

For This
I Live

Doris Hedges

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FOR THIS I LIVE

By Doris Hedges

VERSE

Flower in the Dusk
Crisis
Words on a Page
The Dream Is Certain
For This I Live

NOVELS

Dumb Spirit
Elixir

Hodges, Doris Ryde

FOR THIS I LIVE

Poems

by

Doris Hedges



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D. H.

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C R E D O

I believe that the only person who should run one's life is oneself, and that the responsibility for one's actions lies in one's own hands. Blaming the other guy, or circumstances, or God, is weakness. The challenge of life is here, to be met single-handed by each one of us in a lonely but spiritually stimulating world.

CONTENTS

PHILOSOPHY

Poems in the Air	11
Rusty Words	12
Endless Wait	13
Impact	14
Noble Balance	15
To Be Alone	16
Poems on Paper	17
I Am a Student	18
To Weep Dry Tears	19
Contentment	20
Shyness	21
Do Not Disturb	22
I Am an Animal	23
Mood	24
The Light Heart	25
All the Children	27
Reluctance	28
Cry From the Heart	29
Time Passes	30

LOVE

My Dear	33
I Am a Slave	34
Gentle Meeting	35
Set Free	36
World Without End	37
I Am a Lover	38
Wise Prodigal	39
Warning	40

NATURE

Hardihood	43
-----------	----

Fraternity	44
Flowers in a Vase	45
Slow Lessons	46
Gratitude	47
April Love	48
Poem to Spain	49
Tropic Danger	50
I Am a Mother	51
World Trip	52
Admiration	54
Meeting	55
I Am a Sun-Worshipper	56
Double Requiem	57
Cry to the Gods	58

S A T I R E

Silent Trash Can	61
Paper Boy	62
Just Stepping	63
The Great Why	64
Brains	65
Mailing List	66
Betrayal	67
I Am a Roof-Bird	68
Civic Pride	69
Togetherness	70
??????	71
Lecture	72
Smoke	74
Animal Hearts	75
The Enemy	76
Picture Windows	77
Loneliness	78
Once More Dawn	79
For This I Live	80

PHILOSOPHY

P O E M S I N T H E A I R

I toss my poems into the air
Hoping that my gift
May be caught up
Into resistance
To that strange and nebulous
Phenomenon of the present age,
Spirit clashing
Against spirit,
Robot against robot,
Reason against love.

I toss my poems into the air,
On my lips a cry
That misdirection
May not slip the earth
Sideways into chaos,
World annihilating world,
Apathy in control,
Indifference the bomb
Which if we allow it
Will destroy us all.

R U S T Y W O R D S

We have great need of difficult
And troubling words,
Words to arouse;
Stars, sedatives, and Spring
Are not enough to bear
Even a modicum of spur
To trenchant thought; the times
Are strong; the times reflect
A million muted memories
Of deeds done man-like
In a God-like rut, only the mist
Reminding and remaining, only mist
Showing the ghostly way.

Yes, we have need
Of difficult and troubling words
That will not shake weakly
In their sentences, like men
Crying in unbelief to God;
The words are there
If we reach up for them
And drive them to our will.

ENDLESS WAIT

The helpless beat of a million suns
is lost in the desert
swallowed by time
which furrowed
channels of memory
in hallowed temples.

Before the jewelled shrines
candles droop
then light flickers
blown by the lucid breath
of priests.

Between the covers of the books
lie prisoned thoughts
which Truth turns jestingly
from side to side
uncaring
while the groping hopes
of predestined man
waver like smoke through water
which God's fan
has rippled.

I M P A C T

A sudden clash of eye to eye
and mind to mind is braver
than a turning-off, a fine evasion.
Better a quarrel than an unfought fight,
an angry heart than an ivory tower
with a misted view
and nothing human for the mind
to ponder on.

Better to wound, be wounded, than to run;
wiser to smile, agree to disagree.

