

‘I cannot live with You’

I cannot live with You –
It would be Life –
And Life is over there –
Behind the Shelf

The Sexton keeps the Key to –
Putting up
Our Life – His Porcelain –
Like a Cup –

Discarded of the Housewife –
Quaint – or Broke –
A newer Sevres pleases –
Old Ones crack –

I could not die – with You –
For One must wait
To shut the Other’s Gaze down –
You – could not –

And I – could I stand by
And see You – freeze –
Without my Right of Frost –
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise – with You –
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus’ –
That New Grace

Glow plain – and foreign
On my homesick Eye –
Except that You than He
Shone closer by –

They’d judge Us – How –
For You – served Heaven – You know,
Or sought to –
I could not –

Because You saturated Sight –
And I had no more Eyes
For sordid excellence
As Paradise

And were You lost, I would be –
Though My Name
Rang loudest
On the Heavenly fame –

And were You – saved –
And I – condemned to be
Where You were not –
That self – were Hell to Me –

So We must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair –

—Emily Dickinson

A Blessing in Disguise

Yes, they are alive and can have those colors,
But I, in my soul, am alive too.
I feel I must sing and dance, to tell
Of this in a way, that knowing you may be drawn to me.
And I sing amid despair and isolation
Of the chance to know you, to sing of me
Which are you. You see,
You hold me up to the light in a way
I should never have expected, or suspected, perhaps
Because you always tell me I am you,
And right. The great spruces loom.
I am yours to die with, to desire.
I cannot ever think of me, I desire you
For a room in which the chairs ever
Have their backs turned to the light
Inflicted on the stone and paths, the real trees
That seem to shine at me through a lattice toward you.
If the wild light of this January day is true
I pledge me to be truthful unto you
Whom I cannot ever stop remembering.
Remembering to forgive. Remember to pass beyond you into the day
On the wings of the secret you will never know.
Taking me from myself, in the path
Which the pastel girth of the day has assigned to me.
I prefer “you” in the plural, I want “you”
You must come to me, all golden and pale
Like the dew and the air.
And then I start getting this feeling of exaltation.

—John Ashbery

To Various Persons Talked To All At Once

You have helped hold me together.
I'd like you to be still.
Stop talking or doing anything else for a minute.
No. Please. For three minutes, maybe five minutes.
Tell me which walk to take over the hill.
Is there a bridge there? Will I want company?
Tell me about the old people who built the bridge.
What is "the Japanese economy"?
Where did you hide the doctor's bills?
How much I admire you!
Can you help me to take this off?
May I help you to take that off?
Are you finished with this item?
Who is the car salesman?
The canopy we had made for the dog.
I need some endless embracing.
The ocean's not really very far.
Did you come west in this weather?
I've been sitting at home with my shoes off.
You're wearing a cross!
That bench, look! Under it are some puppies!
Could I have just one little shot of Scotch?
I suppose I wanted to impress you.
It's snowing.
The Revlon Man has come from across the sea.
This racket is annoying.
We didn't want the baby to come here because of the hawk.
What are you reading?
In what style would you like the humidity to explain?
I care, but not much. You can smoke a cigar.
Genuineness isn't a word I'd ever use.
Say, what a short skirt! Do you have a camera?
The moon is a shellfish.
I can't talk to most people. They eat me alive.
Who are you, anyway?
I want to look at you all day long, because you are mine.
Might you crave a little visit to the Pizza Hut?
Thank you for telling me your sign.
I'm filled with joy by this sun!
The turtle is advancing but the lobster stays behind. Silence has won the game!
Well, just damn you and the thermometer!
I don't want to ask the doctor.
I didn't know what you meant when you said that to me.
It's getting cold, but I am feeling awfully lazy.
If you want to we can go over there
Where there's a little more light.

—Kenneth Koch

‘This poem is not addressed to you’

This poem is not addressed to you.
You may come into it briefly,
But no one will find you here, no one.
You will have changed before the poem will.

Even while you sit there, unmovable,
You have begun to vanish. And it does not matter.
The poem will go on without you.
It has the spurious glamor of certain voids.

It is not sad, really, only empty.
Once perhaps it was sad, no one knows why.
It prefers to remember nothing.
Nostalgias were peeled from it long ago.

Your type of beauty has no place here.
Night is the sky over this poem.
It is too black for stars.
And do not look for any illumination.

You neither can nor should understand what it means.
Listen, it comes without guitar,
Neither in rags nor any purple fashion.
And there is nothing in it to comfort you.

Close your eyes, yawn. It will be over soon.
You will forget the poem, but not before
It has forgotten you. And it does not matter.
It has been most beautiful in its erasures.

O bleached mirrors! Oceans of the drowned!
Nor is one silence equal to another.
And it does not matter what you think.
This poem is not addressed to you.

—Donald Justice

Whoever You Are

By now when you say *I stop somewhere waiting for you*
who is the I and who come to that is you

there are those words that were written a long time ago
by someone I have read about who they assure me is you

the handwriting is still running over the pages
but the one who has disappeared from the script is you

I wonder what age you were when those words came to you
though I think it is not any age at all that is you

stopping and waiting under the soles of my feet
this morning this waking this looking up is you

but nothing has stopped in fact and I do not know
what is waiting and surely that also is you

every time you say it you seem to be speaking
through me to some me not yet there who I suppose is you

you said you were stopping and waiting before I was here
maybe the one I heard say it then is you

—W. S. Merwin

[Untitled]

But before you live
you must remember every word
your mother never said.
As in here's the most perfect hole
to reach into
because what remains
is a space like the hands
you're beginning
to forget. Promise me
before you live
you'll remember the darkest
you'll have ever been
won't be holding steady
a cocked barrel in your mouth
the wheat field below the house lit
by another autumn. It was always me blooming
you inside me. Before living
swear to me you'll forget
the way a body carves out its own
season to lie down in.
To never forget the trees
lining the field before the sun
sets at last. Beyond are the torn ghosts
you are to always remember.
There is a voice that leaves
will always hold for you there.
& before you live
you must remember that night
is always falling somewhere
in the world. Someday autumn
could be just another hole
that winter empties into.
Remember me for this hunger
I brought you into. That your warm
body has never lived
without me.

—Michael Wasson