

Classic Poetry Series

Alice Walker
- poems -

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Alice Walker(9 February 1944 -)

Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia, the youngest of eight children, to Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Lou Tallulah Grant. Her father, who was, in her words, "wonderful at math but a terrible farmer," earned only \$300 a year from sharecropping and dairy farming. Her mother supplemented the family income by working as a worked 11 hours a day for USD \$17 per week to help pay for Alice to attend college.

Living under Jim Crow Laws, Walker's parents resisted landlords who expected the children of black sharecroppers to work the fields at a young age. A white plantation owner said to her that black people had "no need for education." Minnie Lou Walker said, "You might have some black children somewhere, but they don't live in this house. Don't you ever come around here again talking about how my children don't need to learn how to read and write." Her mother enrolled Alice in first grade at the age of four.

Growing up with an oral tradition, listening to stories from her grandfather (the model for the character of Mr. in *The Color Purple*), Walker began writing, very privately, when she was eight years old. "With my family, I had to hide things," she said. "And I had to keep a lot in my mind."

In 1952, Walker was accidentally wounded in the right eye by a shot from a BB gun fired by one of her brothers. Because the family had no car, the Walkers could not take their daughter to a hospital for immediate treatment. By the time they reached a doctor a week later, she had become permanently blind in that eye. When a layer of scar tissue formed over her wounded eye, Alice became self-conscious and painfully shy. Stared at and sometimes taunted, she felt like an outcast and turned for solace to reading and to writing poetry. When she was 14, the scar tissue was removed. She later became valedictorian and was voted most-popular girl, as well as queen of her senior class, but she realized that her traumatic injury had some value: it allowed her to begin "really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out".

After high school, Walker went to Spelman College in Atlanta on a full scholarship in 1961 and later transferred to Sarah Lawrence College near New York City, graduating in 1965. Walker became interested in the U.S. civil rights movement in part due to the influence of activist Howard Zinn, who was one of her professors at Spelman College. Continuing the activism that she participated in during her college years, Walker returned to the South where she became

involved with voter registration drives, campaigns for welfare rights, and children's programs in Mississippi.

Activism

Alice Walker met Martin Luther King Jr. when she was a student at Spelman College in Atlanta in the early 1960s. Walker credits King for her decision to return to the American South as an activist for the Civil Rights Movement. She marched with hundreds of thousands in August in the 1963 March on Washington. As a young adult, she volunteered to register black voters in Georgia and Mississippi.

On March 8, 2003, International Women's Day, on the eve of the Iraq War, Alice Walker, Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *The Woman Warrior*; and Terry Tempest Williams, author of *An Unspoken Hunger*; were arrested along with 24 others for crossing a police line during an anti-war protest rally outside the White House with her dogs. Walker and 5,000 activists associated with the organizations Code Pink and Women for Peace, marched from Malcolm X Park in Washington D.C. to the White House. The activists encircled the White House. In an interview with Democracy Now, Walker said, "I was with other women who believe that the women and children of Iraq are just as dear as the women and children in our families, and that, in fact, we are one family. And so it would have felt to me that we were going over to actually bomb ourselves." Walker wrote about the experience in her essay, "We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For."

In November 2008, Alice Walker wrote "An Open Letter to Barack Obama" that was published on . Walker addresses the newly elected President as "Brother Obama" and writes "Seeing you take your rightful place, based solely on your wisdom, stamina, and character, is a balm for the weary warriors of hope, previously only sung about."

In January 2009, she was one of over 50 signers of a letter protesting the Toronto Film Festival's "City to City" spotlight on Israeli filmmakers, condemning Israel as an "apartheid regime."

In March 2009, Alice Walker traveled to Gaza along with a group of 60 other female activists from the anti-war group Code Pink, in response to the Gaza War. Their purpose was to deliver aid, to meet with NGOs and residents, and to persuade Israel and Egypt to open their borders into Gaza. She planned to visit Gaza again in December 2009 to participate in the Gaza Freedom March. On Jun 23, 2011, she announced plans to participate in an upcoming aid flotilla to Gaza

which is attempting to break Israel's naval blockade. Explaining her reasons she cited concern for the children and that she felt that "elders" should bring "whatever understanding and wisdom we might have gained in our fairly long lifetimes, witnessing and being a part of struggles against oppression". Fellow author Howard Jacobson took Walker to task saying that her concern for the children does not justify the flotilla.

In a June 2011 interview, Walker described the United States and Israel as "terrorist organizations" stating "When you terrorize people, when you make them so afraid of you that they are just mentally and psychologically wounded for life -- that's terrorism."