NOBLE BALANCE

There is a fury that is helplessness
And anger that dissipates itself
In uselessness. There is the rage
That drips from wasted causes
Rotting their way to deadwood:
There is exhaustion from spent effort
And the losing of oneself in fires
Already at their ebb; there are tears
Burning the eyelids in frustration
As the heart pulsates; no words
Are there, no reason, only rage.

There is love's voice, and suddenly
Emotion steadies, laughter comes
Like gusty wind, and all the rage
Is gone in shamefaced ignominy,
Leaving a world of hopefulness behind.

T O B E A L O N E

One knows when one is really alone.
It is not enough to be alone; you must feel alone.
One knows when one feels alone.
Then, everything outside oneself
is encompassed in a delicious cloud
upon which one floats.
Then one is really alone
with oneself . . .
no sounds,
no outside thoughts
marring that aloneness.

How seldom one is alone;
how refreshing it is.
It is not loneliness to be alone.
It is to lie warmly
with time and space arrested
in a place where light or darkness
are your slaves,
where good or evil, reason or instinct,
love or hate, may and must obey
your sovereign will.
It is yours to choose
when you are alone. And only
when you are alone.

P O E M O N P A P E R

The pencil and the paper meet
hesitantly, crushing thought between,
spreading too widely or too narrowly
but taking shape;
a miracle that dreams,
timid, yet so persistent, should
appear in silent letters
 and in words
 and sentences.

Another miracle that paper
should be capable of holding,
 white, smooth,
 unscorched,
such frightening emotion
 and such truth.

I AM A STUDENT

I range along the middle ways
of the mind, where no signs say,
"Stop." The road is painful;
these are the straight ways
leading through hedgerows
of certainty where learned values
seem static, yet without them
there is no knowledge.

I range along the middle ways
of the mind, where no signs say,
"Go on." The road is painful;
the fields are greener
to right and left;
imagination calls you there
to revel in undiscipline
and untutored thinking.

I range along the middle ways
of the mind, where no signs say,
"This is the right way." Yet I go on
plodding, believing, caring,
eyes ahead and hope flagging;
and suddenly the road broadens;
I see truth there
written in sunlight.

T O W E E P D R Y T E A R S

Tears no one can see
make bleeding wounds
within a hidden muscle
of the heart, cut jaggedly
timeless and burning scars
in the delicate tissue
of our dreams; they fail
to melt deep sorrow,
fail to assuage.

Tears no one can see,
tears hiding deep in pain
at sight of a hungry child,
a quarrel between lovers,
death searing and ravaging,
young desire turned
to evil, aged solitude,
smile of resignation
on a blind man's face . . .

The tears one sees are those
giving release to joy
or sorrow, soft falling tears
of welcome and of love,
hard tears of pain: these
one may shed; the deeper tears
lurk in closed lids.

C O N T E N T M E N T

My strongest feelings and my dearest hopes
Are locked within me, deeper now
Than all my careful thinking
Bound in life's discipline. Once I
Believed those feelings and those hopes
Could never fail to bring me joy
And fine fulfilment; now I know
They were too strong, too dear, too personal;
Now I am less fulfilled and less ambitious
But in return I know my love is spread
Wide on the world for all who ask for it.

S H Y N E S S

There they are before me, and what
Shall I do to them and they to me?
I thought of them as shadows,
But now they are solid,
One granite mass uncarved
By the knife of meeting
Or the acid of understanding.
They are strangers to me
Yet they are mine, for I shall meet them
Mind to mind and heart to heart;
My voice shall enter their ears
And my shape fill their eyes
As I come nearer.
Are they terrified of me
As I of them? is there one
Among them with the key to my door,
The door to my heart?
"Come in, come in," it says,
The granite mass, disintegrating
With my nearness into people.

What a fool I feel, and drop my guard
Before the friendly battery of eyes.

D O N O T D I S T U R B

It is for man alone to find
Harmonious beats, for man alone
Controls earth's errant tossings
Which by man alone
Must be at last interpreted.

The great ones of the past
Were men alone, their gifts
To man alone, not to the gods.

