

# Divan



**Thirty-Five Poems**





Copyright © William Page 2011-2020

# DIVAN

*I was thinking of the greatness of what was human and  
found myself in the divine. ~ Juan Ramon Jimenez*

Today, because I feel a sudden urgency  
 to confide in you, to speak the unspeakable,  
 to lay bare the difference of man to man,  
 to provide a cipher for a star  
 in the company of a universe of stars;  
 today, because I have an unexpected compulsion  
 to map the terrible abyss behind your eyes,  
 to extract the yellow iridescence  
 from my consciousness and drop it  
 in the blue cup you drink your coffee from;  
 today, because I am a man,  
 and every man sometimes wants  
 to lease another's soul and effect a change  
 so profound that partitions fall,  
 today, because it is every day  
 and you are who you are,  
 I want to extend my will toward you,  
 to leap across hours and miles,  
 and pull your greater self  
 from the debris of your lesser infatuations.

Because it is today, always today,  
 I have to remind you that your memory  
 exists also in the white skulls of your ancestors;  
 because the moment is always before you,  
 I have to ask, "How many people  
 must populate the earth before all the dead can live?"  
 "Can the soul of a wolf take a human form?"  
 "Does the mare in the field feel embarrassment?"  
 "Why so much pride?" "Why humility?"  
 "Why the physical experiment at all?"

Because tomorrow you will sleep  
 in another bed in another room and dream  
 of a yesterday that almost happened, I must ask,  
 "What face is it that you love?"  
 "Where is the pottery bowl we once ate from?"  
 and "Why such a thing as a human heart,  
 why so little mass and so much desire?"

We imagined ourselves chosen for a great work.  
 In the winter, when the rains came,  
 we covered our scaffolding with tarp  
 and worked through the cold and shortened days,  
 and in the summer, when the sun burned our skin,  
 we laid floors under roofs  
 and built fountains and pools  
 to wet our hardened faces  
 and abate our unquenchable thirst.

We imagined we would be untouched  
 by the madness that is life,  
 but our hands were darkened with newsprint,  
 and our eyes, blinded by the violence on the screen,  
 saw how the greed of the rich  
 divided the people into hordes and tribes  
 and how the disappointment of the poor  
 divided the cities into camps.  
 We saw how the scalpel  
 divided the body into organs,  
 and how the frustration of the crowd  
 fragmented the man from himself.

We imagined that we were separate  
 and judged the violence of the times  
 by the waning moon and a few stars  
 reflected in the surface of a lake,  
 but our dead went before us  
 and called us from the mountain  
 to the cities we had once loved.  
 We thought we would be martyred,  
 but instead we were ignored.  
 We thought the myth we created would be acted out,  
 but instead we learned of the body's  
 mortification at growing old,  
 of the dusk that sits brooding in puddles,  
 and of the wounded messenger  
 who helped us climb into a husk of a soul  
 and piece together a life from these fragments:

the fever and fatigue of gratified love,  
streets that cross like blue arteries,  
clocks that ticks only hostile minutes,  
words spoken low and with love,  
bowls of fruit offered to the dead,  
and exuberances so great that we felt  
as if we could grasp the earth  
and pull it toward us.

I wanted to give you so much:  
 the drive along the coast,  
 the harbor by the sea, the salt breeze;  
 but you wanted none of it,  
 you wanted only my Furies.

“Give me your ivory nights,” you said,  
 “the black foam of your mind,  
 and whitened ghost of Clytemnestra.  
 I want none of your colors,  
 give me instead your depths,  
 the white stones at the bottom of the black sea.”

I wanted to give you so much:  
 the summer scent of wet pine, the sun,  
 the rain in September,  
 but you wanted none of my light;  
 you asked only about my rapture  
 and the disturbing visions of my sleep.

“I am without sex,” you said,  
 “I am no more woman than man.  
 My breasts are of marble,  
 and my womb is as sacred  
 as Diana bathing in the moonlight.  
 I am young and physical  
 and can turn the wheel of my thoughts  
 as quickly as you can.”

I wanted to give you so much.  
 I offered you my hands, my arms, my eyes,  
 but you wanted only the agony  
 of my soul without a will;  
 and now you wander mad eyed through the streets,  
 and I go in peace without you.



They were good companions, coarse but proud.  
 They emerged from the swarming multitude  
 like Hector among the Greeks,  
 like soldiers of insolent and ungodly daring.

Together we crossed a blue sea in summer  
 and rode over hills and scorched plains  
 to steal the golden fleece  
 and win the love of the barbarian queen.  
 We shared a sea breeze for our beaten sails  
 and the abundant poverty  
 of our encampment at the water's edge.  
 Together we partook of the favors of the gods,  
 but they, who were at one in pulling  
 an oar in unison or in debate at dinner,  
 were hesitant at the foot of the oracle;  
 they, who were at home in the fields at midday  
 or in buffeting the green foam of the waves,  
 were haunted by the promise of one more journey.  
 They didn't understand that we had arrived.  
 They didn't understand our need  
 to cut ourselves off from the human  
 in order to return to the human;  
 they didn't understand how we squandered  
 the rewards of our youthful labor.

They were good companions, rude but human.  
 They worked as hard as you or me.  
 Their half-formed selves were chiseled  
 from the same good stone.  
 But when we awoke, they were gone.  
 Perhaps the proportions were wrong.  
 Perhaps an arm was cracked; or a hand, broken.  
 We only wondered where they went.  
 The earth will forget them,  
 but we will remember their dreams.  
 They were our teachers.

