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Barter

Sara Teasdale

Life has loveliness to sell,
All beautiful and splendid things,
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,
Soaring fire that sways and sings,
And children's faces looking up
Holding wonder in a cup.

Life has loveliness to sell,
Music like a curve of gold,
Scent of pine trees in the rain,
Eyes that love you, arms that hold,
And for your spirit's still delight,
Holy thoughts that star the night.

Spend all you have for loveliness,
Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
Count many a year of strife well lost,
And for a breath of ecstasy
Give all you have been, or could be. †

Casey at the Bat

Ernest Lawrence Thayer

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day:
The score stood four to two, with but one inning more to play,
And then when Cooney died at first, and Barrows did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go in deep despair. The rest
Clung to the hope which springs eternal in the human breast;
They thought, "If only Casey could but get a whack at that—
We'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat."

But Flynn preceded Casey, as did also Jimmy Blake,
And the former was a hoodoo, while the latter was a cake;
So upon that stricken multitude grim melancholy sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a single, to the wonderment of all,
And Blake, the much despised, tore the cover off the ball;
And when the dust had lifted, and men saw what had occurred,
There was Jimmy safe at second and Flynn a-hugging third.

Then from five thousand throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
It rumbled through the valley, it rattled in the dell;
It pounded on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat,
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile lit Casey's face.
And when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt;
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance flashed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped—
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore;
“Kill him! Kill the umpire!” shouted someone on the stand;
And it’s likely they’d have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey’s visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun sphere flew;
But Casey still ignored it and the umpire said, “Strike two!”

“Fraud!” cried the maddened thousands, and echo answered “Fraud!”
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn’t let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey’s lip, his teeth are clenched in hate,
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate;
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey’s blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favoured land the sun is shining bright,
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light;
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,
But there is no joy in Mudville—mighty Casey has struck out. †

The Creation

James Weldon Johnson

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in
his hands,
And God rolled the light around in his
hands
Until he made the sun;
And he set that sun a-blazing in the
heavens.
And the light that was left from making the
sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and
stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his head,
And the earth was under his feet.

And God walked, and where he trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then he stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the
world
And he spat out the seven seas—
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings
flashed—
He clapped his hands, and the thunders
rolled—
And the waters above the earth came
down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of
the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around his shoulder.

Then God raised his arm and he waved his
hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And he said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop his hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
 And God looked around
 On all that he had made.
 He looked at his sun,
 And he looked at his moon,
 And he looked at his little stars;
 He looked on his world
 With all its living things,
 And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—
 On the side of a hill where he could think;
 By a deep, wide river he sat down;
 With his head in his hands,
 God thought and thought,
 Till he thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river

God scooped the clay;
 And by the bank of the river
 He kneeled him down;
 And there the great God Almighty
 Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
 Who flung the stars to the most far corner
 of the night,
 Who rounded the earth in the middle of his
 hand;
 This great God,
 Like a mammy bending over her baby,
 Kneeled down in the dust
 Toiling over a lump of clay
 Till he shaped it in is his own image;

 Then into it he blew the breath of life,
 And man became a living soul.
 Amen. Amen. †

The Crucifixion

James Weldon Johnson

Jesus, my gentle Jesus,
 Walking in the dark of the Garden --
 The Garden of Gethsemane,
 Saying to the three disciples:
 Sorrow is in my soul --
 Even unto death;
 Tarry ye here a little while,
 And watch with me.
 Jesus, my burdened Jesus,
 Praying in the dark of the Garden --
 The Garden of Gethsemane.
 Saying: Father,
 Oh, Father,
 This bitter cup,
 This bitter cup,
 Let it pass from me.
 Jesus, my sorrowing Jesus,
 The sweat like drops of blood upon his
 brow,
 Talking with his Father,
 While the three disciples slept,
 Saying: Father,
 Oh, Father,
 Not as I will,
 Not as I will,
 But let thy will be done.
 Oh, look at black-hearted Judas --
 Sneaking through the dark of the Garden
 --
 Leading his crucifying mob.
 Oh, God!
 Strike him down!
 Why don't you strike him down,
 Before he plants his traitor's kiss
 Upon my Jesus' cheek?
 And they take my blameless Jesus,
 And they drag him to the Governor,
 To the mighty Roman Governor.
 Great Pilate seated in his hall,--

Great Pilate on his judgment seat,
 Said: In this man I find no fault.
 I find no fault in him.
 And Pilate washed his hands.