It is for man alone to meet
His brother's asking eyes;
For man alone to solve equations
Posed by himself alone
Under God's watching smile.

I AM AN ANIMAL

I am an animal, the earth is mine, and I
Am one with it; my four feet love the soil,
The forest brush, the grass; my eyes see more
Than man's, yet they see less, for he is God
And I am merely life tight-woven with the earth.
I prowl my way, I fight with fury, and I love
Only my own, my mate, my progeny, the fierce
Proud joy of being; and in me deep there lies
A lurking doubt, a wariness, a questioning
In which no reason plays a part, for I
Am animal and man is God, yet we are brothers
In this earthly partnership; will he survive
This shuddering, fearful force, or I? Is he
The stronger? Will he pierce his way
Through all the mysteries of his godhead,
Finding ultimate conquest of himself
And kingship over me before too late,
Or will he sound his clanking robot footsteps
Eerily into space, leaving me here alone?

M O O D

If there were one thing I would do
To run depression off, I'd go
Into the woods with it, and hang it
Dangling and dismayed on a tree branch;
I'd watch it sway and turn as Truth
Fell from it at my feet, waiting.

I'd say to Truth, "How do I know you?
Why did you leave the stuff of my depression
Like a cobweb full of dead flies?
Was I in fact a living fantasy
Of wrong deduction with no reason in it?
Why was my mood so black with weakness?"

And Truth would say, smiling, "Yes,
The pictures of your mind betrayed you;
Man is still man, love waits in joy,
Wonders remain, the unexplained
Asks for your trust, your love. And I
Am with you; come, we will return
As trusted friends; look in my eyes
With hope and let depression rot."

THE LIGHT HEART

It was a light and shining thing,
a ball of gossamer that went
floating on tinkling laughter
into the oddest places,
lingering near playgrounds,
caressing men at dusk
after a good day's work,
dancing at lovers' feet
as they walked in the wood:
everywhere people smiled
in welcome, for above all
the light heart must be welcome.

Then came the sorrowing;
dark and mysterious thinking
spread through the universe
and men grew weary;
sickness fell on the light heart;
some of its glimmered gladness
went from it; it found no welcome
Anywhere, even in playgrounds.

The sorrowing spread
until all the earth
was encompassed.

Then the light heart cried out,
hovered and hovered, drawn
nearer the evil vortex
of human apathy until
slimy tentacles reached up
and touched its loveliness.

The light heart gave a gentle sigh,
bursting so violently that the pieces
floated away on the air
and caught on the stars' points
where they hang still,
waiting for men and children
to reach up to the loving sky
and draw them down again.

ALL THE CHILDREN

Their eyes, so sweet, so powerful,
so lost, so asking,
“We are yours,” they say,
“yet we are more.
We represent the farthest
Man has envisaged.”

The ultimate?
That word, that question!
Perhaps they may answer it
Without our help.

RELUCTANCE

They ask so much
And could we give
We would
But do we know
Our strength?
Each of us is one
Only one
More is arrogance.

CRY FROM THE HEART

Give me a bud now
While the Spring is young.
Later there will be roses
Full in bloom, the juicy green
Of corn, the fields decked out
In lovely colours, brimming
With fulness. I have seen
Poinsettias on a coral wall,
The immortelle against a sea
Of emeralds and sapphires,
Picked narcissus on a hill-top,
Slept on a bed of bluebells
Under a heedless moon.

I searched for Spring
Around the world and back,
Finding only Summer.
Give me a bud now,
Oh, give me a green bud
While the Spring is young!

TIME PASSES

If there were time to love
And time to tell of it
Lighting of spirit
At life's embers
Warming flame
Would follow.

If there were time to think
And time to delve in it
Meeting of minds
And eyes to eyes
Shaming fear
Would dissipate.

If there were time to laugh
And time to savour it
Flowers and stars
In the heart
Sunset glow
Would cheer us.

If there were time to linger
And time to pluck the bud
Soul and mind
Wide welcoming
Breathless promise
Would come true.