Do not concern yourself  
 with the lizards that scamper over the rocks  
 and dart through the dried grass,  
 they will find stillness in the heat.  
 The sun does not care if it is yellow,  
 but the cows have left the golden field  
 for the green grass by the canal.  
 The summer has no need of fences,  
 but the young lovers sitting on the rocks  
 by the rosemary are arguing about the soul.  
 Are you thinking of yourself?

Do not grieve for the man  
 with the black disposition:  
 the night will send him a lover;  
 or for the woman with the yellow thoughts:  
 the morning sun will be her friend.  
 Do not grieve for the mute boy:  
 the crickets in the evening will be his voice,  
 or for the girl who speaks to the river  
 and is amazed by the sea:  
 her neighbors will give her  
 water from their well to drink.  
 Do not grieve for the one  
 who is looking for his shoes  
 among the Manzanita and the poison oak,  
 or for the one who couldn't find  
 the north star in the pond  
 at the bottom of the road:  
 they will find each other.

Who has found his conscience  
 while surrounded by injustice?  
 Who knows pain without bitterness?  
 The rose has climbed up its stem of thorns,  
 and the tyrant has only oppressed himself,  
 and the man who has transformed  
 the injustice of being a man  
 will walk in the shadow of his soul.  
 Are you still thinking of yourself?

From the time you became content  
 with a deed of land and a house,  
 I didn't understand you.  
 I would have offered you the gifts  
 that say always and everything,  
 but by that time I had already fallen in love  
 with that strange, double consciousness  
 of my compassion looking at my anger,  
 of my daring looking at my fear,  
 and of my death looking at the miracle  
 of being a man and in love.

From the hour you imagined  
 your sleep would be undisturbed  
 and that out of that you could build a kind of soul,  
 I couldn't find my way back to the past we shared  
 or forward to the future we expected.  
 I couldn't understand the distinction  
 you made between the grass sown by the wind  
 and the grass sown by your hands.  
 The crows and the deer and the snakes  
 made no such distinction,  
 and the Judas tree in the corner of the lot  
 scattered its red, heart-shaped leaves  
 around the yard just as it had the year before.

From the day you told me  
 that you didn't understand me anymore,  
 my body was always a little numb;  
 in the morning I had to herd it  
 out of the house like a stubborn horse,  
 and in the evening I cared for it and helped it to bed  
 as if it were an ailing brother.

Really, wasn't the soothing masquerade  
 you surrounded yourself with  
 nothing more than the wind emptied  
 of the pungent odor of rain and decaying leaves?

Through the thickets of pines  
 my longing was looking for a voice.  
 Over the stunted trees and the Manzanita  
 my longing to possess a glance from your eyes  
 was looking for a voice and a wind at my back.  
 Through the rain pounding on the road  
 my voice was trying to find its breath.  
 Under a roof of clouds and a sky of gray light  
 my voice of sadness and great force  
 was looking for a garment and the collar of a tongue.  
 Through the rainy days of February and March  
 I was waiting for a sign that signified a change,  
 interpreting the violence of the wind  
 and the dreams that woke me at night  
 in the light of a future we could share.  
 You were strong and I was strong,  
 but the force of our love was caged  
 by the dark partitions the gods set around us.

In the meeting place my tongue  
 was looking for the longing of my voice,  
 but when I stood in the congregation to speak,  
 my words were no longer mine.  
 They fell like stones from my heart,  
 and awakened in me the memory of the beach  
 on the island where Ulysses sat and wept.  
 We decided nothing. Nothing.  
 I awoke alone, surrounded by strangers,  
 in a room at the end of a maze of badly lit corridors.  
 I wanted to go back for you, so I flipped the coin  
 you gave me, and bet my stake on heads.  
 When it came up tails, I knew I would never find you  
 and set out, without belief, towards Ithaca.  
 When I arrived, I made my sacrifice in your name.  
 My body was strong, but my thoughts were troubled,  
 so I offered no prayer. Outside the temple  
 on the mountain the wind and the storm raged.

Brave Ulysses, when you consider  
 your courage and your nobility,  
 consider also your great luck;  
 consider your hardship, but remember  
 the fortune of your fabled destiny,  
 consider your grief, but remember  
 Athena, whose guiding winds taught you  
 to see your soul from the soul of another,  
 who pulled open the seams between  
 the living and the dead to let you enter;  
 brave Ulysses, consider the Trojans and the war,  
 consider the faith of Penelope,  
 but remember the rudder and the sea.

Brave Ulysses, we also have attracted the gods,  
 but we have no bright swords to hold them back.  
 We also have poured a libation of wine,  
 but we have no ram or steer to slaughter  
 and must add our own blood to the pit.  
 Though we have offered a prayer and a song,  
 we now hope only for the yeast,  
 the fire, and the grain for our bread.  
 Though we have carried the stones  
 to make our threshing floor ourselves,  
 we now hope to master the labor of the heart,  
 to learn the inhuman compassion  
 of a man, like you, who found a crack  
 in the walls of the material world.

Brave Ulysses, you who have survived  
 the shipwreck of your death,  
 show us the wash of the wave and the tow of the bow,  
 give us the courage to cut through the labyrinth  
 of being bound to a soul in gestation,  
 teach us the daring of the gods,  
 and give us the shrewdness to know  
 the moment they speak to our thoughts.