But they cried out, saying:
 Crucify him!--
 Crucify him!--
 Crucify him!--
 His blood be on our heads.
 And they beat my loving Jesus,

They spit on my precious Jesus;
 They dressed him up in a purple robe,
 They put a crown of thorns upon his head,
 And they pressed it down --
 Oh, they pressed it down --
 And they mocked my sweet King Jesus.
 Up Golgotha's rugged road
 I see my Jesus go.
 I see him sink beneath the load,
 I see my drooping Jesus sink.
 And then they laid hold on Simon,
 Black Simon, yes, black Simon;
 They put the cross on Simon,
 And Simon bore the cross.
 On Calvary, on Calvary,
 They crucified my Jesus.
 They nailed him to the cruel tree,
 And the hammer!
 The hammer!
 The hammer!
 Rang through Jerusalem's streets.
 The hammer!
 The hammer!
 The hammer!
 Rang through Jerusalem's streets.
 Jesus, my lamb-like Jesus,
 Shivering as the nails go through his

hands;
 Jesus, my lamb-like Jesus,
 Shivering as the nails go through his feet.
 Jesus, my darling Jesus,
 Groaning as the Roman spear plunged in
 his side;
 Jesus, my darling Jesus,
 Groaning as the blood came spurting from
 his wound.
 Oh, look how they done my Jesus.
 Mary,
 Weeping Mary,
 Sees her poor little Jesus on the cross.
 Mary,
 Weeping Mary,
 Sees her sweet, baby Jesus on the cruel
 cross,
 Hanging between two thieves.
 And Jesus, my lonesome Jesus,
 Called out once more to his Father,
 Saying:

My God,
 My God,
 Why hast thou forsaken me?
 And he drooped his head and died.

And the veil of the temple was split in two,
 The midday sun refused to shine,
 The thunder rumbled and the lightning
 wrote
 An unknown language in the sky.
 What a day! Lord, what a day!
 When my blessed Jesus died.

Oh, I tremble, yes, I tremble,
 It causes me to tremble, tremble,
 When I think how Jesus died;
 Died on the steeps of Calvary,
 How Jesus died for sinners,
 Sinners like you and me. †

The Destruction of Sennacherib

George Gordon, Lord Byron

The Assyrians came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
and the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee,

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail;
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
And lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord! †

Do not go gentle into that good night

Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. †

From "Endymion," Book I

John Keats

A THING of beauty is a joy forever:
 Its loveliness increases; it will never
 Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
 A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
 Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. 5
 Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
 A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
 Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
 Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
 Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways 10
 Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
 Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
 From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
 Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
 For simple sheep; and such are daffodils 15
 With the green world they live in; and clear rills
 That for themselves a cooling covert make
 'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
 Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
 And such too is the grandeur of the dooms 20
 We have imagined for the mighty dead;
 All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
 An endless fountain of immortal drink,
 Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink. †

Forgetfulness

Billy Collins

The name of the author is the first to go
followed obediently by the title, the plot,
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,
never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor
decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,

something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember,
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river
whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall,
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.
No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart. †

The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes

PART ONE

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.
 The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.
 The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
 And the highwayman came riding—
 Riding—riding—
 The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,
 A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.
 They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.
 And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
 His pistol butts a-twinkle,
 His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.
 He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.
 He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
 But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked
 Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.
 His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,
 But he loved the landlord's daughter,
 The landlord's red-lipped daughter.
 Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

“One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,
 But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;
 Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
 Then look for me by moonlight,
 Watch for me by moonlight,
 I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way.”

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach her hand,
 But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face burnt like a brand
 As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;

And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
 (O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)
 Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the west.

PART TWO

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon;
 And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,
 When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,
 A red-coat troop came marching—
 Marching—marching—
 King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale instead.
 But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the foot of her narrow bed.
 Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!
 There was death at every window;
 And hell at one dark window;
 For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that he would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.
 They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast!
 "Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her. She heard the doomed man say—
 Look for me by moonlight;
 Watch for me by moonlight;
 I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!
 She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!
 They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years
 Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,
 Cold, on the stroke of midnight,
 The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.
 Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.
 She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;
 For the road lay bare in the moonlight;
 Blank and bare in the moonlight;
 And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horsehoofs ringing clear;
 Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?
 Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,

The highwayman came riding—
 Riding—riding—
 The red coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still.