LOVE

M Y D E A R

And here the test comes,
To say what no words can;
What words are there
Except the old ones,
Laden and golden with the loves
And heart-beats of the ages?

So, dearest, here my poem lies
Helpless and waiting
For the beauty of your eyes;
All I know of love
Is deep within it.

I A M A S L A V E

How beautiful your eyes are, and how hard;
They are twin rocks, warm in a sunset glow;
They draw me to you helplessly.
How beautiful your hands are, and how hard;
They melt my flesh, caress my beating heart;
They let me go so carelessly.
How beautiful your mouth is, and how hard;
Your lips ravage me, your smile is adamant,
Seductive as the perfume of a rose.
How beautiful your voice is, and how hard;
I drown in its dark river, listening,
And hearing nothing but my doom.
How beautiful your love is, and how hard;
I am a slave that dies against you, willingly,
Leaving no mark against the shore.

GENTLE MEETING

Come slowly to me, do not smile
Or speak, but gently touch me
With your thought;
It is enough, and more
Might harden it.

Give me your understanding,
But no spoken word or gesture,
Merely the lightest breath
Of meeting in our eyes,
And we are one.

Go quickly from me, do not weep
Or look behind, but leave your touch
Deep in my heart;
It is enough, and more
Might weaken it.

S E T F R E E

The more you ask of me, the more
I have to give; I am proud
As a mallard's wing
Beating its way southward.

I passed through the images
And as I knelt
I pushed them down,
Nor stayed to listen
To the tinsel crash.

You are no conjured dream,
No idol that my mind evolves,
No glittering illusion:
The more you ask of me, the more
I have to give; as the mallard flies
Above the cacophony
So do I.

WORLD WITHOUT END

My heart is deep;
It holds the sun,
The stars,
The sleepy chirp
Of birds at dawn,
A child's laughter.

My heart is wide;
It beats with joy
At sight of a tiny flower,
A note of music,
The voice of a friend.

My heart is measureless;
It holds all things
That love, that live;
My heart is strong;
It flies to rest
Where it is happiest,
Against your own.

I AM A LOVER

When I was young, I wore my heart
Upon my sleeve for all to see.
Of those who saw it there
No one believed in it;
They thought it false
Because in honesty
I kept the faith, waiting.

So then I hid my heart; I had contempt
For those who loved.
I tore through life, lionlike,
Roaring, demanding all.
Now it is sweet and undeserved
To find my heart young
And gay again;
I put my love
Upon my sleeve
Not caring if they see
I wear it there.

WISE PRODIGAL

Give love away:
Better to be
A spendthrift
Than a hand of iron
In a velvet glove.

Touch of affection
Light as a flower
Laid on someone's heart
And nothing kept or counted:
Give love away.

W A R N I N G

Ask little things of me,
The tiny moths of thought
That die softly in the light;
Ask laughter of me,
Warm with the glow of wine;
Hold me to these; I know
How to be gently true
Until the smiling ends,
But ask more of my inmost heart,
Beware! Light music dims
In echoing aisles; pale loves
Disperse when laughter dies.

Ask little things of me,
A gay, a gossamer love;
I will be yours, my dear,
Forever and a day.

NATURE

HARDIHOOD

Slim bluebells growing in the crevice of a rock,
a natural bouquet, with maidenhair
to complement their sweetness; this
is Summer's gift, this too
the portent of life's strength.

No easy thing to push one's slender roots
into the earth and then through sun and storm
produce this miracle before man's eyes.

FRATERNITY

The Spring's here, a bird sings,
The sun's ray falls on my book,
I reach out hungrily, I touch it,
It lies on my fingers.

Outside, I hear a bird's song,
It lingers; it is without stint;
The sun and the singing belong
To a thousand young Springs.

I will borrow the song, it was made
By me once; it is mine as the season
And his as the sunlight, the reason
For every beginning;
Sung by me or the bird, it has stayed
Through the spinning of time, nor betrayed
Where it came from. To us both, it is free;
I may sing it, or he.

