*It will all fit*

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*The Great Poet I*

The Great Poet writes in free verse.

Calculated and utterly precise,

But with an unmistakable flow,

A sense of making sense when there is no pattern,

Seemingly no point behind the structure.

A sentence ends here.

The line stops in the middle

Of a thought.

We wonder why, but all the while

Something within us recognizes that

What we see is mysteriously, unquestionably

Wonderful.

*Heaven*

At first, it was just my dad and a story,

A story so satisfying that I stopped him and asked to die.

He spoke of the seat of Everlasting,

A sunny castle of immortality

Surrounded by every perfect piece of potential,

All things presently impassable;

He spoke of Paradise.

From a thick, noted script he went on to teach

All the tales of true triumph,

Gotten in the great name of goodness.

But forever his first story followed me,

So that frequently I figured what form

That unimaginable majesty might take.

And as I grew out of thick-rimmed glasses and asthmatic gasps,

I started to grasp the ways in which such wonder

Would awaken my heart

And render my world no more than a wink and a grin

From a stranger selling secrets.

It was in dark mornings following deathly nights

When robins would arise and sing to me,

And only me,

That I had made it once more;

It was in that timeless moment

When sound ceased to insist itself

Among fallen and falling leaves,

Resting on a wind-felled tree;

It was through a drink from the spring

And a stop atop a mountain land beyond man;

It was in the relentlessly luxurious rains

And the immensely joyful shout of thunder

From its home high above and yet so near;

It is in seeing the leaf- and feather-filtered sunlight

Speckled on the forest floor

That my soul surrenders, somersaults and sacrifices itself

To the knowledge that this,

Finally,

Must be what Heaven looks like.

*Itch*

There’s an itch in my heart,

A need that flows through

All that is my being

That won’t fail to insist.

A swell of soul has been steadily building,

Fed by torrents of life and passion,

Until, at glorious last,

The whispered threat is carried out

With a magnificently uncontrollable violence.

The stores break free,

And the liberation of all the shades

God has dramatically and masterfully painted me

Are set free to flow through

Some few fortunate pages

Like the deep, majestic azure

That beats out of each of our chests;

A color only hinted at

And inevitably forgotten

When brought to light

As the brightly dark ribbon of scarlet

We know so well.

But be it adulterated and even ignored,

The truth yet tells itself,

Keeps confident in its constancy:

All that we perceive

Can only a hint be of the true essence

From which spills both blood and ink.

*For Quintilian*

A few soft words can do so much.

Think about how you can put a handful together

And perhaps on the page you see:

“I may only marvel at the glory of this meadow.

The sway of wild oat as it feels me out,

The speckle of muted lavender wildflowers;

Their subtlety sings my spirit.”

And when those words come together just so,

Just so many in a certain order,

Your heart flutters.

This is how I know that words are alive,

On paper and in my soul.

*Little boy*

Who am I to write these words?

Whose words are these that act as though

They’ve sprouted of my own garden,

When their origin is no more rooted in me

Than I am rooted in this world?

I write so much on ideas about which

My writing can do nothing but serve

As a testament to my own profound ignorance.

The words are gifts,

Given not to me,

But to language and those who use it;

I interpret and diminish their dignity,

But yet somehow they find their way

Out of my consciousness

To explore the whites of pages.

I worry, not that I might be insincere,

But that in my most honest attempt

To convey the messages God leaves in my soul,

That they might be twisted and gnarled

From the beauty I feel invested in me,

Torn into mangled, once-sought-after things;

Bastard texts; meaning misspoken.

He gives me glory and asks me to relate it.

I’m not Ezekiel; I’m not some Moses,

Weighted by the fate of his people.

I’m just a little boy,

Afraid of the world.

*The Great Poet II*

There are no restrictions to a writer of free verse.

Braiding words into beauty,

Weaving braids into meaning,

The newly woven article wraps itself around us,

Becomes us.

