

Three Poems by Elizabeth Spring

Grief Grows the Soul

Some sadness still sits in me now
as a sweet melancholy...
The color of soft violet
Pensive, pondering—
A monk in a monastery.

Grief doesn't overtake me now
like a fierce wave
Dragging me under—
I don't drown.

In fact, I'm not sad
in the ordinary sense of the word—
I have simply let
the tender green shoots of grieving grow...
opening my heart to a new place—
and I find that where once
there was something in me
hard and compacted
it is now watered by tears
and touched by kindness—
and where I couldn't see or feel before—
I can now say
Grief is growing my Soul.

There is something about
letting these tender shoots grow—
this slowing down...
and allowing my sadness
to just be...
and so I sit with it:
lowering the lights—
offering it a cup of tea—alone
or at times, sharing it with a friend
deepening our friendship if not our Souls...
For it is no small thing,
to walk on the edge of sorrow
and to trust enough
to let the tender
green shoots
of grieving grow.

Broken Lineage

At eighty-five, my mother didn't have
the English cottage garden
nor did she have the hollyhocks
but she loved these flowers
and painted them in oils...

And I, her daughter
only cursorily said:
"How nice" they were
more astonished by her age
of still painting than her art.

Now "nice" isn't a nice word
suggesting instead an insipid approval:
uninspired, uncourageous
or perhaps implying even trite.
though I didn't take the time
to even think of that then...

And now at seventy-five, I don't have
the English cottage garden either
nor do I have the hollyhocks
but I have her painting
and I will paint them too.
and my hollyhocks
will now look like hers
copied meticulously~
and each stroke
of her radiant petal blossoms
and wide leafed greens
will now be mine...

And perhaps she wondered
if her daughter would like it too
And so I wondered—for a short moment—
if my daughter would like it too—
forgetting that she is no longer here
and I wish now with all my heart
that my mother could know
I *love* her painting
and that tearfully, and finally
I took the time
to truly look, to admire,
and to trace the contours
of her heart on mine.

On the Runway of Life

I am not in the 'youth of old age'
But rather in the 'middle of the muck'
With one foot here and one foot there—
You know what I mean—
No need to explain
That nagging theme
Of hearing about
Yet another person
On the runway of life
Taking off into parts
unknown.

But as I've said before
I'm not afraid of flying—
I try to stay in touch
With the Control Tower
Repeating that I am just not yet
Ready for take-off—
My seat belt is not secure
My baggage is not neatly
Stowed away and
My mind is not in the
Up-right position
For take-off.

Nor can I see where I am in line
Among the others on the run-way—!
A pesky question
I often quietly ponder
At those "Celebrations
Of Life"
But I digress...
I'm not afraid of flying.

But for now
Let the fog keep me
Land-locked and
Earth-bound...
Let me not ever be afraid—
For haven't I flown
many times before?
I'm a believer In many lives past
And still many lives to come—
Flying should be second-nature...

Why look at all those
Who have gone before—!
It must be safe.

It must be as simple as
Opening one's arms
Into flying position and
Letting go—
Letting the Control Tower
Give the all-clear for take-off
As they do the work of
Lifting one up
On a wing and a prayer —
You see—
I'm not afraid of flying
Nor afraid of dying—
I'm just not ready to go
Yet—
Alone—
Into parts
Unknown...

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives might be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

~ Wendell Berry

Three poems by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Ways to Listen: An Incomplete List

There's lonely listening, when
sitting in a crowd. Open listening
as one listens, eyes closed,
to the wind in the cottonwood leaves.
Numb listening, as one listens
to detergent commercials.
Baffled listening, as one
tries to discern if the speaker could
possibly believe what they say.
And full-body listening as
the cello plays. Sometimes,
I've felt my whole being break
with delight in joyful listening
to my daughter's laughter.
And break equally
with the unbearable listening
as the soil falls on the casket.
There's the holy listening
when we listen for the dead,
and greedy listening,

in which every other utterance
is merely a ladder rung
for stepping into your own story.
Selfless listening knows only to receive.
There's the way you sometimes listen to
me,
as if my words are waves on the river,
not something to interpret,
but something familiar.
And the way you sometimes listen
to my silence and know precisely
what I mean. There's nervous listening,
as one listens to the mouse in the wall.
And vast listening, like when on a clear
night
lit only by stars, I can almost sense
how the universe not only sings
through my body, but listens, too,
listens to itself, and knows itself
in the listening.

Ode to Digging Potatoes

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Because

So I can't save the world—
can't save even myself,
can't wrap my arms around
every frightened child, can't
foster peace among nations,
can't bring love to all who
feel unlovable.
So I practice opening my heart
right here in this room and being gentle
with my insufficiency. I practice
walking down the street heart first.
And if it is insufficient to share love,
I will practice loving anyway.
I want to converse about truth,
about trust. I want to invite compassion
into every interaction.
One willing heart can't stop a war.
One willing heart can't feed all the hungry.
And sometimes, daunted by a task too big,
I ask myself, *What's the use of trying?*
But today, the invitation is clear:
to be ridiculously courageous in love.
To open the heart like a lilac in May,
knowing freeze is possible
and opening anyway.
To take love seriously.
To give love wildly.
To race up to the world
as if I were a puppy,
adoring and unjaded,
stumbling on my own exuberance.
To feel the shock of indifference,
of anger, of cruelty, of fear,
and stay open. To love as if it matters,
as if the world depends on it.