

Poems in the Time of Quarantine, vol. 2

From Poems to Take Shelter In (poets.org) & other sources

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The Days to Come

by Medora C. Addison

Now shall I store my soul with silent beauty,
 Beauty of drifting clouds and mountain heights,
Beauty of sun-splashed hills and shadowed forests,
 Beauty of dawn and dusk and star-swept nights.
Now shall I fill my heart with quiet music,
 Song of the wind across the pine-clad hill,
Song of the rain and, fairer than all music,
 Call of the thrush when twilight woods are still.
So shall the days to come be filled with beauty,
 Bright with the promise caught from eastern skies;
So shall I see the stars when night is darkest,
 Still hear the thrush's song when music dies.

Hope is the thing with feathers (254)

Emily Dickinson

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

blessing the boats

Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

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The 19th Amendment & My Mama

Mahogany L. Browne

I always took it for granted, the right to vote
She said
And I knew what my mother meant
Her voice constricted tightly by the flu A virus
& a 30-year-relationship
with Newport 100s
I ain't no chain smoker
she attempts to silence my concern
only a pack a week. That's good, you know?
My mother survived a husband she didn't want
and an addiction that loved her more
than any human needs

I sit to write a poem about the 100 year Anniversary
of the 19th Amendment
& my first thought returns to the womb
& those abortions I did not want at first
but alas

The thirst of an almost anything
is a gorge always looking to be
until the body is filled with more fibroids
than possibilities

On the 19th hour of the fourth day in a new decade
I will wake restless from some nightmare
about a bomb & a man with no backbone
on a golf course who clicks closed his Motorola phone
like an exclamation point against his misogynistic stance
He swings the golf club with each chant
Women let me grab
Women like me
Women vote until I say they don't

In my nightmare he is an infective agent
In the clear of day
he is just the same

Every day he breathes is a threat to this country's marrow
For Ida & Susan & Lucretia & Elizabeth Cady

& every day he tweets grief
like a cynical cornball comic's receipts
like a red light signaling the end of times

The final night of 2019
& my New Year's Eve plans involves
anything that will numb the pain
of a world breaking its own heart

My mother & I have already spoken
& her lungs are croaking wet
I just want you to know I don't feel well
& I pause to pull up my stockings beneath my crumpled smile
On this day I sigh
I just wanted to dance & drink & forget about the 61.7% votes

My silk dress falls to my knees with the same swiftness
defiant as the white feminist who said "I'm your ally"
then voted for the demise of our nation's most ignored
underpaid, imprisoned & impoverished citizens

Every day there is a telephone near
I miss my mother
In the waiting room of the OB/GYN
Uptown bound on the dirt orange train seat of the subway
O! How my mother loves the places she can never go
Her bones swaddled with arthritis & smoke
So she relies on my daily bemoans

*The train smells like yesterday, Ma
They raise the tolls & fix nothing for the people
My landlord refuses to fix my toilet, my bathroom sink, my refrigerator
The city is annoying like an old boyfriend, always buzzing about nothing
& in the way of me making it on time to the polls
This woman didn't say thank you when I held the door
& who does she think she is?*

Each time I crack & cap on the everydayness of my day
My mother laughs as if she can see the flimsy MTA card
The yellow cabs that refuse to stop for her daughter
In these moments she can live again
A whole bodied woman with a full mouth
to speak it plain

*I ask my mother what hurts?
What hurts?
How can I help from here?*

3000 miles away
Alone in a tower between the sea
& the Mexico borders

My mother sighs a little sigh & says
Nothing
I just wanted to hear your voice

Gate A-4

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after
learning
my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement:
"If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic,
please
come to the gate immediately."

Well—one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went
there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress,
just
like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. "Help,"
said the flight agent. "Talk to her. What is her problem? We
told her the flight was going to be late and she did this."

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly.
"Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-
bit-
se-wee?" The minute she heard any words she knew, however
poorly
used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been
cancelled
entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment
the
next day. I said, "No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is
picking you up? Let's call him."

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would
stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to
her. She talked to him. Then we called her other sons just
for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for
a while
in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends.
Then I
thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets
I know
and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my
knee,
answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade *mamool*
cookies—little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with
dates and
nuts—from her bag—and was offering them to all the women at
the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo—we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my new best friend – by now we were holding hands—had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.

