

Afterglow | Helen Lowrie Marshall

I'd like the memory of me
to be a happy one.
I'd like to leave an after glow
of smiles when life is done,
I'd like to leave an echo
whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times and laughing
times and bright and
summer days.
I'd like the tears of those who
grieve, to dry before the sun,
Of happy memories that I leave
When life is done.

Eclipse Before a Funeral | Mary Ellen Talley

The moon pulls drapes across the sun
until your son's funeral at the church
where he was baptized years ago
before he began his rollercoaster wax
and wane, your wan distress,

but with respite enough as these weeks
you gather stories of balloon animals,
revelry at the beach, his kindness,
and recollect the joys he brought you.

With solar glasses, we see a crescent sun
obscured by the far-off moon
as it moves in front of the eye of heaven,
between sun and earth to cast
a soft penumbra with a ring of fire,
crossing a path of sky from Oregon to Texas
then Central America to Brazil
in the four dark earth minutes of annularity
that might blind whoever isn't wary.

Congregation, consolation of gathering
following tears that spend your grief,
two floral gifts for Mother Mary,
and soft perfume of altar incense
to sweeten air for friends who have fled churches
of their youth and now shake grieving hands
as one more celestial spectacle abates
to remind us all how shadowed light
returns to fulfill the hope of prayer.

I Cannot Turn Quite Leisurely Away

After W.H. Auden's « Musée des Beaux Arts » | Julie Gilmour

The year comes round
and it all repeats.
I stagger in it:
the bald shock of the thing,
the hole in the world
that swallowed you up
like a rabbit in the grass, stalked
by what none of us controls—
it strikes again today,
only this time
I know it's coming
I'm onto it
and all the learning, the regrets,
are ahead of the fatal moment,
no longer lagging, late.
Your death comes back
and I wait for it.

I am the one with eyes
glued to the sky
as Icarus falls,
eyes only for him
as the world goes calmly on
because for them your failure

was not an important failure.
But I'm transfixed.
I know exactly
what's going on, this time,
and here's what I have to say:
you were a darling child
your heart was like a star
and this time I'll be there
with a thousand unsaid things
brimming on my lips;
you'll tell me all your stories—
the day will open out and I will listen—
and we will mark the violent,
implacable hour with tenderness.

Nanny | Kevin Courtney

I remember when they were annual
Long summer days with the air conditioning on
And the car windows rolled up
When it was too hot to even sweat properly
So we went swimming instead
You wore a white swim cap over curly white hair
I wore tiny lime green shorts over white skinny legs
Those summers, we retreated into the den late at night
To watch Jeopardy and Who Wants To Be A Millionaire

You stood by the screen door and watched me catch lightning
In a jar
I lived for those summers
And though I only visited once a year
Hallmark brought you to me on Easter, Halloween and Christmas
You were never absent on my birthday
But then the visits began to come more often
As you realized our time was waning
The swim cap became buried in your basement
And you went to bed early
The amount of phone calls and your declining health
Became inversely proportional
I wished that you would stop calling
Because it would have meant you were getting better.
When I learned that we were flying out in February
I knew that it would be my first and last New Year winter
And it chilled me to the bone before I even saw the snow
I was ill-prepared to see you in that hospital bed
My mouth was sucked dry
At the sight of you, sans-curls
With beautiful, brilliant, straight ivory hair cascading down your shoulders
You had deceived the world for 82 years
With your miniscule green hair curlers
I found myself laughing at your trickery
In the most inappropriate of situations
But the trickery had not ended
We were pummeled by reality as your gradual recuperation slowed

And then stopped altogether
I have never felt such an eerie, surreal feeling
As being in your house when you were absent from it
The staircase creaked louder and the sheets itched
As if
You had taken all the hospitality from your quaint little home with you when you left
You used to say that every freckle on my face was a kiss from an angel
And that every wrinkle on yours held a smile
You gave me enough of each to last a lifetime
And all I can do in return
Is to leave the front porch light on
And wait forever
For you to never come home.

Near the End | Alison Eckels

Near the end
you might feel as if you are entering new territory.
And in a moment,
shorter or longer depending on your journey,
you might realize that you recognize this place,
that you have known it all along,
known it was there just on the other side of the veil.
In the midst of The Busy Years
this may seem far away, non-existent, unreal.
But it is always there,

just as the stars are in the sky
even when the sun bathes the side of the planet we are on.
Near the end,
we are near the beginning.
This truth can be wonderful and terrifying
all at the same time.
But we have crossed many endings and beginnings along our way.
We have practiced transitions,
made it through them again and again.
Listen for the music.
The stars are singing.
You are loved.

The Peace of Wild Things | Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

When Death Comes | Mary Oliver

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox
when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,
and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,
When it's over, I want to say all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

Wild Geese | Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you

like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Write it On Your Heart | Ralph Waldo Emerson

Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.

He is rich who owns the day, and no one owns the day
who allows it to be invaded with fret and anxiety.

Finish every day and be done with it.

You have done what you could.

Some blunders and absurdities, no doubt crept in.

Forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day;

begin it well and serenely, with too high a spirit

to be cumbered with your old nonsense.

This new day is too dear,

with its hopes and invitations,

to waste a moment on the yesterdays.