Or it becomes the world around us;

The butterfly settling on the tips of fingers.

*Miracle*

I'd never seen anything like it the first time the rain came.

We were winding our way back home,

A careless caravan of ignorant white kids

Kicking up the dust of a dying land,

Not noticing when knowing locals were careening from too full skies.

The elephant skin paths had us meandering when the trickles first tickled our shoulders.

We stopped then to delight in this heat's reprieve

But soon we could see that this would be like nothing we had ever known.

We ran home, our laughter lost in the patter of drops on our shoulders,

Our heels on hard earth.

By the time we made it back, we were beyond salvage,

Lost in love with the torrent,

Praying that it might live forever,

As if Heaven were nothing more than an African plain trapped beneath passionate clouds.

We let the rush carry us into the courtyard

And accepted with overwhelming joy every offering lost of the sky.

We all danced that night to the rhythm of the rain,

Musicless movements mirroring the magic in those moments.

We jumped and spun, we ran, we lay, we lived.

Caught in a miracle, we fell into the sweetest madness,

Dripping wet with the love of the Lord.

*The first morning*

A gush of water glides across the Earth,

And tiny trickles fall off the sides of rocks,

Making the most pleasing sound you could imagine.

It gathers over each inch of the Earth

As God wills,

And everywhere it passes,

Its mark is left,

Carrying away bits of the land

But in its place leaving life.

A new life created,

Making meaning of the path left,

The feeling out of a flawed land.

The water was always going to come,

And only where it unites with the Earth,

Smoothing out rocks and shaping scapes,

Only here does it make sense.

And though a streambed may dry,

A mark will always remain,

The beauty forever remembered

By the Earth and the water.

*How much more lovely?*

How much more lovely,

The dull gray block upon which we walk

When interrupted, broken and torn at the corners,

Showing instead a patch of earth,

Shoving through,

Draping itself in fine brown and green moss?

How much more lovely,

These old red bricks,

Found ever framed by oak and beech and cherry,

At times dressed in fall’s evening gown

Or, later, the trusting nudity of winter?

How much more lovely,

To walk out of your door and bid good morning

First to the walnuts and maples

Because the sun is still struggling

To make his way through their loving arms

And the dreamy haze of promise

That accompanies each new day?

How much more lovely,

To live a life of faith

And to know that you have seen your god,

In the snowflake who falls alone

To rest on her bare cheek;

In the first blossoming poppy of Spring,

Vibrant, alive and loud;

In his wild brothers and sisters?

How much more lovely,

To know that you have seen your god

As you traced the stars

From the horizon across the sky

And felt the loving bite

Of the cold night air

In the midst of a respite from some fearful world?

How much more lovely?

*Blue Dam, my childhood*

Here, happiness lives, grows alongside the trees.

Here is so much of my childhood,

All of who I am.

It is in itself a place of magic,

Cut from this world,

Pasted into

The world of each of its visitors.

Its plants produce beauty as much as air,

And while there,

We learn to breathe this new life

In place of the old.

Mercifully, we can then live in our worlds

As beings who thrive on extraordinary images,

Whose pulses send love and the very land through our veins.

And when we leave and collect ourselves in the great world,

What’s left in our hearts changes our eyes,

And our troubles aren’t so bad.

*With acorns underfoot*

With acorns underfoot

I step along this life.

Though I loathe to crush

Such an unlit wick of life,

I would find unbearable

Such a path as was not surrounded

By these little wisps of life,

Any land not so full of root and branch

That to avoid such a mishap

As to falsely sow a seed

Could even be a reasonable hope.

For roots of steel and skin of stone

Conduce no pulse.

No flow of living

May pass through such matter.

True, we may walk about surrounded

By such structure,

But can you not feel that

Seeping, sinking of soul

As so cold a set of walls

Seeks ever in its hopeless quest

To gain some of that spring

Which trickles through and out of each of us?

