When I consider how my light is spent,

Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,

And that one talent which is death to hide

Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my maker, and present

My true account, lest he returning chide;

“Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?”

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 mild yoke, they serve him best, his state

Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed

And post o’er land and ocean without rest:

They also serve who only stand and wait.”

—John Milton

**A Broken Appointment**

You did not come,

And marching Time drew on, and wore me numb,—

Yet less for loss of your dear presence there

Than that I thus found lacking in your make

That high compassion which can overbear

Reluctance for pure lovingkindness’ sake

Grieved I, when, as the hope-hour stroked its sum,

You did not come.

You love not me,

And love alone can lend you loyalty;

—I know and knew it. But, unto the store

Of human deeds divine in all but name,

Was it not worth a little hour or more

To add yet this: Once you, a woman, came

To soothe a time-torn man; even though it be

You love not me?

—Thomas Hardy

**Waiting for a Poem**

You can see the jonquil follow the sun

if you do not watch it. I spent one summer

trying to catch the tide’s turn, saw it

after I left. What I did not say grows

loud in memory. My second visit to the Arctic

came between the first and second operation

when I did not wake. When I draw, my pen

reveals what I have not seen. Sometimes

I put down the telephone and walk away.

When I return I know what he has said,

and answer. At night the window reflects

what is inside. When I was fourteen,

camping in the woods, I heard the moose

charge from the lake. I knew he would

run over me and I would never suffer

his weight. Once I looked up to see

the great oak crash. I knew the surf

of leaves would fall, then rise, knew

how birds would celebrate fear. Each morning

I accept the permanence of the granite

ledge outside my study window, then

when my eye followed a squirrel, high

on a branch, stepping out on air, I saw

the ledge gently rise. I hear silence

when it rises between the notes of a song,

perhaps Schubert’s, perhaps Grandma’s hymn

still curled in my ear. I intrude

on the privacy of roots, find my way down

into darkness, grow between rock and ledge,

seek dampness, the fellowship of worms,

the hanging on when wind sings through leaves,

and even the vast trunk bends.

—Donald M. Murray

**Wait**

Wait, for now.

Distrust everything if you have to.

But trust the hours. Haven’t they

carried you everywhere, up to now?

Personal events will become interesting again.

Hair will become interesting.

Pain will become interesting.

Buds that open out of season will become interesting.

Second-hand gloves will become lovely again;

their memories are what give them

the need for other hands. The desolation

of lovers is the same: that enormous emptiness

carved out of such tiny beings as we are

asks to be filled; the need

for the new love *is* faithfulness to the old.

Wait.

Don’t go too early.

You’re tired. But everyone’s tired.

But no one is tired enough.

Only wait a little and listen:

music of hair,

music of pain,

music of looms weaving our loves again.

Be there to hear it, it will be the only time,

most of all to hear your whole existence,

rehearsed by the sorrows, play itself into total exhaustion.

—Galway Kinnell

**The Shut-In**

Good of them, all told, to leave me locked  
inside my favourite hour: the whole one early  
I came to wait for one I loved too dearly  
in this coffered snug below the viaduct  
with my dark vernacular ale, Stevenson’s  
short fiction, and the little game I played  
of not thinking of her, except to thumb away  
the exquisite stitch that gathers at my breastbone.

The minute hand strains at its lengthening tether  
like Achilles on the hare; the luscious beer  
refills; the millionth page flowers on the last  
of *The Bottle Imp*… O Fathers, leave me here,  
beyond the night, the stars, beyond the vast  
infinitesimal letdown of each other!

—Don Paterson