I admit I was not unhappy  
 when you were perplexed by our love.  
 The strangeness of the wind in the trees  
 astonished me, and you wondered  
 how I could stand before you  
 and not know what to say.  
 I have no net for my feelings.  
 They enter my blood and are burnt up  
 by the rarefied air the gods have given us to breathe;  
 they enter my thoughts and fly from me like birds.

I never understood how you could believe  
 that the distance around me  
 was a testament that my love was lacking.  
 The emblem of my death kept distracting me,  
 and the joy we tried to take possession of  
 gathered weight until we could no longer  
 keep it from falling into the abyss of our thoughts.  
 There, in the depths of our concern,  
 it became terrible and menacing.

I admit I was amazed, most of all,  
 by the flowering branches  
 you managed to sustain far into June.  
 That summer the gods, tired of the heat,  
 waited for the dark to unfold their influence,  
 and Athena, who used to protect us,  
 had a head for wind at dusk.  
 She kept banging the screen door  
 shut, and then open, shut, and then open.  
 I don't why you looked for me  
 in the cellar among the roots and garden pots.  
 I am less water and earth than air;  
 it was the wind that drove me  
 from the house we used to occupy.  
 Perhaps the lit room where we sat was enough.  
 You were always one to say so,  
 but I was drawn out:  
 the great machine of the night  
 was my house of intricate stars.

We expected nothing. Nothing.  
 We were rowed up river and left.  
 We knew the flight of the birds  
 across the sky at dusk had meaning,  
 and that the roar of the jet sounding  
 across the sky at dawn was inauspicious,  
 but the darkness of the age blinded us,  
 and left us to decipher the numbers,  
 the labor of a winter sun,  
 and the blue and yellow dress  
 in the painting we loved so much.

Good people pitied us because they believed  
 we wanted the life they treasured.  
 And when we set out for the sea  
 but found ourselves instead at the river,  
 we filled our clay cups and drank,  
 but the dark water made us restless .  
 And when the full moon rose over the willows  
 on the further bank, we carried our hollow boats  
 on our backs to the city and told the good people  
 that we had died and come back to life.

We were content when they didn't believe us;  
 but when we found that the water in their wells  
 left us thirsty, we returned to the river  
 and followed it again downstream to the sea.

We expected nothing. Certainly not joy.  
 This is what we found: the coincidence  
 of Athena waiting for us at the crossroads,  
 a street sign that told us more  
 than what we wanted to know,  
 a thought that had nothing to do with us;  
 the example of a winter tree that demonstrated  
 how to be in two dimensions at once,  
 and, yes, the joy of companionship.

Every day I do something useless.  
I pin strange voices on the wind,  
and pick mint and rosemary for no one;  
I wear my love around my waist  
with the red ribbon of a clown;  
I eat the petals of a rose,  
and recite philosophy to the birds and the lizards  
and expect them to understand;  
I open doors that would have been better left shut,  
and carry boats on my shoulders  
to mountains where there are no lakes  
and to valleys where there are no rivers.

Every day I do something useless;  
this reminds me that my world  
of useful movements is also useless,  
and that a whole tumbling universe  
is kept from falling down around my feet  
by the will I have built to uphold my love.



I never believed in your purity.  
 The mud of the flesh, even for the beautiful,  
 is never crystalline, and the soul,  
 when it concerns itself with making a life  
 out of a plot of land, a house,  
 or out of the thoughts of other people,  
 becomes small and opaque  
 and cannot anymore rise up and possess  
 the wonderful indifference of the night sky in summer  
 or the great shadow of the autumn.

I never believed in your secrets;  
 they weren't really secrets and they protected no one.  
 I knew that the sunlight in your hair was doomed  
 to photography and without comparison,  
 but today I found your picture  
 between the pages of a book  
 and saw that the shadows were turning white.  
 Why you had to so clearly demonstrate  
 that I would not be part of your life  
 I understood, but why you demanded  
 happiness from your dress and compassion  
 from the brim of your hat I couldn't follow.

I never believed that your innocence  
 was as childlike as you wanted us all to believe.  
 The theater of our life together  
 always seemed a little too rehearsed.  
 We are not chosen for our purity.  
 The moon wants purity. The gods want nothing.  
 Tell me, do you still wear  
 the blue dress with the open collar  
 and the straw hat with the wide brim?

If you insist with questions like  
 "What is it like?" and  
 "Where do the dead go?"  
 I will talk of the air thick with gulls,  
 and of the soul of the winding river  
 forever resurrecting itself in the light  
 of the incomprehensible canyon;  
 I will speak not of lilacs  
 but of the memory of their fragrance,  
 not of life but of the maps of annihilation;  
 and I will ask you to remember the night  
 we threw ourselves on the beach  
 gasping at the salt air like shipwrecked sailors.

If you ask me about the city,  
 I will tell you of Athena,  
 of her broad, littered presence  
 inhabiting what the poor  
 and the birds have picked through,  
 of the river dark with death and commerce  
 like a belt dividing her cavernous womb  
 and the hills that are her breasts,  
 of the newspaper vendors  
 who scream out her prophecies,  
 and of the sea at her feet  
 where the footprints of the drowned  
 are washed by the waves.