FLOWERS IN A VASE

They look at me and smile and say,
“We’ve had our day. Throw us away.”
And I with gentle hands remove
Their weary stems from vase’s groove.
I say, “I thank you from my heart
For all the beauty you impart,
For strength of petal and perfume,
Which brought grace to my lonely room;
Thank you that when I looked at you,
I saw life’s mystery anew
As never-ending, never done
And beauty there for everyone.”

“So now in gratitude I lay
Your mystic loveliness away.”

SLOW LESSONS

I saw a fish lie gasping on the shore
And vomited to watch it slowly die;
The hare I shot so many years before
Still haunts me in my dreams unhappily.

And yet it pleases me to see a flower
Shedding its petals in a silent mirth,
For it has gone the circle of the hour
And smilingly returned to friendly earth.

To kill a living thing is like a death
Within oneself, if one believes
In nature's unrelenting shibboleth
That every time we kill, all nature grieves.

GRATITUDE

I can hear the pounding
of the frozen forces
at the roots of the trees
as they loosen slowly
under the pull and sway
of another Spring.
I can hear the siren
whispering under the blue
of melting river ice.

I can see the velvet
of the greeny down
on the trunks of the trees,
the lifting of the fern
as though listening
to a future song.
I can see life moving
rapturous yet shy
through the teeming woods.

What better music
can anyone desire?
What further light
behind your probing eyes?

APRIL LOVE

April turns cold under a summer sun;
No death chillier than violets
With folded petals, and their scent
All gone, no thought more bitter
Than a memory of love hard-held too long.
Better let April go when summer comes;
She will return when sap is flowing
In free delight, before the encroaching sun
Makes shadows early on the silvery grass.
April is wise; better let April go,
Leaving a memory of sweet and bittersweet
Behind: eternal youth, eternal restlessness.

P O E M T O S P A I N

Why not write a poem now
While the senses quiver
At the beauty of the day?

The surge of the heart is now
And the strange elation
Centered in the pulses.

Massed poppies are swaying
In the scented breeze
Of lemon blossoms.

Smiles are in children's eyes now,
This now so precious
Set deep like a jewel in the heart.

TROPIC DANGER

Where the sea whispers on a coral beach
In sapphire and in jade and diamonds
Of burning sunlight; where the days
Are tropic torpor, and the nights
Burst in a spate of passion
In the drumming of a million insects
And the midnight crowing of the cocks;
Where there is no scent of flower
Or of fruit, only a heady taste
Upon the tongue, seduction in the eye,
And savage music tearing at the senses;
Where these are, there is soft danger
In the sea's lapping, in the brilliance
Of the impact, in the sensuous sleep.

I AM A MOTHER

I press my racing footsteps deep
Into the shore-sand, striding
Quick behind the curving line
Of slow-retiring wave.

Above me, I see Johnny in a blue blur—
Builder of houses, man of mine,
With flaxen hair as straight
As sweater-silk, and just as soft.

I turn to see how well my steps
Have fared, but they are gone,
Wiped out by such a little force,
A tiny, curving, bubbly creep of sea;
My passing blew no trumpets,
Scratched no smallest hollow.

Above me, there is Johnny in a blue blur,
Signalling to me with pail and paddle,
All pride and jubilation, and I see
How fine a house my little son has made.

WORLD TRIP

How precious people seem pent in a plane
Above the feathery and deceptive clouds;
How slender is the line of shore
And the borders between countries.
Where are the steely barriers
Lying between eye and eye
And smile and smile?

How valuable voices seem, and strong the words
Heard in a Spanish farmyard or in a church
In Sicily or in a ruined mosque;
And how one longs to know
Their heart's meaning
And the mind's code
Behind the voice.

How sweet it is to pluck an orange blossom
And hide it, smiling, in your deepest heart,
Sharing the smile with someone watching,
Someone, a stranger, one who knows
You are not an alien
But only a guest
In happiness:

Swift traverse high above the clouds and storms,
Above the narrowness, dropping like birds

Into the trees of evil, innocent
Of ill intent, with eager heart asking
For the learning that all love is;
Refusing the man-made barriers
That keep life out.

