

## MARY OLIVER

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1935-2019



### When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.

5 I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

10 Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you too have come  
15 into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine."

2006

### Of Love

I have been in love more times than one,  
thank the Lord. Sometimes it was lasting  
whether active or not. Sometimes  
it was all but ephemeral, maybe only  
5 an afternoon, but not less real for that.

They stay in my mind, these beautiful people,  
or anyway people beautiful to me, of which  
there are so many. You, and you, and you,  
whom I had the fortune to meet, or maybe

10 missed. Love, love, love, it was the  
core of my life, from which, of course, comes  
the word for the heart. And, oh, have I mentioned  
that some of them were men and some were women  
and some—now carry my revelation with you—  
15 were trees. Or places. Or music flying above  
the names of their makers. Or clouds, or the sun  
which was the first, and the best, the most  
loyal for certain, who looked so faithfully into  
my eyes, every morning. So I imagine  
20 such love of the world—its fervency, its shining, its  
innocence and hunger to give of itself—I imagine  
this is how it began.

2008

## Iraq

I want to sing a song  
for a body I saw  
crumpled  
and without a name

5 but clearly someone young  
who had not yet lived his life  
and never would.  
How shall I do this?

What kind of song  
10 would serve such a purpose?  
This poem may never end,  
for what answer does it have

for anyone  
in this distant,  
15 comfortable country,  
simply looking on?

Clearly  
he had a weapon in his hands.  
I think

20 he could have been no more than twenty.

I think, whoever he was,  
 of whatever country,  
 he might have been my brother,  
 were the world different.

25 I think  
 he would not have been lying there  
 were the world different.  
 I think

if I had known him,  
 30 on his birthday,  
 I would have made for him  
 a great celebration.

2008

### Self-Portrait

I wish I was twenty and in love with life  
 and still full of beans.

Onward, old legs!  
 There are the long, pale dunes; on the other side  
 5 the roses are blooming and finding their labor  
 no adversity to the spirit.

Upward, old legs! There are the roses, and there is the sea  
 shining like a song, like a body  
 I want to touch

10 though I'm not twenty  
 and won't be again but ah! seventy. And still  
 in love with life. And still  
 full of beans.

2008

## Loneliness

I too have known loneliness.  
I too have known what it is to feel  
    misunderstood,  
    rejected, and suddenly  
5 not at all beautiful.  
Oh, mother earth,  
    your comfort is great, your arms never withhold.  
It has saved my life to know this.  
Your rivers flowing, your roses opening in the morning.  
10 Oh, motions of tenderness!

2014

## The First Time Percy Came Back

The first time Percy came back  
he was not sailing on a cloud.  
He was loping along the sand as though  
he had come a great way.  
5 “Percy,” I cried out, and reached to him—  
    those white curls—  
but he was unreachable. As music  
is present yet you can’t touch it.  
“Yes, it’s all different,” he said.  
10 “You’re going to be very surprised.”  
But I wasn’t thinking of that. I only  
wanted to hold him. “Listen,” he said,  
“I miss that too.  
And now you’ll be telling stories  
15           of my coming back  
and they won’t be false, and they won’t be true,  
but they’ll be real.”  
And then, as he used to, he said, “Let’s go!”  
And we walked down the beach together.

2013



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