No, I’ll believe until I die

That I’d rather risk less-resilient life

Than go on for a beat of my heart

In a void of it.

*The sowing*

A seed trembles, tumbles,

Finds a soft spot on the ground,

And the whole Earth takes notice.

The soil saturates its new child,

Rocks shift as nutrients pass by.

Plants all around lean in,

Crowding the future home of their newfound friend

Once he’s gained the courage to emerge

From his mossy womb,

Showing first a head,

And then shoulders

As his branches break free in new birth.

The trees overhead sigh with relief,

The robin rejoices,

God smiles,

And we, at our thousand tasks, are blind.

*The Great Poet III*

The free verse takes on any image the Great Poet chooses,

Depicting images, sounds, conflict.

For conflict, too, finds home in free verse.

Dissonance not only in rhythm,

But in picture, in meaning, in action;

It disrupts and unsettles.

*Green*

Life lives in me.

It is in my being that the sun finds factory,

That the process of existence proceeds.

I am ever-moving, always propelling,

Providing the means yet being an end,

Because I am life.

And yet in my fullness,

Something is lacking,

For simply by living here,

I cut short my life there.

The factory that I am

Tears me from my home;

The left hand attacks the right.

Progress is made, or so they say,

But then who am I to argue?

I, who insist on my own existence as pure life,

Surely must give in

And let myself die,

That I may live.

True, that I may live is no guarantee,

Not in this form—

But I adapt, I change, I cannibalize myself

And yet I know there is no answer,

Only to give in and let life live,

Even to my own detriment.

Maybe— to the fulfillment of myself.

*In love with the moon*

Out where water is more black than green

There is a strange pull.

Unconscious ounces join in a common goal:

They will meet this call.

A mystery attraction, what is becoming one body

Knows not its source.

A mass takes shape, looks for perfection in itself,

As in the eyes of such as this, this pull.

Having taken shape, this new form is on his way.

Pushing, tearing, forcing his way through,

He has but one sight, one aim:

He must answer to she who calls him.

His effort soon takes him over, brings him ever closer, til,

In a desperate climax of all that he is,

He recognizes a body, distant, it would seem, as the stars.

This pitiful soul, seeing only now that his pilgrimage is impossible,

Has no more to give.

For how could the moon ever love one as simple as he?

There is nothing left but for him to collapse,

Falling violently into himself in a display of perfect power.

All that remains is a thin foam skimming the surface of the water

Which is soon swallowed by others answering the same call.

The moon stares on unimpressed,

Consumed in her own longing.

But how could the sun ever love one as simple as she?

*Our song*

Our song began abruptly

And we were cast into the chorus

Before sufficient chords

Could create any sort of state

In which we could safely

Cast ourselves out into that

Climate of sound.

But captives as we were,

Of that piece of soul that God

Only plucks at during those few

Near-perfect hints of eternity,

That lotus chorus drew us in

And we fell so hard

That it didn’t occur to us to stand.

Disoriented, we found ourselves flung forward and,

Still astounded by the beauty of before,

We began to sing different verses of the same song.

And all fell apart.

*The sweetest discord*

I know you’re not asking,

But the answer is yes.

I know it’s passed,

But why not daydream?

After all, I’ve always believed

Loveliness in this world to be born of flaws,

So maybe our failure

Is the perfect foundation

Of a hopeless beauty,

A loss craved and reflected on.

Perfect by its very nature,

Necessary to show me

That I’m worthy of being invested in

Such that some success

Might even have been a potential.

The denial of that potential

Proves that you knew and I knew

That there was no sure union,

And though I throw myself willingly

Into such uncertainties with whimsy,

You, as guarded as you seem to be,

And to have been to me,

Let me in,

If even just to the foyer of your heart,

If even just for a quick foray into young passions,

Knowing that I might betray your trust

As easily as I would not be perfect for you.

Or, perhaps even the greater betrayal,

That I would not be imperfect for you.

