

Friends of Silence

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"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"



Dear friends ~ September, the month that rounds out summer's dreamy days, the ones in which Mary Oliver strolls through the fields, idle and blessed, falls down into the grass and gazes at the grasshopper eating sugar out of her

hand. The days that carry enormous questions on their sun-kissed shoulders. "...what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

I wanted to write about all that: imagination and cosmos, consciousness and love, gift and gratitude and joy, all that one contemplates as summer fades on the horizon and the sun sets magenta behind the purple clouds.

But what kept coming up was not the bittersweet glory of sunset but the fierce territory of forgiveness. Perhaps this is because the human community I'm part of is facing something of an existential crisis, a rough initiation, stumbling together toward the inevitable consequence of living shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart. We are confronted not with the glowing questions of Oliver's one wild and precious life, but with the frightening invitations in these lines from David Whyte's poem, "Sometimes":

Sometimes

*if you move carefully
through the forest,
breathing like the ones
in the old stories...*

*you come to a place
whose only task
is to trouble you
with tiny
but frightening requests...*

*...Requests to stop what
you are doing right now
and
to stop what you
are becoming
while you do it,
questions
that can make
or unmake
a life....*

~ David Whyte, lines from "Sometimes"

in EVERYTHING IS WAITING FOR YOU

There is a longing for forgiveness, a crying out for it, that can arise among open-hearted people who find themselves cast into the pain of being human with other humans. But forgiveness is not a moral obligation, nor is it a virtue, Christian or otherwise. It is not something you can simply choose to do or be. Forgiveness is an unfolding, a grace, that arrives out of the immense storm, the harsh kneading of transformation. It is the ealing that becomes possible after you have wrestled to the

blood and bone with the questions of Whyte's poem...and been defeated by them. The lyric poet Rilke has a vision of this:

*...The storm, the shifter of shapes, drives on
across the woods and across time,
and the world looks as if it had no age...*

*What we choose to fight is so tiny!
What fights with us is so great!
If only we would let ourselves be dominated
as things do by some immense storm,
we would become strong too,
and not need names.*

*When we win it's with small things,
and the triumph itself makes us small.
What is extraordinary and eternal
does not want to be bent by us...*

*Whoever was beaten by this Angel
(who often simply declined the fight)
went away proud and strengthened
and great from that harsh hand,
that kneaded him as if to change his shape.
Winning does not tempt that man.
This is how he grows:
by being defeated, decisively,
by constantly greater beings.*

~ Rainer Maria Rilke, trans. Robert Bly from "The Man Watching"

in SELECTED POEMS OF RAINER MARIA RILKE

Perhaps I am offering you the cosmic and the enormous after all. Here in Rilke's poem is the immense storm, the Angel, the extraordinary and the eternal, by whom we are defeated, unmade, and made again.

After the storm, the unmaking, there is a hush in which something breaks open. Khaled Hosseini's difficult and luminous novel *The Kite Runner* is an excruciating tale of friendship, betrayal, and long-struggled-for redemption amid the violent and troubling time of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. It is the story of the immense storm and the long fight with the Angel. In the end Hosseini writes:

*I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the
fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing
up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night.*

Forgiveness. After the harsh hand, the kneading, the changing of the very shape of things. A fierce grace, and a healing.

So, friends, settle down before the magenta sunset of summer's fading and listen to the soul criers sing for you of forgiveness, of cosmos and imagination, consciousness and love...and gift, grace and joy. ~ Lindsay

Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift.

~ Robin Wall Kimmerer in *BRAIDING SWEETGRASS*

...there are at least two ways to understand what it means to have our hearts broken. One is to imagine the heart broken into shards and scattered about—a feeling most of us know, and a fate we would like to avoid. The other is to imagine the heart broken open into new capacity—a process that is not without pain but one that many of us would welcome. As I stand in the tragic gap between reality and possibility, this small, tight fist of a thing called my heart can break open into greater capacity to hold more of my own and the world's suffering and joy, despair and hope.

~ Parker Palmer in *A HIDDEN WHOLENESS*

I believe that maturity is not an outgrowing, but a growing up: that an adult is not a dead child, but a child who survived. I believe that all the best faculties of a mature human being exist in the child, and that if these faculties are encouraged in youth they will act well and wisely in the adult... I believe that one of the most deeply human, and humane, of these faculties is the power of imagination: so that it is our pleasant duty, as librarians, or teachers, or parents, or writers, or simply as grown-ups, to encourage that faculty of imagination in our children... And never, under any circumstances, to squelch it, or sneer at it, or imply that it is childish, ... or untrue.

For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it, too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom.

~ Ursula K. Le Guin in *THE LANGUAGE OF THE NIGHT: ESSAYS ON WRITING, SCIENCE FICTION, AND FANTASY*



*You wouldn't have bet on it,
the battered rock
orbiting a star
from the discount bin
of the universe,
wouldn't have guessed
that it would bloom
mitochondria and music,
that it would mushroom
mountains and minds,

and the hummingbird wing
whirring a hundred times faster
than your eye can blink...

...and the marbled orca
carrying her dead calf
down the entire edge
of the continent,
carrying the weight
of consciousness

and consciousness
how it windows
this tenement
of breath and bone
with wonder,
how it hovers over everything,
gigantic and unnecessary,
like music,
like love.*

~ Maria Popova, lines from "The Wildest Bet is the Winning Bet"
in *The Marginalian*, May 3, 2026

*Above the mountains
the geese turn into
the light again*

*Painting their
black silhouettes
on an open sky.*

*Sometimes everything
has to be
inscribed across
the heavens*

*so you can find
the one line
already written
inside you...*

*Sometimes with
the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire
has gone out*

*someone has written
something new
in the ashes of your life...*

~ David Whyte, lines from "The Journey" in *THE HOUSE OF BELONGING*

Many people have trouble with forgiveness because they have been taught that it is a singular act to be completed in one sitting. That is not so. Forgiveness has many layers, many seasons. In our culture there is a notion that forgiveness is a 100 percent proposition. All or nothing. It is also taught that forgiveness means to overlook, to act as though a thing has not occurred. That is not true either.

~ Clarissa Pinkola Estes in *WOMEN WHO RUN WITH THE WOLVES: MYTHS AND STORIES OF THE WILD WOMAN ARCHETYPE*