

Contains five poems

## The Vital Fire

The vital fire crackles in your dangerously dry sighs,  
You slouch over your book and as the teacher babbles  
About equal opportunities and undivided attention  
Your phone kindles beguilingly under the desk.

Remember when you first loved reading,  
It talked of daffodils, mending walls, great white birds  
And shepherdesses with a ruinous eye and teeth  
That were as unredeemable as your heart, cast

You in rapture, potentially hurtful spells.  
You read, flustered, without anyone having to tell  
There were loads of things you couldn't talk, only dream about --  
You'd bite your lips raw with effacements.

And now, while the teacher talks of the moralities  
Of everyday sex, and you are glad you aren't suppressed  
As a member of this or that set, but can hover in between,  
And your friend, who is black, is thankfully colorblind --

Oh man, we're tottering on our last legs. While  
Some butterflies and lions are still out there, battering, buttressing  
Their cool races, you cultivate the strip of nature  
In you (that is your skin, hair and teeth), as civilization razes.

Under the desk your fingers hurry, falter.  
The hushed light bares stuff teachers abhor.  
You will never set off a bomb, or burn a book.  
Dull hour drawn to an end, you type your faltering hi.

## I Want His Tenderness

I want his tenderness  
 In a small handbag, its sticks invisible, compact like a  
 Rolled-up hedgehog from my favorite web shop  
 That I fold out into a handy sunshade  
 When I go to the beach, and it puffs up in the wind,  
 Expands in the afternoons  
 And gets longer in its shadows, and the fierce spikes are pointed outwards  
 So that no one will try to enter  
 But I'm cozy inside.

And its shadows keep spreading deep  
 Into the night, and I can be long alone,  
 Then sea stars blend into  
 The stars at a distance,  
 I go to sleep, finally at rest.  
 And in the morning it has crept and folded back into its small purse  
 That I can pick up and take with me.

I want his voice  
 So full of cheery goodwill  
 When he asks me what I'd like in the canyon of marble and gold  
 Where the shoppers never stop sifting their fingers through  
 incense and myrrh  
 to look at us marveling  
 He buys a few trinkets,  
 I fumble and find nothing to want,  
 Because I forgot my money;  
 His voice when it is tossed and clinks and drops  
 Into my heart's pocket is dearer.

It's great, isn't it, when you don't need to rummage  
 Through a messy drawer,  
 Don't need to strike a gong  
 or start a car,  
 And you don't need to equip yourself for an expedition  
 To the North Pole, before you can get a kind word?  
 I can save myself the journey  
 (Though I've already made it, of course.  
 The journey was worth it because I was born  
 to travel),

His meekness gives right here, bubbling up,  
 Without asking,  
 Like the Well of Lovers, or so the legend goes,  
 We are told in the desert sun, hanging back gold-  
 En through the palm leaves,  
 Not far from Mount Sodom, but that doesn't make it any kinkier.  
 almost winter:

it does look like a pitiable puddle.

## The Lost Day

In the calm sway of the day train  
Where the journey starts, whence the journey ends  
The forced boredom makes you go out of your mind  
When you hear your companions prattling.

Now you can no longer read your book  
To infuse your obsession with meaning,  
And a long dark tunnel where nothing can be seen  
Whisks you coldly underground.

You're supposed to join the talk  
About the things you'd love to see  
Once you get to Florence, and you'll be free  
From their chatter in the noiseless rush.

The grey lakes do not doubt your vision  
And now, partition widening,  
Insane for those lakes, to be at one  
With the earth, you close your eyes.

## Something was botched up between us

Something was botched up between us  
Or maybe it was never there  
We went to restaurants, enjoyed every minute  
Talking about things that excited us.  
Waiters liked us and brought us cocktails, chasers;  
We got a little tipsy  
Music was played that we liked, put us in a mood  
And then, nothing.

We looked into each other's eyes  
Talked serious stuff and understood each other  
I waited for you to cross the street, and you  
Waited for me, pulled my sleeve  
When I bolted, could have been killed.  
There was mutual admiration, the deepest feeling  
Of harmony.  
And then, nothing.

We even went so far as to take trips together,  
Stir the wayfarer in our souls;  
We rowed about who was to drive  
And I gave in without demanding anything back.  
We rode camels, steamed up mountains,  
I waited for you as you were just  
A little slow. Afterwards, we laughed at funny people  
Who seemed less happy than us,  
Propped up our feet watching the sundown.  
And again, nothing.

## Lapping 2

One day I fucked him and he liked it  
And again we did it and it was so good  
Like the sea did by us: pulling and slapping,  
Withdrawing and again on the attack  
And love submerged us but didn't wipe me out  
Even if the wave almost broke us back;  
Now I have the movement, the rollicking  
Down pat, and make no bones to be his prey;  
So long as I have my arms and legs, I lap  
On bravery's belly, outbound depth and in the inland  
Vapour, all gulp and bulges.  
Let time do its work of relentless tenderness  
And landlubbers denounce my gaping urges;  
Nothing I write is as fun or as important.