If you ask me about the sea,  
 I will tell you of Ulysses,  
 of his strength tied to the mast,  
 of his men speared like fish,  
 of one-eyed monsters, broken oars,  
 and the promise of the blood  
 of a black ram in Ithaca  
 that the dead may, for a time, live;  
 I will tell you of his greatness diminished  
 by nights without sleep, of endless  
 sun-bleached days jostled on the green waves,

and of his greatness redefined in the endurance  
of a man who must learn to yield  
because he is an intruder far from his home.

If you keep asking questions like  
“Where will I find her?” and  
“Is it like life after all?”  
I will advise you to forget yourself  
and to look for her image in a mirror  
that has never held a human face;  
I will take you on a sea journey  
to where creation falls off and will walk  
with you to the prow of a massive ship  
where the abyss of a certain sailors eyes  
awaits the return of his soul.  
And when you have no more questions,  
I will take you to the land you called your home;  
I will ask you will drink from the facet  
in the kitchen to wash the taste of the earth  
from your mouth and to repeat to yourself:  
“No one loves without sacrifice,  
no one dies without consent,  
no one makes the rain fall.”

Now that I have known beauty:  
the unseeing marble eyes, straight nose,  
and lips parted in blind inwardness,  
how can I cut from my mind  
the perfection of the statue lost at sea  
or the injustice of the figure bound for the river?

Now that I have known love:  
the laughter of your eyes,  
the magic of your slender waist,  
and the excitement of the moment  
when your hair falls around the  
nakedness of your arms and chest,  
how can I forget myself  
in the summer that will never die,  
or in the friends that understand  
the sadness I hide from my thoughts?

Now that I have witnessed the open sea  
and the god disguised as a tiller man,  
let Athena speak to my inconstant heart  
of the home I lost so long ago.

They have given us so much,  
 but what is it that we offer them in return?  
 The sensation of fingers touching a face,  
 the human balm of eyes closing  
 in a room filled with nothing but silence,  
 a voice more complex than the wind,  
 more nostalgic than the night,  
 or maybe the tremendous release of weeping?

Without us the light would be unbroken,  
 and the summer would never die.  
 Without our arrogance and fight,  
 they would have left their shoes  
 at the foot their graves and fled,  
 and the map that they used to escape  
 would have been set adrift in a bottle on the sea.  
 On our backs we carry the shadow  
 of the white cypress down to the pool of oblivion,  
 and with our hands we extract salt  
 from eternity and feed it to the world.  
 Perhaps we too could escape,  
 if only we could only reach the sea one more time.

Without us, what would they do?  
 We dye the wind blue with our voices,  
 and color the light yellow with our pain.  
 We know we are fortunate because  
 they have lent us what they do not need:  
 their shoes, time, and a description of the sea.  
 We know we are fortunate because  
 they have dictated a vision  
 of the world that is the world.

They have given us so much,  
 but tonight the bottles are empty,  
 and we are laughing with our clothes full of sand  
 and our bellies full of wine,  
 laughing at how they have mocked us,  
 at how they have used our weakness to destroy  
 who we are and what we wanted to become.  
 If we could only reach the sea one more time.

Sad wind. Sky of weeping.  
 Your head upon my pillow,  
 and the rain blown against the window.  
 Inside our room of passion  
 I'll take off my boots of mud;  
 and you, your mask of tears.  
 On our bed of springs and blankets  
 I'll remove your clothes of fallen leaves,  
 and you'll take from me my forest of thoughts.

If you sew for me a glove  
 of lightening and another of rain,  
 with one hand I'll lead you through the dark,  
 and with the other I'll wash the fear from your face.  
 If you cover my body with a sack of kisses  
 and my soul with a cloak of solitude,  
 I'll teach you to bind the wet grass  
 into a book of hours and seasons,  
 to color the chamomile yellow,  
 and to paint stars on the blue cloth of the soul.  
 And if you heal my heart with your love,  
 I'll show you how to mend the forest floor  
 with ten-thousand patches of light,  
 and to discredit my words with eyes of thunder.

Dark wind. Night without stars.  
 You have saved your nights  
 for love's intimate expression,  
 and I for the unity that sees  
 the coat and the rain without preference;  
 and now all that is left are two spirits  
 and the ghost of the wind howling in the storm.  
 Now all that is left is a bottle in the corner  
 and a past of seams ripped and sewn to old cloth.

Inhabited wind. Night without child.  
 Your head upon my pillow,  
 and the rain blown against the window.  
 Sew for me a glove of passion and another of exile,  
 and I'll give you the left hand and wear the other.

Now that we have shared the most intimate union  
the body allows, can we go further?  
Now that we have offered each other  
neck and shoulder, lips and hands,  
and the fragrance of warm skin,  
can we lay ourselves open to the mist  
and the twilight where our feelings end?  
Can we invite the cold that rolls  
in from the sea after so much desire?

Now the waves have thrown  
us back on the sand, what must we do  
to find the sun's heat  
in the moon's reflection  
and the justification of discourse  
in the cry of the gulls?

Now that we have exhausted  
the flames that licked at our throats  
and set fire to our thoughts,  
can we recover from the shipwreck  
of our pleasure and find in the freezing waters  
a calm, warm present in the depths of the sea?

We were told that only beauty and suffering  
 could make us like the gods.  
 We learned with so much ease to lean  
 out of ourselves and settle in the beautiful.  
 The lips parted in inward amazement  
 were touched and remembered,  
 and the road flooded with moonlight  
 helped us locate the compassion we knew  
 must be buried in the corner of who we were;  
 it was a kind of love, but it didn't change us.