That we would have been less than each other and so united,

What fairness could have lived in our mutual imperfections,

The sweetest discord together.

*Love in the cold*

Laughing and rolling on heartless winter earth,

We mock its dark cold,

Letting love lock us together,

A soft shackle born not just

In spite of the land’s lovelessness,

But even because of it.

So steading our frozen bed,

The tether tightens and we’re nearly too close to contain.

Resting alongside you,

Content comes too quick,

For soon I’m sleepless with excitement,

Too eager to awake to your tender feel

To allow dreams to truly take over,

And so I can only pretend while you breathe next to me,

Wondering if you, too, are lying, laying.

And though sleep stays locked away,

The moment when first

Dawn allows us to acknowledge each other’s existence once more,

Breathlessness cannot describe the void of all being into which we enter.

We spend days here,

The chains ever tightening,

And us too fallen to notice, to care.

It happens to us,

But we welcome it with love-stained eyes.

*The hallway*

I open up doors I’ve never seen

And stand in the hallway,

Looking at all the rooms

But too scared to commit myself

To walking into any one of them.

I like that each room is different,

That when I walk into one

I might find a different me in the mirror.

But I know that if I spend too much time

Toiling in one,

Others will get smaller,

Harder to pass through.

So instead I stay in the hallway,

Content not to know.

*The Great Poet IV*

The poem is making less sense.

The meaning hides behind walls of confusion,

Blocks of questions.

How does this fit?

The Great Poet subtly seems

To have let the poem run ahead of his thoughts.

He’s losing control; some quit reading.

Either the poem writes the Poet,

Or the work of the Poet is too complex.

Whichever it is, nothing makes sense.

There’s no longer any flow,

The images are not concrete.

There is no solid.

But some read on.

Confused they may be,

But they press ahead,

Filled with a strange sense that somehow it will all fit.

*Monster*

Uncertainty,

My oldest friend, my most skillful tormentor,

His home is neither wood nor stone,

But coercion;

Its foundation is of hope,

Its rafters fear.

His heart, a shocking duality.

I feel today that he is a monster.

He makes tomorrow a threat,

Shuts the world from my mind

By explaining, using examples,

That trust is a fool’s game.

He turns opportunity to risk,

Pushes me into my past.

And then, to make true his teaching,

Or perhaps to punish me for expressing

His eternal paradox through my lack of faith

In his word, he turns.

He becomes excitement, potentiality;

He becomes choice, so I that I may

Walk down any one of seventy paths.

He speaks of generosity amid extravagance,

Love within communities of hate;

He speaks of the type of adventure

Which is thirsted for in the soul

And truly can only arise out of one’s own

Ignorance of its existence.

He feeds me possibility—tinged with poison.

And so when I’m left for hours

Clutching a toilet made of certainty,

Dribbling the dreams that had sustained me,

I remember his warnings,

The fear of him he had

Worked so hard to instill in me,

His Machiavellian lesson pinned to my heart.

I acknowledge him and his teachings,

Though I know his pedagogy is of contradiction,

Even in reply to doubt.

Is he so truly insidious, and I so dependent,

So weak of will

That I still hold so desperately to him

After all he’s done?

Pathetically, I might think that I can’t say no,

So surely is his theory woven into my mind.

But that’s not entirely true.

Unbeknownst to him,

His lessons have finally become so many

That they’ve turned on him.

For I’ve learned that I can accept his treachery

And reject his offerings of fear,

And I can find life in the opportunities he lays before me,

So many that they overwhelm even him;

Too many to stifle.

You see,

Had I been certain,

I would not have become a poet.

I would not have explored my country and others

In search of poverty, healing, beauty,

And what it means to be alive.

There would have been no first kiss,

No nights comforted by a pulsing warmth at my side,

Moments made more lovely by the darkness surrounding;

There would have been no love.