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot, in the echoing night!
 Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.
 Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,
 Then her finger moved in the moonlight,
 Her musket shattered the moonlight,
 Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the west; he did not know who stood
 Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own blood!
 Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey to hear
 How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
 With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high.
 Blood red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat;
 When they shot him down on the highway,
 Down like a dog on the highway,
 And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch of lace at his throat.

. . .

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,
 When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
 When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
 A highwayman comes riding—
 Riding—riding—
 A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard.
 He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred.
 He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
 But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair. †

The House on the Hill

EA Robison

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one to-day
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

Why is it then we stray
Around the sunken sill?
They are all gone away,

And our poor fancy-play
For them is wasted skill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say. †

If

Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
 But make allowance for their doubting too;
 If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
 Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
 Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
 If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
 If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
 And treat those two impostors just the same;
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
 Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
 And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
 And lose, and start again at your beginnings
 And never breathe a word about your loss;
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you
 Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
 Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
 If all men count with you, but none too much;
 If you can fill the unforgiving minute
 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
 And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son! †

The Listeners

Walter De La Mare

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
 Knocking on the moonlit door;
 And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
 Of the forest's ferny floor:
 And a bird flew up out of the turret,
 Above the Traveller's head
 And he smote upon the door again a second time;
 'Is there anybody there?' he said.
 But no one descended to the Traveller;
 No head from the leaf-fringed sill
 Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
 Where he stood perplexed and still.
 But only a host of phantom listeners
 That dwelt in the lone house then
 Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
 To that voice from the world of men:
 Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
 That goes down to the empty hall,
 Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
 By the lonely Traveller's call.
 And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
 Their stillness answering his cry,
 While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
 'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
 For he suddenly smote on the door, even
 Louder, and lifted his head:—
 'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
 That I kept my word,' he said.
 Never the least stir made the listeners,
 Though every word he spake
 Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
 From the one man left awake:
 Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
 And the sound of iron on stone,
 And how the silence surged softly backward,
 When the plunging hoofs were gone. †

Love (III)

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning

If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":

Love said, "You shall be he."

"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,

I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame

Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"

"My dear, then I will serve."

"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."

So I did sit and eat. †

The New Colossus

Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” †

No Coward Soul Is Mine

Emily Bronte

No coward soul is mine,
 No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
 I see Heaven's glories shine,
 And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear.

O God within my breast,
 Almighty, ever-present Deity!
 Life, that in me has rest,
 As I, undying Life, have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds
 That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;
 Worthless as withered weeds,
 Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one
 Holding so fast by Thy infinity,
 So surely anchored on
 The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love
 Thy Spirit animates eternal years,
 Pervades and broods above,
 Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and moon were gone,
 And suns and universes ceased to be,
 And Thou wert left alone,
 Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,
 Nor atom that his might could render void:
 Thou -Thou art Being and Breath,
 And what Thou art may never be destroyed. †

One Art

Elizabeth Bishop

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster. †

On His Blindness

John Milton

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, least he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light deny'd,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his milde yoak, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o're Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and waite. †

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. †

Ozymandias

Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: `Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear –
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.' †

Paul Revere's Ride

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.
He said to his friend, "If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,--
One if by land, and two if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm."
Then he said "Good-night!" and with muffled
oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war;
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.
Meanwhile, his friend through alley and street
Wanders and watches, with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.
Then he climbed the tower of the Old North
Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the sombre rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade,--
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,

Where he paused to listen and look down
 A moment on the roofs of the town
 And the moonlight flowing over all.
 Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
 In their night encampment on the hill,
 Wrapped in silence so deep and still
 That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
 The watchful night-wind, as it went
 Creeping along from tent to tent,
 And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
 A moment only he feels the spell
 Of the place and the hour, and the secret
 dread
 Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
 For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
 On a shadowy something far away,
 Where the river widens to meet the bay,—
 A line of black that bends and floats
 On the rising tide like a bridge of boats.
 Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
 Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride
 On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
 Now he patted his horse's side,
 Now he gazed at the landscape far and near,
 Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,
 And turned and tightened his saddle girth;
 But mostly he watched with eager search
 The belfry tower of the Old North Church,
 As it rose above the graves on the hill,
 Lonely and spectral and sombre and still.
 And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
 A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
 He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
 But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
 A second lamp in the belfry burns.
 A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
 A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
 And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a
 spark
 Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet;
 That was all! And yet, through the gloom and
 the light,
 The fate of a nation was riding that night;
 And the spark struck out by that steed, in his