We were told that only suffering  
 could fasten us to a spirit  
 quick enough for tolerance to be mastered.  
 By then we were already bent toward  
 depending too much on our overburdened luck.  
 The moths at night flew through us,  
 and the snakes kept away from our light.  
 The crickets in the grass were our music,  
 and the cool air above the lake renewed us.  
 All this we reveled in, but when we awoke  
 with our mouths parched from wine  
 and our hands knotted from the strain of our labor,  
 we were desperate again for the night  
 and for the wine that would help us  
 forget who we were and remind us  
 of the gods we might become.

Our youth passed away as a cloud,  
 and our summers seemed long.  
 And when we labored in the fields  
 with the sun on faces and the weight  
 of the stars on our backs, we longed  
 once more to see the river overflowing its banks,  
 and to hear the sound of waves crashing on the shore.  
 We were surprised to find that our memories  
 spilled over into the present  
 we had fought for so long to protect.  
 And in the sixth year of drought  
 we went to the mountain to drink wine,



and the youngest among us  
stood at the edge of the abyss and cried out:

“I am the brother of Dionysus,  
and these are the children of Zeus  
We are the inheritors of life's elixir  
and the heirs of the stars of the western sky.”

But the red moon was unimpressed;  
it rose over the valley with its head  
held high like an angel of raging fire.

Six years and so little rain.  
 The perfect, cloudless day is barren,  
 and our dead cannot find their way back to the sky  
 because the lush garden and overflowing fountain  
 have become our vision of paradise.  
 The desert beyond the mountain is not a god,  
 and the sun, our symbol for presence,  
 has ravished the river  
 and left the mud in its bed hard and cracked.

Six years and so little rain.  
 And you, woman, spirit, have only prospered.  
 Your gait has changed clothes with the bobcat,  
 and your gaze has hidden itself  
 among the needles in the shade of the pine trees.  
 The desert beyond the mountain has courted you,  
 and the afternoon has given you a dress of sun.  
 The dusk also hides in the folds of your skirt,  
 and the night, our only cover,  
 flows from your shadow like wine.

Six years and so little rain.  
 Though we have lured the gods  
 with our blood and our sacrifice,  
 we cannot sustain them at our supper.  
 Though we have transformed our frustration  
 into endurance, it's not because we know  
 the place where we will finally drop anchor,  
 but because the river that leads us  
 back to the sea has run dry,  
 and because the destiny that has made us  
 is inherited from the patience of fisherman  
 and the good fortune of the poor.

We imagined we were alone,  
like a moon in an empty sky.  
We were so taken with the closed world  
that bounded between our thoughts  
and our blistered hands that we hardly noticed  
that the air around us was inhabited.  
With our eyes turned inward,  
we walked in the dream of the glory  
we would finally possess when the good people  
of the world recognized that the end  
of our labor had been worth the sacrifice.

We imagined we were complete,  
like an egg waiting to be hatched.  
And when the dust blew up from the road  
and took away our sight,  
we hauled our broken carts  
to the mountain and began  
the labor of perfection  
without the illusion of perfection.

So many summer nights were lost,  
and in the autumn in the morning,  
when the dew dropped from the yellow leaves,  
we didn't think to lighten our loneliness  
with the wood smoke from the chimney,  
or with the mist in the harvest fields  
that rose up like the poet's soul to meet us.  
And when the rains came  
and took away the bow and arrows  
we used to protect our thoughts,  
we stood on the battlements  
of our old defenses and let the gods slay us.

Tonight I don't want to be believed.  
 I want to be humored as you humored me  
 when you told me you loved me  
 before you knew you loved me.  
 I don't want your light because it could never  
 illuminate the distances that surround me.  
 I don't want anything like you charity;  
 it would be more than I could bear.

My eyes are useless; I am falling  
 backward and forward out of their reach  
 I am like a blind man whose precise hearing  
 jumps from corner to corner  
 without the slightest movement of his head.  
 The perfume the moon has left on your skin  
 has overwhelmed me and taken my strength.  
 I am cleansed and my arms are far from me,  
 so far that I cannot anymore possess  
 the hands and the fingers that reach down  
 like roots toward the cool waters of your waist.

Tonight I want our love to be death's sister.  
 I want our intimacy to explore  
 the profound chasms between us.  
 Tonight I have a terrible need for deserted streets  
 for departures from train stations covered with snow,  
 for planets wrapped in perpetual winter,  
 and for the substance and fire of far flung stars;  
 tonight I want the impartiality of deserts of white sand,  
 the unbearable silence of ice-bound waterfalls,  
 and the detachment of the eagle that devours  
 the snake coupled with the indifference  
 of the snake that captures and swallows the bird.

Tonight, because the day  
 has shattered my enthusiasms,  
 I ask for your permission to observe our intimacy  
 from the whole weight of my solitude.

Tonight, because the evening has left  
the innermost core of my being exposed,  
I want to lay at your feet the useless weapons  
I have used to protect myself,  
and offer you the immense spaces  
of an under-populated universe.

As we carried another to the river,  
 I knew what I would miss:  
 the press of a woman's embrace,  
 the warmth of a child's breath on my neck,  
 and the chill in my hands as I brush  
 the snow from an apple and hold it  
 to the mouth of an inquiring mare.