And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate—once the crying of confusion stopped—seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too.

This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.

On the Fifth Day

Jane Hirshfield

On the fifth day
the scientists who studied the rivers
were forbidden to speak
or to study the rivers.

The scientists who studied the air
were told not to speak of the air,
and the ones who worked for the farmers
were silenced,
and the ones who worked for the bees.

Someone, from deep in the Badlands,
began posting facts.

The facts were told not to speak
and were taken away.
The facts, surprised to be taken, were silent.

Now it was only the rivers
that spoke of the rivers,
and only the wind that spoke of its bees,

while the unpausing factual buds of the fruit trees
continued to move toward their fruit.

The silence spoke loudly of silence,
and the rivers kept speaking
of rivers, of boulders and air.

Bound to gravity, earless and tongueless,
the untested rivers kept speaking.

Bus drivers, shelf stockers,
code writers, machinists, accountants,
lab techs, cellists kept speaking.

They spoke, the fifth day,
of silence.

—2017

POWER

by Adrienne Rich

Living in the earth-deposits of our history

Today a backhoe divulged out of a crumbling flank of earth
one bottle amber perfect a hundred-year-old
cure for fever or melancholy a tonic
for living on this earth in the winters of this climate

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:
she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness
her body bombarded for years by the element
she had purified
It seems she denied to the end
the source of the cataracts on her eyes
the cracked and suppurating skin of her finger-ends
till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil

She died a famous woman denying
her wounds
denying
her wounds came from the same source as her power

I used to be a roller coaster girl

jessica Care moore

(for Ntozake Shange)

I used to be a roller coaster girl
7 times in a row
No vertigo in these skinny legs
My lipstick bubblegum pink
As my panther 10 speed.

never kissed

Nappy pigtails, no-brand gym shoes
White lined yellow short-shorts

Scatched up legs pedaling past borders of
humus and baba ganoush
Masjids and liquor stores
City chicken, pepperoni bread
and superman ice cream
Cones.

Yellow black blending with bits of Arabic
Islam and Catholicism.

My daddy was Jesus
My mother was quiet
Jayne Kennedy was worshipped
by my brother Mark

I don't remember having my own bed before 12.
Me and my sister Lisa shared.

Sometimes all three Moore girls slept in the Queen.

You grow up so close
never close enough.

I used to be a roller coaster girl
Wild child full of flowers and ideas
Useless crushes on polish boys
in a school full of white girls.

Future black swan singing
Zeppelin, U2 and Rick Springfield

Hoping to be Jessie's Girl

I could outrun my brothers and
Everybody else to that
reoccurring line

I used to be a roller coaster girl
Till you told me I was moving too fast
Said my rush made your head spin
My laughter hurt your ears

A scream of happiness
A whisper of freedom
Pouring out my armpits
Sweating up my neck

You were always the scared one
I kept my eyes open for the entire trip
Right before the drop I would brace myself
And let that force push my head back into

That hard iron seat

My arms nearly fell off a few times
Still, I kept running back to the line
When I was done
Same way I kept running back to you

I used to be a roller coaster girl
I wasn't scared of mountains or falling
Hell, I looked forward to flying and dropping
Off this earth and coming back to life

every once in a while

I found some peace in being out of control
allowing my blood to race
through my veins for 180 seconds

I earned my sometime nicotine pull
I buy my own damn drinks & the ocean
Still calls my name when it feels my toes
Near its shore.

I still love roller coasters
& you grew up to be
Afraid
of all girls who cld

ride

Fearlessly

like
me.

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Alone

Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Kentucky River Junction

Wendell Berry

to Ken Kesey & Ken Babbs

Clumsy at first, fitting together
the years we have been apart,
and the ways.

But as the night
passed and the day came, the first
fine morning of April,

it came clear:
the world that has tried us
and showed us its joy

was our bond
when we said nothing.
And we allowed it to be

with us, the new green
shining.

*

Our lives, half gone,
stay full of laughter.

Free-hearted men
have the world for words.

Though we have been
apart, we have been together.

*

Trying to sleep, I cannot
take my mind away.
The bright day

shines in my head
like a coin
on the bed of a stream.

*

You left
your welcome.

From *Collected Poems: 1957-1982* by Wendell Berry. Copyright © 1985 by Wendell Berry.

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

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