

Could Be

New Poems

GEORGE
BOWERING



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Baby's Breath

First thing in the morning you wake up enough
to shove the poem back down into its container,
vacuous as it may seem, is that where they all
come from, or just the good frightening ones?
That's why you get coffee into you fast as you can,
to wet the poem, get it into the chute,
back down to where it will never try that again.
Down there where someone you don't even *like*
is already thinking of a word to fit into
the word he already has, down there in the dark
where no angel or scholar has ever been seen,
down there where bad luck is the mud you
slide in, a thoroughly heart-breaking place,
unknown to obedient children and your generous auntie,
a home for blind birds at the sea's bottom on an
unexamined planet smelling of unfortunate innards.
I cannot stress this too much—get out of bed,
look out the window at the cold sunlight, read
the most boring parts of the newspaper.

But

if that poem somehow squirms its way loose
and pants and shivers in your bedroom before
measuring this world—talk sweetly to it, let it
feel the smooth embrace of your body, make it shine
like the moon after a summer rain, send it out
and give it your fondest hope for some life at least.

Holding Your Flesh

I stood by the counter that held me up,
looking at this and that, then picked up
an old wrinkly brownish apple, hello,
how long you been here in this fruit bowl,

who are your friends, I'll be your friend,
look at me, one leg shorter than the other,
one eye with clouds across it, fingers asleep,
toes unconscious, hair dry and empty of grace,

I will be your daily partner, you stay there,
I won't bite you with my porcelain teeth,
this implanted machine in my chest is counting
the days left to you and me, I once found

a chunk of wood made of stone, older than we
will ever be, can you imagine the secret pain
shooting across the back of the hand that was
holding your flesh, I can't stand here much

longer, are you afraid I will eat you, or
longing for my sore teeth to complete you,
or should I prefer to eat a peach and try to find
any new poetry in that non-event, all of us
so far from our trees?

An Oblate Sphere

When we fall in love, we do not tumble
for perfect features, not for the ideal neck,
not Max Factor, guy got everything wrong.
We love a quirk, an irregular turn of some
foot or phrase. Oh, that was just right,
we say, and there's no way of backing it up,
we just hold it to us as our own, so it
doesn't matter who else would know, as if
a dog or a heart skipped and no one else
noticed. Wendy's ankles were a little thick,
Frannie had a voice no one else liked,
the Earth, remember, is an oblate sphere;
when I was a forestry marker we abjured
imperfect specimens, and I wondered why.
When I fall in love, it will be forever,
we sang, and half-believed—we had spaces
to occupy in our own young brains. Surely
the Garden of Eden was lovable because we
brought in the imperfect. I'm telling you
I hope Eveline never did get that crooked
tooth fixed.

Brueghel's Idiots

You'd think they'd learn a lesson from Icarus, or at least the part of him they could see if they'd only look, but no, one guy lets his sheep walk on stone all the way down to the water, where there's nothing to graze. And I can't help but wonder what he's looking at up in the sky, while another guy sits on the slippery stone, leaning into the air far above the disturbed water.

The guy in the dead centre whacks his horse while plowing around a dead sheep or maybe female Martian visitor probably fallen from above the sun. They all could have taken a tip from any father who said pay attention, any odd and even peculiar poet, any such artist could see those woolly critters will be lamb-burgers, any Billy's going to tell you, look out, at least apply some sun screen, the sea is also a labyrinth.