There would have been no reason for me

To question the birth of the stars,

No need for a savior that I so deeply love,

No spiritual crisis whose final resolve

Made my faith so much stronger than the ore

As which it had begun.

You see, I need uncertainty.

For if I could ever be certain of one idea,

It would be that certainty,

That this false protector,

In his grand and yet inexplicably subtle exclusiveness,

Is far more dangerous.

*My heart, my future*

What my future holds, I will never know;

Whether a loan or some adventure

Will leave me fall’s leaf

Or the heart of an oak.

Many decisions are in front of me,

So many have been strewn in my wake.

Had I known the impact of one here, another there;

I wonder who and what I would be.

Maybe a Chicago subway would seat me regardless.

It’s true that I believe a path has been set before me

Which I am bound to follow,

But only because there is One

Who knows and has known

What decisions I would be faced with,

What veins I would break off into.

Surely a heart pumps blood out,

And though there is knowledge

That life will flow to each end of my flesh,

And though, yes, the heart does send,

None but each cell forks left or right,

For one end or the other.

I have reached many forks,

And many are newly reaching me.

Whichever way I will go,

Nobody can know but He.

So I’ll trust and think and pray in earnest,

Until sweat drops like blood from my face;

Until I go with whatever doubt,

Having chosen for myself

What I believe is good.

*Driven*

Upon this path,

Do I strive smartly forward,

Or am I led?

Is it hope that lifts each foot

One step further,

Or a voice that calls to me?

Am I drug, captive,

Or do I cheerfully stride down a cherished swath?

Truly, I am forced,

A slave to my master.

And my master is passion.

My master is responsibility.

I am a slave to a thirst that could never be sated,

A thirst to help,

To change the world

By changing people.

I am a slave to a different kind of greatness,

The kind where at the end of a long week,

I can at last rest my feet,

Sore from a long walk

Down a path not chosen,

And know that good has been done.

*Avalanche*

But a shout,

And a whole mountain is thrust into motion.

Rock, snow, plant;

All thrash angrily against their brothers

With a boiling, blind malevolence; bliss.

A void of order,

Where only truth can remain.

Will is tested and torn

Until once-timid ideals,

Sheltered by winter’s coat,

Are made accountable.

Only the noblest withstand,

Unconquerable more now than ever before.

Only having been tested

Do they turn outward the test,

So that all who visit this memorial

To a landscape once known so well

Can look and see

That it is these few ramparts

Left to watch over the soul of the mountain

That have always been,

And will always be

Not merely the reason such a mountain still exists,

But the reason it ever entered into

Such a hateful world at all.

These are the purest of the mountain,

Purpose for eternity.

*I think I met an angel*

I think I met an angel.

She didn’t look like

What I thought an angel

Should look like.

She didn’t act like

What I thought an angel

Should act like.

She was beautiful,

But flawed.

I’m not sure yet,

And I may never be,

But I think her beauty

Made its home in each imperfection.

She didn’t utter precision,

She wasn’t free from mistake,

She wore no wings.

But she was in love

With every person

And with every creature

On Earth.

I’m not sure yet,

And I may never be,

But I think I loved her for it.

It’s not that I was trying to say thank you

In the name of the world.

I just couldn’t resist a love

So pure.

She wasn’t worried.

She loved God.

I’m not sure yet,

And I may never be,

But I think she changed my life.

*An apology*

To those whose love has been

Lost among the lines of my poetry,

Heard in your own voice

Or, at best, my recitation,

Please accept my apology.

I know that this form is so much less true;

Poetry is a vain exercise,

An attempt to find a way to say simple thoughts

In a pretty way.

How then can I not corrupt my intentions?

I spare those moments of spoken feeling,

I fear what my untrained lips may loose,

And only when logic and my pen have shown me

My best expression

Do I confront you, indirectly,

With how much I care

—And how eloquent I must be.

And so wholly has the poem

Set its foundation in my heart,

That even now I contradict myself.

Please accept my apology.

