-armor of black rubber

the absurd flippers

the grave and awkward mask.

I am having to do this

not like Cousteau with his

assiduous team

aboard the sun-flooded schooner

but here alone.

There is a ladder.

The ladder is always there

hanging innocently

close to the side of the schooner.

We know what it is for,

we who have used it.

Otherwise

it is a piece of maritime floss

some sundry equipment.

I go down.

Rung after rung and still

the oxygen immerses me

the blue light

the clear atoms

of our human air.

I go down.

My flippers cripple me,

I crawl like an insect down the ladder

and there is no one

to tell me when the ocean

will begin.

First the air is blue and then

it is bluer and then green and then

black I am blacking out and yet

my mask is powerful

it pumps my blood with power

the sea is another story

the sea is not a question of power

I have to learn alone

to turn my body without force

in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget

what I came for

among so many who have always

lived here

swaying their crenellated fans

between the reefs

and besides

you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck.

The words are purposes.

The words are maps.

I came to see the damage that was done

and the treasures that prevail.

I stroke the beam of my lamp

slowly along the flank

of something more permanent

than fish or weed

the thing I came for:

the wreck and not the story of the wreck

the thing itself and not the myth

the drowned face always staring

toward the sun

the evidence of damage

worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty

the ribs of the disaster

curving their assertion

among the tentative haunters.

This is the place.

And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair

streams black, the merman in his armored body.

We circle silently

about the wreck

we dive into the hold.

I am she: I am he

whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes

whose breasts still bear the stress

whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies

obscurely inside barrels

half-wedged and left to rot

we are the half-destroyed instruments

that once held to a course

the water-eaten log

the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are

by cowardice or courage

the one who find our way

back to this scene

carrying a knife, a camera

a book of myths

in which

our names do not appear.

By Adrienne Rich

**Edge**

The woman is perfected

Her dead

Body wears the smile of accomplishment,

The illusion of a Greek necessity

Flows in the scrolls of her toga,

Her bare

Feet seem to be saying:

We have come so far, it is over.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,

One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty

She has folded

Them back into her body as petals

Of a rose close when the garden

Stiffens and odors bleed

From the sweet, deep throats of the night flower.

The moon has nothing to be sad about,

Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and drag.

By Sylvia Plath