

### **I Saw in Louisiana A Live-Oak Growing**

I saw in Louisiana a live-oak growing,  
All alone stood it and the moss hung down from the branches,  
Without any companion it grew there uttering joyous leaves of dark green,  
And its look, rude, unbending, lusty, made me think of myself,  
But I wonder'd how it could utter joyous leaves standing alone there without its friend  
    near, for I knew I could not,  
And I broke off a twig with a certain number of leaves upon it, and twined around it a  
    little moss,  
And brought it away, and I have placed it in sight in my room,  
It is not needed to remind me as of my own dear friends,  
(For I believe lately I think of little else than of them,)  
Yet it remains to me a curious token, it makes me think of manly love;  
For all that, and though the live-oak glistens there in Louisiana solitary in a wide flat space,  
Uttering joyous leaves all its life without a friend a lover near,  
I know very well I could not.

—Walt Whitman

I tried to think a lonelier Thing  
Than any I had seen —  
Some Polar Expiation — An Omen in the Bone  
Of Death's tremendous nearness —

I probed Retrieveless things  
My Duplicate — to borrow —  
A Haggard Comfort springs

From the belief that Somewhere —  
Within the Clutch of Thought —  
There dwells one other Creature  
Of Heavenly Love — forgot —

I plucked at our Partition  
As One should pry the Walls —  
Between Himself — and Horror's Twin —  
Within Opposing Cells —

I almost strove to clasp his Hand,  
Such Luxury — it grew —  
That as Myself — could pity Him —  
Perhaps he — pitied me —

—Emily Dickinson

## **Danse Russe**

If I when my wife is sleeping  
and the baby and Kathleen  
are sleeping  
and the sun is a flame-white disc  
in silken mists  
above shining trees,—  
if I in my north room  
dance naked, grotesquely  
before my mirror  
waving my shirt round my head  
and singing softly to myself:  
“I am lonely, lonely.  
I was born to be lonely,  
I am best so!”  
If I admire my arms, my face,  
my shoulders, flanks, buttocks  
against the yellow drawn shades,—

Who shall say I am not  
the happy genius of my household?

—William Carlos Williams

## Vers de Société

*My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps  
To come and waste their time and ours: perhaps  
You'd care to join us? In a pig's arse, friend.  
Day comes to an end.  
The gas fire breathes, the trees are darkly swayed.  
And so Dear Warlock-Williams: I'm afraid—*

Funny how hard it is to be alone.  
I could spend half my evenings, if I wanted,  
Holding a glass of washing sherry, canted  
Over to catch the drivel of some bitch  
Who's read nothing but *Which*;  
Just think of all the spare time that has flown

Straight into nothingness by being filled  
With forks and faces, rather than repaid  
Under a lamp, hearing the noise of wind,  
And looking out to see the moon thinned  
To an air-sharpened blade.  
A life, and yet how sternly it's instilled

*All solitude is selfish.* No one now  
Believes the hermit with his gown and dish  
Talking to God (who's gone too); the big wish  
Is to have people nice to you, which means  
Doing it back somehow.  
*Virtue is social.* Are, then, these routines

Playing at goodness, like going to church?  
Something that bores us, something we don't do well  
(Asking that ass about his fool research)  
But try to feel, because, however crudely,  
It shows us what should be?  
Too subtle, that. Too decent, too. Oh hell,

Only the young can be alone freely.  
The time is shorter now for company,  
And sitting by a lamp more often brings  
Not peace, but other things.  
Beyond the light stand failure and remorse  
Whispering Dear Warlock-Williams: *Why, of course—*

—Philip Larkin

## Deeply Morbid

Deeply morbid deeply morbid was the girl who typed the letters  
Always out of office hours running with her social betters  
But when daylight and the darkness of the office closed about her  
Not for this ah not for this her office colleagues came to doubt her  
It was that look within her eye  
Why did it always seem to say goodbye?

Joan her name was and at lunchtime  
Solitary solitary  
She would go and watch the pictures  
In the National Gallery  
All alone all alone  
This time with no friend beside her  
She would go and watch the pictures  
All alone.

Will she leave her office colleagues  
Will she leave her evening pleasures  
Toil within a friendly bureau  
Running later in her leisure?  
All alone all alone  
Before the pictures she seems turned to stone.

Close upon the Turner pictures  
Closer than a thought may go  
Hangs her eye and all the colours  
Leap into a special glow  
All for her, all alone  
All for her, all for Joan.

First the canvas where the ocean  
Like a mighty animal  
With a really wicked motion  
Leaps for sailors' funeral

Holds her panting. Oh the creature  
Oh the wicked virile thing  
With its skin of fleck and shadow  
Stretching tightening over him.  
Wild yet captured wild yet captured  
By the painter, Joan is quite enraptured.

Now she edges from the canvas  
To another loved more dearly  
Where the awful light of purest

Sunshine falls across the spray,  
There the burning coasts of fancy  
Open to her pleasure lay.  
All alone, all alone  
Come away, come away  
All alone.

Lady Mary, Lady Kitty  
The Honourable Featherstonehaugh  
Polly Tommy from the office  
Which of these shall hold her now?  
Come away, come away  
All alone.

The spray reached out and sucked her in  
It was a hardly noticed thing  
That Joan was there and is not now  
(Oh go and tell young Featherstonehaugh)  
Gone away, gone away  
All alone.

She stood up straight  
The sun fell down  
There was no more of London Town  
She went upon the painted shore  
And there she walks for ever more  
Happy quite  
Beaming bright  
In a happy happy light  
All alone.

They say she was a morbid girl, no doubt of it  
And what befell her clearly grew out of it  
But I say she's a lucky one  
To walk for ever in that sun  
And as I bless sweet Turner's name  
I wish that I could do the same.

—Stevie Smith

## **The Copper Beech**

Immense, entirely itself,  
it wore that yard like a dress,  
  
with limbs low enough for me to enter it  
and climb the crooked ladder to where  
  
I could lean against the trunk and practice being alone.  
  
One day, I heard the sound before I saw it, rain fell  
darkening the sidewalk.  
  
Sitting close to the center, not very high in the branches,  
I heard it hitting the high leaves, and I was happy,  
  
watching it happen without it happening to me.

—Marie Howe