

Gifts From the Shadow World: An Ode to Special People in Our Lives

Special people may enter our lives and find a place in our heart that is forever fixed in time. These are the people fate brings to us, a happy happenstance, everyday miracles that come to us in different ways, our family - father and mother, brothers, sisters, grandparents, perhaps a childhood playmate, a forgotten high school friend, the person we first kiss, perhaps a lost love who fills our dreams. If we are lucky, we may find a teacher or two among them. But especially, our children, from beginning till end, children are our emissaries to eternity.

Special people can enter our life without much fanfare and they can slip through our life like shadows fading at dusk, yet, as the years go by, we grow to miss them so. When we are young, it's easy to forget that our life journey is not only about all that we achieve as the years go by, but also, about all the people that we leave behind and then forever miss with the passing years. So much can vanish from our lives— people, places, sometimes even our memories. The Sanskrit-Buddhist text Diamond Sutra tells us that life is like “So many phantoms passing in a dream.” What special people share with us, even if measured by moments in time, may be as close to an eternal embrace as we ever receive in this life.

Special people can touch our hearts and shape our souls in strange and sometimes mysterious ways. No matter how far we travel, they can be there waiting for us, in the mist of an early morning rainbow or just after midnight when we turn out the lights. They can help us visit the past, and sometimes see the future. They can shadow our spirit and mirror our sorrows. They can be felt, seen, and heard, forever in our lives, we never lose them. They travel with us, through life and death. They visit our dreams and, whether awake or asleep, they speak to us, even if dead and gone. Sometimes in the moonlight, we can still feel their touch, on our hand, on our face, always somehow still with us, stirring our soul and shaping our spirit.

Special people, if we are truly blessed, stay within our calling, and we within easy reach of their remembered embrace. They simply never let go, they become part of us, our living, our breathing, our days, and our nights, never a turning back, never a forgetting, never a departing. Like a seal pressed in wax, they can imprint on our soul. If we are lucky, those we love, love us back, at least sometimes. They can wake us at night and stir us on cold winter mornings, then appear in the orange threads of light that flash and then vanish at dawn in the grey clouds of a January sky. We make of them what we will, finding meaning, and perhaps hope, in these friendly ghosts.

Special people can become much like us and we, too, become much like them, or, at least, who we believe they are. One thing seems certain, they will mark our life and our death as much as anything on this spinning planet, and they will die twice when we depart this life. Who knows where in time these special people go when they leave us. Perhaps they go where time stops and where it is we go when we follow after them. Perhaps, they join us at that place that always opens in our heart when we find them in the soft whisper of the stars on a dark summer night. One thing seems clear, in this mystery and chaos of the cosmos, the treasure they are to us remains ours for a lifetime, for perhaps an eternity if such exists.

Special people who visit our lives are our gifts from the universe, as Tao tells us, our own “magic coincidences” in cosmic time. I like to think there are lasting connections between special people who enter our lives that eternally bind us together. It’s a nice thought, but I know that’s probably just wishful thinking. Our hearts, no doubt, want what the world denies us. Truth is all of us may lose everything, and time may put eternity between us. Maybe all we will ever hold in our hearts are some fleeting moments and a few memories. Emerson’s notion of a lived life as “expanding circles around circles” is perfectly mirrored by the ancient Buddhist text that life endings are much like snowflakes, spinning inward “Dissolving in the pure air.” That’s a heartbreaker, but probably closer than we like to the truth.

Special people, in the grand scheme of things, may sometimes not seem so much. We can all be weak, flawed, and petty, and often time is short. But special people in our lives are usually not so little, as they shape the stories of our life and death, our small and large stories of love shared. And what finally, in the end, have we left, if not this? If there is joy in living in this world, this tops the list.

Special people in our lives spite the chaos of the cosmos
and that's surely "not nothing" and just may be everything.
Only this, perhaps, can we ever really count on.

Gifts from the Shadow World - Sixfold

PERHAPS THIS CHILD

The Visual Vernacular of Childhood

*What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind.*

William Wordsworth, "Recollections of Early Childhood."

Perhaps this child
Who graces my life for a little while
Will come to know the mysteries of time
As he grows up,
How rainbows come and go
In the blink of an owl's eye,
And how the dawn and dusk
Of his summers
Will spin wildly to the beat
Of a dragonfly's wings.

Perhaps this child
In the season's turning
Will find that everything,
That at first seemed light years away,
Happens now in just a moment,
When a winter night breaks
And the long orange ribbons at dawn
Turn a young boy's dreams from home.
And nothing in this world
Will stop time's passing
Nor move it much,
In our mind's eye,
Beyond those memories

Of the child's early years
And those first footsteps in the snow.