As we carried another corpse to the river,  
 I knew what I would miss:  
 the shared contact and odor of flesh,  
 the crowd of men and women in the street,  
 the strength of the horse in full gallop,  
 and the recognition of the disguised master  
 by the dog that had waited for so long.  
 I knew that if I were being carried to the river now,  
 I would follow at my bearers feet.

When, on the banks by the white poplars  
 we formed a circle to say our rite,  
 I knew I wasn't ready yet to give up the grandeur  
 of muscle, sinew, and bone in motion,  
 of the perception of the heart in turmoil.  
 I knew I would be drawn back.

When we heard the howling of the three-headed dog,  
 we set fire to the branches where the corpse lay and fled.  
 We knew it wasn't yet our time to cross the hated river.

I will not forget the coin  
 you gave me for the ferryman.  
 I will keep it in my pocket because it is a gift  
 no one else thought to give to me,  
 and because the crickets tonight  
 tell me that I will die alone.  
 Perhaps I will have forgotten you by then,  
 but the coin I will never forget.  
 At the last moment I will  
 place it under my tongue,  
 and fall backwards through all the little deaths  
 I placed between my exile  
 and your ever-approaching steps.

It will be raining when they find me.  
 I will seed the clouds and inhabit my garden,  
 but they will not think to look for me there,  
 or think to make a bow from a branch of my yew tree.

There will be two of them,  
 and they will walk blindly  
 under a black umbrella to a heated car.  
 You will not be one of them,  
 but your bones will ache,  
 and the life we almost had together  
 will pull at your remembrance.

And when I am buried with your coin  
 under my tongue you will not guess  
 that the bells at six are for me.  
 You will not guess that I am gone  
 because you have always assumed  
 that my love was yours.  
 I will be lost to you, but if,  
 when they tell you, you want to find me,  
 go to the river and say:  
 I serve because I flow everywhere;  
 I am because I am going nowhere.

A few pines. Some Manzanita.  
 A mountain in the distance. A sun.  
 A landscape to rebuild and renew.  
 A soil of red dust and orange rock.  
 A dream of Ithaca.

Here, we thought to finally rest,  
 to build for our children a legacy  
 of an earth worth preserving.  
 We labored, but already we were  
 thinking of the next adventure,  
 already we were enfolding our selves  
 into the distances of a sea  
 that leaped and washed below  
 a sky of evolving planets and stars.  
 Already we found time to set our tools aside  
 and ask if our failures  
 weren't more heartfelt than the successes  
 we were so eager to name.

And if, in the daring our task, we overshot  
 the caliber of our abilities, what of it?

Our hands have learned humility;  
 our arms and legs, to be alive;  
 our thoughts, the burden of the gods;  
 our spirits, to survive.



Don't tell me that life is unjust,  
 I am dead and know already  
 the souls of your ancestors,  
 the cold undertow of the river,  
 and the traveler you used to be.  
 Don't tell me who you hate.  
 I have hated also, but now I am dead  
 and my hate has become a little yellow bird  
 singing in the roar of the jungle.  
 Do you remember the earth  
 before it was your home?

Don't tell me of your revenge.  
 I have seen the blood on your hands.  
 I am dead and know already  
 the judgment from the mountain,  
 the full moon that has become your god,  
 and the movement of the stars  
 you no longer trust to guide you.  
 Remember the greed you forgot to own,  
 the ghost horsemen who follows you,  
 and the machinery of the war  
 that will be fought but never won.

Don't tell what I must do, I know already.  
 I am dead and do not want to be a warrior  
 with a copper soul and eyes of green water,  
 or a weapon rusted in the wet grass.  
 I remember the savage inequalities of fire and stone,  
 centuries of jungle and sun,  
 and the consciousness of the horse and the dog.  
 I remember the fossils at the dawn of man,  
 the dark seas we sailed together,  
 words carved in the stone of the forgotten temple,  
 and the frontiers of the spirit  
 we promised to inhabit so long ago.  
 I remember the timeless pact  
 of our disembodied communion, cities now buried,  
 and the forgiveness we forged from the tools  
 we dug up but no longer knew how to use.

No one understood your solitude  
 because they were all distracted  
 by the spectacle of their loneliness.  
 No one noticed that you had something to say  
 because they were all trapped between  
 their thoughts and the chaos of the congregation  
 gathered on the feast of the spring.  
 No one guessed that you took no trouble to hide  
 because they were too busy  
 preparing the supper that no one would eat,  
 and no one dared to follow you  
 to the desolation at the back of your mind  
 because they were all too startled by the noise  
 of a dream they couldn't remember.

Instead of a horse they gave you a trunk;  
 instead of a violin they gave you a clock;  
 instead of a sky with two moons and a red dusk  
 they gave you two arms connected to a back,  
 a mind for contemplation, and two legs for walking.

From the shadows came a sun.  
 From the void came a spirit.  
 Someday, someday when I am freed  
 from the burden of myself,  
 I will speak only of you.  
 I will put on the voice I save for the navigation  
 of the western wind and announce your person  
 to the pasture where Persephone was taken.

For you I would be perfect, emptied  
 like the day that falls to its knees  
 to set two stars behind your eyes.  
 For you I would be undivided,  
 like the night, which I know to be  
 the blue dress you pull over your head.

