

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

Week 6. POEMS



~ TO LIVE WITH AND/ OR LEARN BY
HEART ~

Greetings, lovely!

Here five more poems to add to your collection, for you to peruse and enjoy, and – if any of them speak to you, to live with and/or learn by heart.

Having added five poems each week to this bank, you'll now have 30 total as we come to the end of this 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 Facebook group. Enjoy!

UNTITLED

Dogen Zenji

Midnight.

No waves,

no wind, the empty boat
is flooded with moonlight.

GATE C22

Ellen Bass

At gate C22 in the Portland airport a man in a broad-band leather hat kissed a woman arriving from Orange County. They kissed and kissed and kissed. Long after the other passengers clicked the handles of their carry-ons and wheeled briskly toward short-term parking, the couple stood there, arms wrapped around each other like he'd just staggered off the boat at Ellis Island, like she'd been released at last from ICU, snapped out of a coma, survived bone cancer, made it down from Annapurna in only the clothes she was wearing. Neither of them was young. His beard was gray. She carried a few extra pounds you could imagine her saying she had to lose. But they kissed lavish kisses like the ocean in the early morning, the way it gathers and swells, sucking each rock under, swallowing it again and again. We were all watching— passengers waiting for the delayed flight to San Jose, the stewardesses, the pilots, the aproned woman icing Cinnabons, the man selling sunglasses.

We couldn't look away. We could taste the kisses crushed in our mouths.

But the best part was his face. When he drew back and looked at her, his smile soft with wonder, almost as though he were a mother still open from giving birth, as your mother must have looked at you, no matter what happened after—if she beat you or left you or you're lonely now—you once lay there, the vernix not yet wiped off, and someone gazed at you as if you were the first sunrise seen from the Earth. The whole wing of the airport hushed, all of us trying to slip into that woman's middle-aged body, her plaid Bermuda shorts, sleeveless blouse, glasses, little gold hoop earrings, tilting our heads up.

BONFIRE OPERA

Danusha Lameris

In those days, there was a woman in our circle
who was known, not only for her beauty,
but for taking off all her clothes and singing opera.
And sure enough, as the night wore on and the stars
emerged to stare at their reflections on the sea,
and everyone had drunk a little wine,
she began to disrobe, loose her great bosom,
and the tender belly, pale in the moonlight,
the Viking hips, and to let her torn raiment
fall to the sand as we looked up from the flames.
And then a voice lifted into the dark, high and clear
as a flock of blackbirds. And everything was very still,
the way the congregation quiets when the priest
prays over the incense, and the smoke wafts
up into the rafters. I wanted to be that free
inside the body, the doors of pleasure
opening, one after the next, an arpeggio
climbing the ladder of sky. And all the while
she was singing and wading into the water
until it rose up to her waist and then lapped
at the underside of her breasts, and the aria
drifted over us, her soprano spare and sharp
in the night air. And even though I was young,
somehow, in that moment, I heard it,
the song inside the song, and I knew then

that this was not the hymn of promise
but the body's bright wailing against its limits.
A bird caught in a cathedral—the way it tries
to escape by throwing itself, again and again,
against the stained glass.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

Galway Kinnell

While spoon-feeding him with one hand
she holds his hand with her other hand,
or rather lets it rest on top of his,
which is permanently clenched shut.
When he turns his head away, she reaches
around and puts in the spoonful blind.
He will not accept the next morsel
until he has completely chewed this one.
His bright squint tells her he finds
the shrimp she has just put in delicious.
Next to the voice and touch of those we love,
food may be our last pleasure on earth—
a man on death row takes his T-bone
in small bites and swishes each sip
of the jug wine around in his mouth,
tomorrow will be too late for them to jolt
this supper out of him. She strokes
his head very slowly, as if to cheer up
each separate discomfited hair sticking up

from its root in his stricken brain.
Standing behind him, she presses
her cheek to his, kisses his jowl,
and his eyes seem to stop seeing
and do nothing but emit light.
Could heaven be a time, after we are dead,
of remembering the knowledge
flesh had from flesh? The flesh
of his face is hard, perhaps
from years spent facing down others
until they fell back, and harder
from years of being himself faced down
and falling back in his turn, and harder still
from all the while frowning
and beaming and worrying and shouting
and probably letting go in rages.
His face softens into a kind
of quizzical wince, as if one
of the other animals were working at
getting the knack of the human smile.
When picking up a cookie he uses
both thumbtips to grip it
and push it against an index finger
to secure it so that he can lift it.
She takes him then to the bathroom,
where she lowers his pants and removes
the wet diaper and holds the spout of the bottle
to his old penis until he pisses all he can,
then puts on the fresh diaper and pulls up his pants.

When they come out, she is facing him,
walking backwards in front of him
and holding his hands, pulling him
when he stops, reminding him to step
when he forgets and starts to pitch forward.
She is leading her old father into the future
as far as they can go, and she is walking
him back into her childhood, where she stood
in bare feet on the toes of his shoes
and they foxtrotted on this same rug.
I watch them closely: she could be teaching him
the last steps that one day she may teach me.
At this moment, he glints and shines,
as if it will be only a small dislocation
for him to pass from this paradise into the next.

THE KNOWING

Sharon Olds

Afterwards, when we have slept, paradise-
comaed and woken, we lie a long time
looking at each other.

I do not know what he sees, but I see
eyes of surpassing tenderness
and calm, a calm like the dignity
of matter. I love the open ocean
blue-grey-green of his iris, I love

the curve of it against the white,
that curve the sight of what has caused me
to come, when he's quite still, deep
inside me. I have never seen a curve
like that, except the earth from outer
space. I don't know where he got
his kindness without self-regard,
almost without self, and yet
he chose one woman, instead of the others.

By knowing him, I get to know
the purity of the animal
which mates for life. Sometimes he is slightly
smiling, but mostly he just gazes at me gazing,
his entire face lit. I love
to see it change if I cry-there is no worry,
no pity, no graver radiance. If we
are on our backs, side by side,
with our faces turned fully to face each other,
I can hear a tear from my lower eye
hit the sheet, as if it is an early day on earth,
and then the upper eye's tears
braid and sluice down through the lower eyebrow
like the invention of farming, irrigation, a non-nomadic people.

I am so lucky that I can know him.
This is the only way to know him.
I am the only one who knows him.

When I wake again, he is still looking at me,
as if he is eternal. For an hour
we wake and doze, and slowly I know
that though we are sated, though we are hardly
touching, this is the coming the other
coming brought us to the edge of-we are entering,
deeper and deeper, gaze by gaze,
this place beyond the other places,
beyond the body itself, we are making
love.