ADMIRATION

I am afraid of too much suffering;
Have you read the letters of Van Gogh?
They are intact and firm in a book
Someone edited and put a title
"To my brother," or "Dear Theo," on it.
In these, Van Gogh (an artist and much more,
Oh, much, much more; a man with moral guts
And a cutting suffering-capacity)
Said, "I am mad; but I am still a man,
Dear Theodore; into your hands
I put this testimonial, these pictures
From my core of sanity; sell them all
For money if you can; repay yourself
In this poor coin for all your love."

I am afraid of too much suffering;
I am not Van Gogh, nor am I sure my soul's
As iron-clad, my brush as firm, as his.

M E E T I N G

After seeing an exhibition of Henry Moore's sculpture and drawings.

Suddenly you meet someone
At an exhibition
Of his own works;
He is not there
In body
But now
You know him well
And are grateful,
So terribly grateful.
He is here
In his creations on the walls
And in the marble
Sprung from his spirit
As thoughts on paper
Eager and ready.

Suddenly you meet someone
And your mind leaps,
Your heart thuds
In recognition.

I AM A SUN-WORSHIPPER

Blue with softened edges,
Clouds and shapes and shapes
Like dreaming; long, narrow
Streaks of fluttering white
Fly lightly, stripingly
From the hubs of jets.

Sound without fury
Following, and silence
Beforehand: the jets like bees
Hide behind powder clouds;
I lie in the sun watching
Men on a scaffolding.

The men make echoing jokes
Which fly outward; the forms cling
Solidly to concrete.
Above in the soft blue
The jets pass; nothing is new
Or old but merely different.

DOUBLE REQUIEM

And you, my enemy, have you hatred
In your heart? Do you desire
My death? My suffering? For me,
I have no thing at all of this
And, knowing it, wonder if you, as I,
Go stumbling on the road of war
With lagging feet. There lie the green
Of fields, the golden sky, the dusk,
Tarnished for you, and for me too;
The smoking ruin of our lives
Betrays earth's fairness; oh, my enemy,
Wife of his, sister, mother, do you feel
Hatred? Love is a hidden flame
Waiting to warm our hands; seek
With your woman's grasp, pierce
With your woman's wit this tangle
That our feet are deep in. Stand
As you must behind your man, yet keep
Him pure of hate, untouched by evil.

Oh, my enemy, my heart goes out in pain
Upon the empty fields, lies on his grave
Who is your husband, brother, son.

CRY TO THE GODS

I pray that Siva, or God,
Or Whoever runs the Buddhist entrance
And the heavens' golden gatepost
Into the Far Whatever—
Anyway, I pray that He—or It—
Will be benevolent and gentle
When I face Him—or It.

I fought in wars, my medals show it;
Courage is a stupid quality
And necessary, come to think of it;
But to be a He or a She
In startling headlines
Or even in a quiet unambitious
“I am an individual” way
You must have difficult essentials
Such as ability to sell your product
Because if you're bad at that
You can be a Rodin or a Bach
Or even a cancer-killer
And still lose out, and die unsold.
It all boils down to salesmanship—
And a good product, of course.

I have a passionate belief in Me
And in all the other Me's;
I pray continually
That Whoever it is who runs
The entrances to Heaven
Or to Nirvana will be kind.

SATIRE

SILENT TRASH CAN

Neighbours,
Boxes, paper,
Funny-looking bundles,
Mysterious bottles,
Babies' diapers,
Bang! Crash!
All hours of the day
And evening—
Then suddenly—
Nothing.

Cold grey cans
With tops tightly on,
Silence,
Quiet,
No cries,
No varied ages,
No admonitions,
No laughter . . .
Silence!
The noise is gone,
Sleep is easy,
Calm and choosy,
And so dull!