Perhaps this child
Will someday shelter a child
In the embrace of his own smile,
And the circle will begin again,
As daydreams once more unfold
Under orange winter skies at dawn
And all in the blink of an owl's eye.
And this child too may travel far beyond
The shelter of his father's protecting arms,
And tuned to the pearlescent
Beat of a dragonfly's wings,
He too may come to know
How much I still miss that little boy
Who grew tall and straight with the years,
And then left my home forever.

Perhaps this child
Will visit again,
Fashioned for a moment
In a tiny sparkle of light
That dances through my garden
On the last glint
Of a fading summer's sun.
The tiny light flickers
Catching my eye
And lifted on the breeze
It moves slowly through the garden
And gently stirs the roses,
Always his favorite flower.
Time will soon set
An eternity between us
And this world and this garden
May be forever lost in time.
As the novelist Nabokov put it,
A life may seem no more
Than a brief sparkle of light
Bookended by eternities of darkness.

But today, I smile
My face brushed by the breeze
Passing in the twilight.
It whispers my name,
And sings of farewell,
A last hello
And a final goodbye.

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PEOPLE AND PLACES

LEFT BEHIND

Last night I listened to music from my teen years, both old love ballads and classic Rock and Roll, over and over, and over again. The music moved me to recall all the people and places we leave behind on our journey through life. I felt a sense of deep sadness about that time in our life when high school comes to an end and new worlds open, different worlds for each of us.

Everything is unknown and we are all eager and a little brash, a little scared and clueless, and both happy and sad, and all at the same time.

Everyone is hopeful as these new worlds open and take us in, though anxiety now marks our play with friends and nervous smiles our parting. I felt a deep sadness thinking how we play-acted so much of our own coming of age all those many years ago. I found this in my own life and watched it in my child's.

Life would be better for some than for others, harder and much shorter for some than for others, our lives now becoming serious adventures as life began playing for keeps.

Drifting apart on different roads, soon different cities, different friends, different lives, always looking forward and making our way with work and life, not knowing how much we would miss, for the rest of our lives, all those people and places we loved in our youth.

Our younger worlds lost with the years, we pass each other unrecognized now, old age the perfect disguise, though our memory of those people and places of our youth, can remain for us as clear as a bell.

And underneath it all, the old anxieties still linger.
This time mostly about being forgotten,
or something like it, like being loved,
if only for how we threw a ball or how we wore our cap,
or by the girl we walked away from, without a last kiss
and embrace, and without a whisper that she would be
loved for a lifetime. There's that vague feeling that an
opportunity may arise for a great do over in our life, to return
to those people and places of our youth to say the right thing
or to make things right. That feeling, of course, is just another
mirage in the passing shadows of our life and time. Once the
sun sets, it returns only on its own turning and only after the
dark night has passed.

Still, we might turn back to those people and places
we loved, through the memories and shadows,
the smiles and the tears and hope just once
for something more, for something buried deep in those fields
of gold that has always been just at the edge of our heart, hoping that
the remembering might finally turn us toward home again. Perhaps,
it will be that sad part in our recalling how long ago we lost so much
by not really knowing how to say goodbye to those people and
places that we loved, and of how easily
we let it all slip away.

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MEADOW PARK

Ode to Dylan Thomas

As spring commenced it's green journey circling
Over a dawn lit Meadow Park,
Spinning its sweet but slim orange threads
Around my lamb white childhood morn,
I lord of the daffodils scorned your crested robin's call,
And growing high with the dragon clouds
Danced like a perky prince on house high waves,
Edging slowly into that ageless silver night.

And oh, how Meadow Park did sparkle
In its noonday turning
As crimson rockets with their fiery hue
Lit up my rainbow space.
But quickly, so quickly came the thunderstorms
And melting blue tipped flames in the silver night,
Sweet spring slowly followed me out of grace.

And though the midnight clowns
In Meadow Park still sing
Spring's merry-go-round of rhyme,
The soft green of that summer's eve
Faded long ago,
When the shadows of the silver night
Hid your morning light from mine.

And now standing in the sleepy chill
Of a childless morning's light,
I now cold and lonely
And chilled through blood and bone,
Want for much, much more,
Than those silver nights in Meadow Park,
For you, returning on the wings
Of the October wind,
To finally take me home.

HALFWAY DOWN THE HILL
Passing Time in Santa Fe

He sits alone on those crooked steps
halfway down the hill,
and thinks of times in green days past
when the black night was so still.
In Spring long ago he built that house
halfway down the hill, and on those crooked steps
first kissed his bride,
when the black night was so still.
Soon children played at that little house,
halfway down the hill
and her laughter filled the summer sky
when the black night was so still.
Then the children left those crooked steps,
halfway down the hill,
and she passed on a winter wind
when the black night was so still.
Now he sits alone in the long dark night
And listens for laughter on the winter wind,
when the black night goes so still,
and with his ghosts he counts the stars
on the crooked steps of that little house
halfway down the hill.