The caress of your hand on my belly  
 is pulling ten-thousand swallows  
 from the primeval caves of my sleeping loins;  
 and the red rose, lost, no longer symbolic  
 because it is every poet's symbol  
 is searching for fulfillment  
 under the transparent ivory of your skin.  
 From your cheeks to your breasts  
 to your womb, it fades and reappears  
 searching for an avenue of blood.  
 With my hands I am seeking,  
 with all my strength I am holding you to me,  
 with all our love we are searching  
 for the release that comes like the dusk  
 when it carries the heat away and opens  
 a dark gate to a universe of falling stars.

Is this our culmination, the perfection of two made one?  
 Maybe a god who has the head of a man,  
 the pleasure of a woman, the feet of a horse,  
 and the eyes of the wind—maybe he is perfect.  
 The dream is not anymore a dream, and the petals  
 of the rose are ripped with a thorn from its stem.

For you I would be more than a man  
 emptied of desire, I would be more than my will,  
 which is burdened from the heights I uphold.  
 For you I would lie in the lap of the gods  
 and let my spirit, which is homeless,  
 roam between the quiet of my mind  
 and the vision of you asleep in my bed.

We knew our destiny would be hard,  
 but we imagined it would be difficult  
 in ways that were easy for us;  
 we expected chills for the one  
 insulated against the cold,  
 pain for the insensitive,  
 hunger and poverty for the ascetic,  
 and neglect for the one who knows  
 what he feels isn't who he is.  
 We envisioned a coat of detachment  
 but were given instead a trunk  
 for the clothes we used to wear;  
 we anticipated a destiny of two white doves,  
 but instead a wind of ashes arose  
 to meet us and blackened our faces.

We thought we could steer our spirits  
 like hollow ships over an uninhabited sea,  
 but the gods sent us a headwind for a companion.  
 We were caught in the panic of the civilian  
 under fire and in the surgical torture  
 of the human machine under repair.  
 We didn't guess that the snapshots  
 from the battlefield would shatter us,  
 or that the dead climate of the hospital  
 would make us question whether the living  
 were not sometimes dead, and whether the dead  
 didn't sometimes prefer a coming and going  
 outside the span of years we call life.

We imagined ownership, body and soul,  
 and the comfort of judicious rule.  
 We sat on the right side of the left handed  
 and then on the left side of the right handed  
 and from this learned how to center our force  
 between the stress of our shadows  
 pulling away from us at noon  
 and the strain of our souls expanding  
 to receive the darkness when night falls.

We thought we would have souls  
like houses with windows and titles  
and great wooden hearts like doors.  
More than anything we prayed  
for meaning and companionship,  
but, in the end, we had to be comforted  
by the knowledge that suffering  
fate as it comes or fighting it as it goes  
is nothing more than a planetary influence,  
a predilection for red or blue.

We didn't guess that the lymph that washed  
our blood could have a kinship of its own.  
In our effort to know ourselves  
and to touch the skirts of the gods  
we forgot about the divine.  
We left our baggage by the sea,  
and walked in beggar's clothes toward Ithaca.  
We became, and when the others wanted  
to mourn the dead, we mourned the living.

In my exile from your love,  
I cannot imagine how I can again  
refresh myself in the raindrops that shimmer  
on the yellow flowers in the field at twilight,  
or how I will suffer the night air  
we made thick with the heat our love.  
The day shifts its light away from me  
and falls where I am not;  
It goes westward with the birds  
away from my dark dusk.  
And the summer avoids me;  
enraged by my sudden poverty,  
its galloping hoof beats  
are always sounding ahead of my steps.

If my loneliness were mine,  
I would fashion a wave from it  
and let it drift toward you,  
but it stays with me because  
I cannot bring myself to possess it.  
I place it outside my reach like a second soul.  
But tonight I miss you so much  
that I let it wash over me  
like the darkness that covers my steps.  
Tonight even the moon hides its face,  
and my shadow, tired of my company,  
abandons me to look for you among the stars  
that form the constellations of the gods  
and of the heroes who knew more than love.

I cannot wait anymore either  
 for the girl with the chiming bracelets  
 who is rushing away from me,  
 or for the woman with the feverish hands  
 who is rushing toward me.  
 They have their houses and their families  
 that root them to their lives,  
 and I have the deck of this ship.  
 They have a childhood of their own,  
 and I have this expanse of gray sea,  
 this vaulted sky, and these strangers who tell me  
 that they are traveling back to their homes.

I cannot wait anymore either  
 for the friends who are forever living  
 on the threshold of a future without pain,  
 or for the friends who have never lifted  
 themselves above the single perspective.  
 I am going to the silent mountain  
 and to where the fire doesn't cling,  
 to where the pheasant will escape my arrow,  
 to where the friend I have not yet met  
 will take to bed and die.  
 I have seen ghost cities  
 and towns abandoned to the dead.  
 I have seen the air inhabited,  
 and the human spirit caught  
 in the cry of the howling Furies.  
 When I opened my mouth to speak,  
 fathers scorned me, set their dogs on me,  
 and held their yellow hands  
 over the ears of their daughters.  
 My home is the deck of this ship,  
 and the sound of the waves licking the bow.  
 This cabin is my house,  
 and this suitcase is my only estate,  
 and at the port by the salt sea shore  
 I will sleep in a bed made

especially for the shape of my bones  
and dream of the destiny that is no longer mine.

I cannot wait anymore either  
for the brother who hates the ways of the world  
or for the sister who loves horses.

They have their fate,  
and I have Athena who tells me  
that my life is no longer mine to give.  
They are tying the knot that will pull them  
back through the womb into another life,  
and I am untying the thoughts  
that bind me to the clang of the bells at midday.

