

Write to the Heart of Motherhood
connecting to our true voice in the middle of our messy lives

Week 1. POEMS



~ TO LIVE WITH AND/ OR LEARN BY HEART ~

Greetings, lovely!

This is a bank of poems for you to peruse and enjoy, and – if any of them speak to you, to live with and/or learn by heart. I like to print and cut out poems and keep them posted on my bathroom mirror, in my office, or at a threshold I pass often, like the door to my bedroom. The poem will catch me and seize me out of my distracted mind wanderings. Sometime I also keep poems in the “notes” section of my phone, to read when I need them, when I’m out and about in the world.

Certain poems ask me to be learned by heart. Kim Rosen, poet and author of “Saved by a Poem,” has an excellent chapter in that book, on why and how to learn poems by heart, which I highly recommend. I typically learn one line a day, and practice speaking the poem to myself cumulatively. I can’t tell you how soothing and inspiring it has been to be able to speak a poem I love to myself while driving to the next meeting, or in the middle of the night, exhausted and bouncing my baby back to sleep. Sometimes it literally feels like a magic spell to shift my being into congruence and buoyancy.

I will add five poems each week to this bank, so you'll have 30 total by the end of the course. I've tried to choose a range of topics, but all with lengths that are workable to learn by heart. Of course, choose any poems you like outside this list too! And feel free to post those you love in our private Facebook group. Enjoy!

INSHA'ALLAH

Danusha Lameris

I don't know when it slipped into my speech
that soft word meaning, "if God wills it."
Insha'Allah I will see you next summer.
The baby will come in spring, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this year we will have enough rain.

So many plans I've laid have unraveled
easily as braids beneath my mother's quick fingers.

Every language must have a word for this. A word
our grandmothers uttered under their breath
as they pinned the whites, soaked in lemon,
hung them to dry in the sun, or peeled potatoes,
dropping the discarded skins into a bowl.

*Our sons will return next month, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this war will end, soon. Insha'Allah
the rice will be enough to last through winter.*

How lightly we learn to hold hope,

as if it were an animal that could turn around
and bite your hand. And still we carry it
the way a mother would, carefully,
from one day to the next.

ON TURNING TEN

Billy Collins

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light--
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.

At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.

Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I could shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

FOOD AND WATER

Brooke McNamara

Sit yourself kindly down
and begin to breathe

with and as
the ache of being,
instead of above it.

Remember your first questions.

Enduring and unanswerable,
they can make you
curiosity again.

Gently,

allow your heart to hand you
every last piece
of who you truly are.

This is the food you've been hungry for.

This is the water that will quench.

Softly you dissolve
into an undomesticated friendship
with your world.

Enter into it again
with that quiet quivering
in your now more-human heart,

and let an uncaused joy
come out of your eyes —
so the others feel it,

so it's all of ours
to eat and drink and share.

THE NATIVITY

John O'Donohue

No man reaches where the moon touches a woman.

Even the moon leaves her when she opens
Deeper into the ripple in her womb
That encircles dark, to become flesh and bone.

Someone is coming ashore inside her,
A face deciphers itself from water,
And she curves around the gathering wave,
Opening to offer the life it craves.

In a corner stall of pilgrim strangers,
She falls and heaves, holding a tide of tears.
A red wire of pain feeds through every vein,
Until night unweaves and the child reaches dawn.

Outside each other now, she sees him first,
Flesh of her flesh, her dreamt son safe on earth.

THINGS TO KNOW WHEN WAKING

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

There will be weather. There will be some measure of light. The earth will not pause, will not stop in its spinning. The morning will stretch into night. And whatever I feel, I won't feel it forever. And whatever I love will someday be lost— no matter how well I love it, no matter my hopes, no matter how tightly I grasp. But the love itself, love can continue to grow in ways that defy what I think I know— if only I tend it, meet it. And the mountains around me are falling down. Somewhere else, mountains are being made. Our Milky Way Galaxy, sure in its course, will collide with Andromeda Galaxy someday. That someday will not be today. Today there will be thousands of chances to choose to be generous. I am what I give. I have a love light to carry. Gravity wins. Today is the day to live.