P A P E R B O Y

The bundle is so solid and so heavy, it
reminds me of the bales of hay
I help my father take from the machine
in summer at the farm, after my work.
The bundles are so different; the hay
is for food to eat, to fill the stomach,
and the other is to feed the mind.
I do not know which is the most important;
I only know the bundles weigh the same
and that I find them equally unwieldy.
I will deliver all my papers, one by one,
throwing them at the doors, or trudging up
the imposing steps of the richer houses.
Sometimes I read the headlines staring out
before my eyes and recognize a newsy piece,
an exciting bit of information made
too hard to understand because of words.
Oh, yes, I know the world's a mess, I've heard
about the messes here, the messes there;
I go right on throwing my papers at the doors,
and wondering who reads it all, who studies it,
who has the time to feel deep down inside
enough to understand, to fix things up, to do.

My arms ache so, I have no time
to stop and read, to think; I only hear
the dangers in the air, and wonder why
there are so many papers full of words.

JUST STEPPING

It isn't dancing any more,
Long, smooth gliding
And fewer couples
To bump with dignity
In a ballroom
With a sideways sway
The head steady
Shoulders never moving
In a slow tango . . .

That was the old dance
Of the thirties
And even forties

Now it's a new job,
Simple if you like
Fast tempo
Short steps
Bobbing up and down
Backsides wiggling
On one spot . . .

Today

If you want to dance

In a bistro

Or even a boite

You learn to put rhythm

Into just stepping.

THE GREAT WHY

Nuclear physicists, learned professors,
Men with trained minds and a sense of proportion,
Are to themselves their own father confessors,
Believe in pure reason and brook no distortion.

Yet it is odd that so many wise thinkers
Return to their God when they feel a misgiving,
Cast off their findings and throw off their blinkers,
Admit the Great Why at the centre of living.

B R A I N S

The clever octopus has no bones
But has a lot of good hormones
Secreted in its wicked glands.
It kills although it has no hands.
It seems to be more smart than us;
Oh, to be an octopus!

MAILING LIST

Billy Wane, Ruth Howe, the Rev. C.
And dozens more, people I knew,
People I loved at home and everywhere,
Here is the list, with names crossed out,
My God, it's only—only what?
Why it's twenty years ago,
And I? I am still alive,
And they? How do I know?
I loved them, and they're gone.

B E T R A Y A L

The child, so seriously intent
Upon his blocks, looks up
Into his mother's face, and says,
"Look what I did!" and watches, saddened,
As the tower falls. His mother smiles,
Says, "That's a good boy; go on playing
Quietly and make no noise." But he
In trust cries, "This is not in play!
I am working. Help me to rebuild!"
Then, seeing no understanding in her eyes,
The child returns in sorrow to his blocks
And his inept desire for learning.
He will remember how his tower crashed
For lack of skill to make it firm,
And how his mother smiled to see it fall.

I AM A ROOF-BIRD

I am a roof-bird
With time to spare
I look at the pretty girl
On the next roof-top
And see that she
Returns my bird-look

My sandwiches are ham
Hers look like chicken
I am a roof-bird
She is one too
How sad to be
Two wingless ones

CIVIC PRIDE

Everyone knows it's a sign of sophistication
To be slightly wicked;
We know that sex crimes of any originality
Came from Europe or the Middle East;
So the crimes we have in our city
Are a sign of maturity.

Our city isn't really malicious;
It wishes it could originate something
However suspicious;
But we know in our hearts
That our very best tarts
Learn their trade somewhere else
just as vicious.

T O G E T H E R N E S S

To watch the mass destruction of the mind
Is easy once you get the hang of it:
Buy a split-level, put glass windows up,
Join all the groups as you're supposed to do,
Follow the crowd, do what it tells you to.

But just before you go completely blind
Stop for a moment, think, if still you can,
Are you still you? Or just a folksy cog?
Are you a man or just a smooth machine
Run by the welded group on which you lean?

??????

If I were you, and you were I
Would we laugh, or would we cry?
If you were I, and I were you
What would I do? What would you do?

Would you make the same mistakes?
Would I play for higher stakes?
Would you like to start anew?
And you be I, and I be you?