flight,
 Kindled the land into flame with its heat.
 He has left the village and mounted the steep,
 And beneath him, tranquil and broad and
 deep,
 Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
 And under the alders that skirt its edge,
 Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge,
 Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.
 It was twelve by the village clock
 When he crossed the bridge into Medford
 town.
 He heard the crowing of the cock,
 And the barking of the farmer's dog,
 And felt the damp of the river fog,
 That rises after the sun goes down.
 It was one by the village clock,
 When he galloped into Lexington.
 He saw the gilded weathercock
 Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
 And the meeting-house windows, black and
 bare,
 Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
 As if they already stood aghast
 At the bloody work they would look upon.
 It was two by the village clock,
 When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
 He heard the bleating of the flock,
 And the twitter of birds among the trees,
 And felt the breath of the morning breeze
 Blowing over the meadow brown.
 And one was safe and asleep in his bed
 Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
 Who that day would be lying dead,
 Pierced by a British musket ball.
 You know the rest. In the books you have
 read
 How the British Regulars fired and fled,---
 How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
 >From behind each fence and farmyard wall,
 Chasing the redcoats down the lane,
 Then crossing the fields to emerge again
 Under the trees at the turn of the road,
 And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,---
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo for evermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

†

The Road Goes Ever On (from The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings)

J R R Tolkien

Roads go ever ever on,
 Over rock and under tree,
 By caves where never sun has shone,
 By streams that never find the sea;
 Over snow by winter sown,
 And through the merry flowers of June,
 Over grass and over stone,
 And under mountains of the moon.

Roads go ever ever on
 Under cloud and under star,
 Yet feet that wandering have gone
 Turn at last to home afar.
 Eyes that fire and sword have seen
 And horror in the halls of stone
 Look at last on meadows green
 And trees and hills they long have known.

The Road goes ever on and on,
 Down from the door where it began.
 Now far ahead the Road has gone,
 And I must follow, if I can,
 Pursuing it with eager feet,
 Until it joins some larger way
 Where many paths and errands meet.
 And whither then? I cannot say.

The Road goes ever on and on
 Out from the door where it began.
 Now far ahead the Road has gone,
 Let others follow it who can!
 Let them a journey new begin,
 But I at last with weary feet
 Will turn towards the lighted inn,
 My evening-rest and sleep to meet. †

Sonnet

Elizabeth Bishop

I am in need of music that would flow
Over my fretful, feeling finger-tips,
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
A song to fall like water on my head,
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep. †

Spring and Fall

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Márgarét, áre you gríeving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you will weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrów's spríngs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It ís the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for. †

Stanzas

Emily Bronte

Often rebuked, yet always back returning
To those first feelings that were born with me,
And leaving busy chase of wealth and learning
For idle dreams of things that cannot be:

To-day, I will seek not the shadowy region;
Its unsustaining vastness waxes drear;
And visions rising, legion after legion,
Bring the unreal world too strangely near.

I'll walk, but not in old heroic traces,
And not in paths of high morality,
And not among the half-distinguished faces,
The clouded forms of long-past history.

I'll walk where my own nature would be leading:
It vexes me to choose another guide:
Where the gray flocks in ferny glens are feeding;
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side.

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?
More glory and more grief than I can tell:
The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell. †

The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The tide rises, the tide falls,
The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;
Along the sea-sands damp and brown
The traveller hastens toward the town,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Darkness settles on roofs and walls,
But the sea, the sea in the darkness calls;
The little waves, with their soft, white hands,
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

The morning breaks; the steeds in their stalls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveller to the shore,
And the tide rises, the tide falls. †

The Village Blacksmith

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Under a spreading chestnut-tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
You can hear his bellows blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,--rejoicing,--sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
Each evening sees it close
Something attempted, something done,
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
For the lesson thou hast taught!
Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought. †

The World

George Herbert

Love built a stately house, where Fortune
came,
And spinning fancies, she was heard to say
That her fine cobwebs did support the frame,
Whereas they were supported by the same;
But Wisdom quickly swept them all away.

The Pleasure came, who, liking not the fashion,
Began to make balconies, terraces,
Till she had weakened all by alteration;
But reverend laws, and many a proclamation
Reforméd all at length with menaces.

Then entered Sin, and with that sycamore
Whose leaves first sheltered man from drought
and dew,
Working and winding slyly evermore,
The inward walls and summers cleft and tore;
But Grace shored these, and cut that as it
grew.

Then Sin combined with death in a firm band,
To raze the building to the very floor;
Which they effected,--none could them
withstand;
But Love and Grace took Glory by the hand,
And built a braver palace than before. †