Were I more courageous,

It wouldn’t be just now that

A message so simple finds its way from my soul

To wherever you may now be:

I love you.

*The Great Poet V*

Then they come to the end.

The work in free verse comes to a halt.

Some readers find it jagged;

Others are impressed by its softness.

Quickly, now that they have reached the end,

They look back over the free verse.

The interruptions of style and sense,

The valleys of energy and emotion—

Now, having reached the end,

We realized why we always read on.

The free verse conceals much,

But it cannot do this:

Hide its own brilliance

And the beauty of the Great Poet

From those who earnestly seek it out,

All the way

To the last

Line.

*Concentricity*

Concentric circles radiate influences

Over the influencing power of singular events,

Spiraling out of control,

But not down.

Growth: delirious, a prairie fire,

Its reach ever widening.

Passing

Through other concentricities

Without a sound,

Hardly a disruption at all.

Perfect circles,

Perfection in three hundred and sixty points,

Beautiful in the

Impact.

One pebble thrown,

One leaf fallen,

And a glass world is shattered.

Aftershocks pass through,

Nothing is the same.

And here I sit,

Finally seeing them for what they are, these

Concentricities.

*Moments in a life*

A moment passed cannot be re-grasped;

We can only take what we have learned

And move ahead.

The sadness of a time lost

Is outshone by the glory

Of its application to the rest of life.

It will magnify the meaning of the moment

A hundred-fold.

*The blacksmith*

What hammer did you use to flatten me into this shape?

And have you ever stopped hammering, or do you pound yet?

Is my form still white hot, yielding to your expert manipulation?

This I truly hope, for surely I will never be just right.

And had I one wish, it would be to ever improve the steel of my being.

Yes, throw me in the water so that I might be a tool in your hands,

But I beg you, every chance you get, to thrust me back into the fire.

Please, hold me down and beat every flaw out of me

That my mettle can withstand at once

So that I might come off of the anvil more useful;

For what better purpose is there for a tool

Than to be useful in the hands of its master?

As for what use, you know better than I what it should be

And even if I must be melted all the way down

And made into a new shape entirely,

I will embrace the embers and the hammer as good friends.

Allow me to plow the fields, making right the land for your purposes.

Let me be a sword to stay your enemies.

Or, should my material ever be deemed worthy,

What joy to be your hammer!

To know that my purpose is to form other shapes by your hands;

Between me and your anvil, your will would take form.

I know not whether I might be enough for so high a purpose,

And yet, what do I know but that you can make any shape of me

And in your hands I can accomplish any task;

There is no work that I do, but only the work done by you through me.

And now I remember my initial question and it seems obvious:

Though I may have felt their pressure briefly or my whole life,

Though I may have known well or not at all those objects pressed upon me,

Though I may have been stung by flaws in their surfaces or coaxed by their roundness,

I can see now easily all those who in my life have spent time in your hands

While I struggled between anvil and these.

*The next time you read this, I’ll be with you*

The next time you read this,

I’ll be with you.

I’ll be with you still.

For though you think my heart

Must lie in some other world,

I can go on only knowing that

It might feel the rise of your chest

At every fresh, living breath.

So while I wander this wonderful new world,

I’ll marvel at each fresh glory,

And think to myself,

“You would love this, of all people.”

Oh, I am delighting always.

I simply bring you along.

So the next time you read this,

You’ll be with me.

When in Spring you walk down

Aisles of cherry trees,

Some petals may fall on your shoulders

As they did mine when last we walked

This path together.

And when snow falls and you can’t bear

To mar the frozen fields with even a single footprint,

Think of our silent fights over

Who would be first to flaw

Such a lovely landscape,

Each of us watching out of corners of eyes

For the other to step outside.

But just know that while my feet

May not walk alongside yours,

And though your hand I may not take,

Still remains each moment we’ve shared.

Know that they are more than any distance,

And the next time you read this,

I’ll be with you.