I am not too fond of I
Would you like you, if you were I?
I wonder if I would like you
If you were I, and I were you?

LECTURE

Have you ever seen an evening sky
Full of stars, and meeting them
In muted glory, fireflies
From fields and valleys
Until one full sweep of candles
Filled the world you looked at?

Haven't you?
You've missed something!

Have you ever been in bed with a man
You love in full trust,
All your womanhood enslaved
And yet victorious in deep breath
Of lushest living?

Haven't you?
You've missed something!

Have you ever touched a ghost,
Found it alive and trusting,
Brought it to life? A ghost, you say?
Oh, well, a dream, an errant thought,
A deep-held vision you can take
Like a spring flower in your hand,

A miracle you feared to face,
And then you felt its force,
A dream no longer, but reality?

Haven't you?
You've missed everything!

S M O K E

There was a little girl once
Who longed to be smoke.
She used to lie on the grass
Before the house, and watch
The smoke rising from the chimneys;
She loved it,
She envied its grace
And freedom.

Then one day there was a fire
In the schoolhouse;
All the other children
Escaped
But Janey went too near,
Stayed too long.
When the smoke rose
First in volume,
Then mistily
From the smouldering ruins
Janey went up with it.

Her parents grieved;
They did not know
Of Janey's wish
And Utter Happiness.

ANIMAL HEARTS

Has any woman written a poem
about mink before?

Mink is a symbol
of false security,
false glamour,
false picture in the eyes
of empty-minded society.

This is a poem,
slightly unpoetic,
but still a poem . . .

Poor little animals!
Minks!
Poor little women
in mink coats
with dead skins
in their eyes.

Dead animals,
dead rodents,
yes, this is my poem.

I have worn mink,
poor me
who can't kill anything
and be happy.

THE ENEMY

The rugged individual
Hates to be residual
In picture windows.

The I CAN STAND ALONE chap
Prefers to make his own trap
To trip up on.

Split-level type obedience
Or folksy group subservience
Makes him mad.

When told he simply must conform
To someone else's feeble norm
He blows his top.

The group will never make him jell
He'd rather have his private hell
At least it's his!

PICTURE WINDOWS

You can watch the goldfish swim
Wonder why they look so grim
Take the same route every day
Never have a word to say

If the bowl were made of wood
Do you think they'd be so good?

L O N E L I N E S S

If drunkenness would do it
I would sell my soul to Bacchus for a song.
If by some madness I could make you see
I would enclose myself within a maniac's cage.
Why should I care, why should my heart contract
That you can gaze at me with empty eyes
And calm acceptance when I nod at you
And say, "Of course, my dear"? You are content
To look no further. Who am I to dare
And dare again to hope that there are eyes,
Covered as mine are, somewhere to rejoice
In meeting with my own, lips that are stern
When mine are, arms that still take
The burden of aloneness from my back
And shoulder it in yoke? No fairer bond
That this could ever be, that we might know
Together when to pull, when to let laughter come,
When to be grave. If I were satyr without wine
Or madman caught within a lucid moment, you
With pity in your eyes, perhaps, would never see
How sober was the sot, how sane the fool.

ONCE MORE DAWN

Poets once gave us the stars, or pink asters,
Songs, or a saga, the whispering leaves
Of the trees at day's ending; the poet
Today is a man with a flag, and a chip
On his shoulder, his sounds like strong drink
Making froth in his cup; so we laugh as we read,
Or we sigh on a stumbling prayer of our own.

But the crow of the cock, and the prayer,
Are enough; there is work to be done.
A man is a man if he makes
His own verse, if he hears the cock crow
And can smile at each dawning.

FOR THIS I LIVE

To do the job of being Me
With strength and with efficiency,
To love with everything one's got
Whether one is afraid or not;
To grow with pain and conquer fear,
To get the values straight and clear,
To face the Devil with his grin
And say, "Oh, please, sir, let me in!"

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Hodges, Doris Ryde
For this I live.

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