

IN DREAMS, PRIVILEGE IS COLORLESS

In dreams, we are all the same color;
that is to say – no color at all;
and the scent that fills the air
is redolent of newborn elephants
and a hot healthy desert sand, hard
to describe because of its long absence
in reality.

Poet Mary Oliver dies before I can ask
her some things—not that I know her
well, but, there’s always the off-chance;
possibilities abound in the poetry
community, smallish as it is—
She is just so effortlessly wise, at least
that’s how it always seems to me.

Now, an eighty-three-year-old white woman,
she dies of lymphoma. I mention race because
I wonder, did Oliver feel the stain of white
privilege, or was she immune to the political
rhetoric of the day? I study photos of her face
and see intelligence and age, but also a serenity—
Or, am I superimposing my wish upon her?

DEVASTATED

It might be considered hyperbole,
a description this large, this dire—
But every time enough hours go by, or
I get distracted, or fall asleep, then awake
I find myself coming to, as it were,
wondering momentarily what is wrong
then remembering afresh
as if it has just happened, and it will hit
me—like getting kicked in the stomach.
The wolf is dead—this time for real—not
going to be dead, not dying, no—is now dead.

Earlier in the day, he'd been in distress, and
there'd been no telling ourselves we could
keep him comfortable. No, we had to confess,
we were keeping him alive for ourselves—
unwilling to part with our beloved pet.
And finally, he was begging us with pain
in his eyes, and tiny yelping whimpers—
horrific noises from an animal once so stately—
to let him go. There should be some comfort
in having done what was best for him, our wolf,
but all I feel is empty, and, devastated.

BROKEN BRANCH WILLOW OF MINE

Another windy night has left your detritus
spread over our lawn and the back neighbour's.
Skinny twig-branches lopped off as neatly
as if with man-made pruners lay like
over-large nail-clippings, large crescents
obliterating grass not yet ready to be green.
Why do I have such a fondness for you, old tree?

Is it because you are ancient? And messy —
I have an affinity for your messiness, I know.
But I think more than anything; it's your strength.
Oh - your tiny twig ends may snap off,
but your actual whip-like limbs; once they grow
beyond a certain length, they no longer break.
It doesn't matter how fierce the wind or storm,

those graceful branches sway and shake;
they slash forward, back, up and down —
looking for all the planets as if they might rip
apart, but they don't—no, as they mature,
those limbs develop a tensile strength and,
defying nature's harshest elements, keep the tree
whole, and growing steadily, older, and statelier.

Perhaps it's that I like the comparison
I hear between willows and women —
how both have an incredible ability
to withstand enormous pressure but instead
of breaking under the strain
will bend and bend and bend and eventually
bounce back up straight and sturdy, and alive still.

PAGES OF SORROW

I weep for too few days left, and too many,
and collect tears in leaves being swept
from trees burning on the coasts
of two continents, burying them in dunes.

My sadnesses grow from joy as well
as small unhappinesses, but all bring
weighty importance at the moment
of their happenstance, and I have learned
to honor each with the ritualistic ceremony
I deem proper to the occasion.
This might involve an hour of silence,
or, infrequently, days on my knees.

I sob when I learn of children dying
anywhere: victims of genocide,
war, or infanticide, and, depending
where I am in my own life,
the accumulation of pain,
is a strong indicator,
as to how much more I can bear
to amass.

If I am not cognizant of the sorrows
I am toting like carry-on baggage
at any one time, it is easy
for me to slip into a state
where I cannot control
the amount of despair sloshing
within my being.

However, if dawn's curtains part
on skies gray as gloom,
I find counting
distressful situations irresistible.
Before my feet even hit the floor
I number: the labs using animals
to test for makeup, the Navies
sending sonar through the oceans,
making whales bleed inside.

5 Totally Unrelated Poems [\[Document title\]](#)

My eyes are swimming as I remember
the amount of gunk *our* Tar Sands
spills daily, with no care nor concern
for those living downstream.

I cannot seem to turn off the reel
of Baby M; the tiny girl lying dead
in a local cemetery.
Starved and beaten by her parents—
a couple now imprisoned, and
awaiting trial starting here in
several months.

It's usually the last one that forces
me to either pull the covers
back up and over reality—
Or me up and out into the dark world.
Again, it matters in what part of
the dismal world I find myself.

NAIVELY MARCHING FORWARD

*Is the Dalai Lama optimistic, she asks.
Or just woefully naïve?*
We are sipping green tea at her favourite
teahouse. All I can think is how much I want
a Starbucks© Grande Macchiato,
how disappointed she would be if she knew.

*Well, I counter, wondering if she thinks of me
as being naïve or even optimistic.
Amused, or maybe bemused, I hear myself say,
No way, not either.
What then? You're a realist, she scoffs.
Do you even **believe** in the Dalai Lama?*

Stung, I am surprised at how I must present,
especially to my youngest, who I thought **knew** me
And the me she knows is entirely different from
the ever-hopeful, somewhat naïve me, even
when I should know better, after all these years.
That one—I must be giving off a changed vibe.

Trying for lightness, I ask, *How can anyone not
believe in the Dalai Lama? Wouldn't that be like
not believing in Buicks?* She stares, clearly perplexed;
a reference too dated for one this young. I change it up:
*Wouldn't that be like not believing in your iPhone,
or American Idol?*

Now she looks at me pityingly—oh God.
She tells me impatiently; *I get it. Of course,
iPhones exist, therefore, so must the Dalai Lama.
But American Idol – is that still on?*
We both have a good laugh over that, my bad.
Just how cynical do you think I am?

She frowns, considers my question.
Then, *Are you really never going to march
for peace again?*
Her face is vulnerable, her hope vivid.
I'd forgotten the last time we marched,
how discouraged I was at the low turnout.

5 Totally Unrelated Poems [\[Document title\]](#)

And how the bombing in Afghanistan
continued unabated, sending four young
men home in flag-draped boxes,
the same day as the march.
I said some harsh things.
I meant them too.

I marched for peace and nuclear
disarmament for decades. Much of the
time it did feel futile. But, being met
now with my daughter's hopeful face,
the prospect of dashing her future
made me angry. At myself.

What was I thinking? *I do remember,*
I tell her. *A tired old lady's words,*
on a disheartening day. Words spoken
in haste that shouldn't count for
everything...or anything.
Peace is within our grasp

But we need people like you.
Young, energetic people who won't
give up on the idea, who keep marching,
and agitating, and saying no to war,
voting in better governments,
insisting on better everything—

Suddenly she is grinning, catches me
mid-sentence. *What?* I wonder. *There,* she says.
*That's the **you** I remember. I want **her** back.*
Do you think she's available? And right then,
I know. She's just been on hiatus. She's back,
and she's going nowhere but forward.