No, I cannot wait anymore either  
for the one who is rushing away from me,  
or for the one who is rushing toward me.  
Instead, I take them with me; I engraft them  
onto my wounded breast like Adam's rib.



I know that the way you tilted your head  
and spoke to me while touching my hand moved me.  
I wrote about it that summer we parted,  
but today it just seems like words on a page.

What I remember now is how,  
on a boat from the island, I sat across  
from a woman whose eyes reminded me of you.  
At first I thought she would cry, but she didn't.  
She was thinner than you were,  
and her hair was darker and longer.  
I tried to imagine the face of the one she loved,  
but the wind rose up from the waves,  
blew her hair around her face,  
and turned her features to stone.  
I tried to imagine her suffering, but I couldn't.

That night in the city by the sea  
I fell in love with a head of Athena.  
The face was unscarred,  
but the helmet was missing.

I was sad, but when the afternoon came  
 and filled me with the arid heat of summer,  
 my sadness became brittle,  
 broke up, and fell down at my feet.  
 The silent lizards collected the pieces  
 and hid them among the dead leaves,  
 and in the autumn when the rains came,  
 they expanded and covered  
 my garden grounds with mist.

I was angry, but when the moon rose,  
 her light filled my body with forgiveness,  
 and my anger became afraid  
 and leapt up looking for my shadow.  
 In its alarm it mistook the night  
 for my shadow and tried to inhabit the stillness,  
 and now, when the wind dies and the night is still,  
 the dogs bark in anger and the coyotes howl.

I was absent, but then Athena came  
 and filled my inconsolable heart  
 with the fragrance of lilacs,  
 and now when I see the lilac petals  
 scattered across the yard in spring,  
 I chase away my sleep with the broom  
 the goddess placed at my door.

For seven years we waited  
for a sign that would herald  
the beginning of a happier time,  
but all we found was the misfortune  
of the cluttered wheelbarrow  
too heavy to push up the mountain.  
For seven years we labored  
in the fields of our desires,  
thinking that if we conquered ourselves  
we could have what we wanted,  
but in the end what we found was  
that we wanted nothing.

The horse was the master,  
but when the wind came,  
the horse was led to stable.  
Just a little longer, a little further,  
a few more steps, always so near,  
always on the edge of the presence  
that means extinction.

What did we know of happiness anyway?  
Now we possess: an empty wheelbarrow,  
a horse without a saddle,  
and the desire to want nothing.  
Sitting on our overturned baskets,  
we pick the thistle needles  
and cockleburs from our clothes.

I have longed so many times  
 to be more than a knotted back muscle  
 or a pair of eyes closed to what is behind me;  
 for many years I have deeply desired  
 to separate myself from a mind  
 that is constantly digging at my flesh,  
 trying hard, on one hand, to bury  
 the humiliations of having a body,  
 and trying equally as hard, on the other hand,  
 to resurrect the distraction of pleasures  
 that last anywhere from a minute to an hour  
 and leave only a gray passageway  
 between thoughts for me to hide in.

I have wanted to follow the wind  
 across a field many times;  
 for longer than I care to say  
 I have desired ardently to join  
 a flock of birds in mid flight;  
 for more than a lifetime I have yearned  
 to combine my individuality  
 with the miracle the light performs  
 among the ten-thousand shades  
 of greens and browns in the forest;  
 for centuries I have aspired  
 to climb the first flash of a day,  
 any day, to ascend to the sun itself,  
 and then to fall back to the earth  
 and let the flowers of the plants  
 and the pleasure of men and animals  
 feed on what I had become.

I have visited my death  
 and walked away many times;  
 for years I pretended to be unscarred,  
 for a decade I waited for a sign  
 that would demonstrate that my eyes  
 were meant to mirror the night sky  
 and that my feet were destined

to walk through fire,  
but when it came I didn't believe it.  
I awoke to see my sleep,  
and slept in the knowledge  
that my dreams were no longer mine;  
and when you pressed me,  
I could only say, "It is not what you think.  
It is not what you think."

Many times, so many times,  
I have felt a terrible need to give myself up,  
to love to the extent of what I am,  
and to pit my too human heart  
against an hour of inhuman emptiness;  
for years I have protected  
the ghost of what I have been,  
but lately, very lately, my eyes  
have turned from gray to blue,  
and now only the animals will suffer their gaze;  
my feet also refuse to obey me,  
only the wind that shaped me can command them.

If I were the morning sun,  
 I would rise with the dawn,  
 warm your hands and face,  
 and fill the air you breathe  
 with my golden vigilance;  
 I would chase from your soul the ghosts  
 your dreams called from the tomb of the night.

If I were the night, I would shape  
 a starry dome to shelter your every step;  
 I would protect you as I believed  
 the gods once protected me,  
 but I am not the night or the morning sun;  
 I am only a man in love with the twilight.  
 When a dark wind blows in your soul  
 and life rains down on your head,  
 when it is autumn in your heart  
 and all the yellow leaves you used  
 to clothe your fear fall to your feet,  
 when the gods dismantle your world, brick by brick,  
 no matter what I want, no matter what I feel,  
 you will have to tame those monstrous, bitter hours  
 with a will of your own making.

Only remember, that you are never alone,  
 that there is a man who loves you  
 for what you are becoming,  
 that he leans out toward you  
 from what window he has,  
 wishing more than the gods allow,  
 when you feel most abandoned.