Personal life

In 1965, Walker met Melvyn Roseman Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer. They were married on March 17, 1967 in New York City. Later that year the couple relocated to Jackson, Mississippi, becoming "the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi". They were harassed and threatened by whites, including the Ku Klux Klan. The couple had a daughter Rebecca in 1969. Walker described her in 2008 as "a living, breathing, mixed-race embodiment of the new America that they were trying to forge." Walker and her husband divorced amicably in 1976.

Walker and her daughter became estranged. Rebecca felt herself to be more of "a political symbol... than a cherished daughter". She published a memoir entitled *Black White and Jewish*, expressing the complexities of her parents' relationship and her childhood. Rebecca recalls her teenage years when her mother would retreat to her far-off writing studio while "I was left with money to buy my own meals and lived on a diet of fast food." Since the birth of Rebecca's son Tenzin, her mother has not spoken to her because she dared to "question her ideology." Rebecca has learned that she was cut out of her mother's will in favor of a distant cousin.

In the mid-1990s, Walker was involved in a romance with singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman.

In 2011 shooting began on *Beauty in Truth*, a documentary film about Walker's life directed by Pratibha Parmar.

Writing career

Walker's first book of poetry was written while she was a senior at Sarah

Lawrence. She took a brief sabbatical from writing while working in Mississippi in the civil rights movement. Walker resumed her writing career when she joined *Ms.* magazine as an editor before moving to northern California in the late 1970s. Her 1975 article, *In Search of Zora Neale Hurston*, published on *Ms Magazine*, helped revive interest in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, who inspired Walker's writing and subject matter. In 1973, Walker and fellow Hurston scholar Charlotte D. Hunt discovered Hurston's unmarked grave in Ft. Pierce, Florida. The women collaborated to buy a modest headstone for the gravesite.

In addition to her collected short stories and poetry, Walker's first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, was published in 1970. In 1976, Walker's second novel, *Meridian*, was published. The novel dealt with activist workers in the South during the civil rights movement, and closely paralleled some of Walker's own experiences.

In 1982, Walker published what has become her best-known work, the novel *The Color Purple*. About a young troubled black woman fighting her way through not only racist white culture but also patriarchal black culture, it was a resounding commercial success. The book became a bestseller and was subsequently adapted into a critically acclaimed 1985 movie as well as a 2005 Broadway musical.

Walker has written several other novels, including *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (which featured several characters and descendants of characters from *The Color Purple*). She has published a number of collections of short stories, poetry, and other published work. She expresses the struggles of black people, particularly women, and their lives in a racist, sexist, and violent society. Her writings also focus on the role of women of color in culture and history. Walker is a respected figure in the liberal political community for her support of unconventional and unpopular views as a matter of principle.

Her short stories include the 1973 *Everyday Use*, in which she discusses feminism, racism and the issues raised by young black people who leave home and lose respect for their parents' culture.

In 2007, Walker gave her papers, 122 boxes of manuscripts and archive material, to Emory University's Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. In addition to drafts of novels such as *The Color Purple*, unpublished poems and manuscripts, and correspondence with editors, the collection includes extensive correspondence with family members, friends and colleagues, an early treatment of the film script for *The Color Purple*, syllabi from courses she taught, and fan mail. The collection also contains a scrapbook of poetry compiled when Walker

was 15, entitled "Poems of a Childhood Poetess".

Selected awards and honors

Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (1983) for *The Color Purple*

National Book Award for Fiction (1983) for *The Color Purple*

O. Henry Award for "Kindred Spirits" 1985.

Honorary Degree from the California Institute of the Arts (1995)

American Humanist Association named her as "Humanist of the Year" (1997)

The Lillian Smith Award from the National Endowment for the Arts

The Rosenthal Award from the National Institute of Arts & Letters

The Radcliffe Institute Fellowship, the Merrill Fellowship, and a Guggenheim Fellowship

The Front Page Award for Best Magazine Criticism from the Newswoman's Club of New York

Induction to the California Hall of Fame in The California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts (2006)

Domestic Human Rights Award from Global Exchange (2007)

A Picture Story For The Curious

(You supply the pictures!)

I get to meditate
in a chair!
Or against the wall
with my legs
stretched out!
(Or even in bed!)

I get to see
maybe half
of what I'm looking at!
(This changes everything!)

I get to dance
like the tipsy old men
I adored
when I was an infant!
(They never dropped me!)

I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!
I get to ride a bicycle
with tall
handlebars!
(My posture improves!)

I get to give up
learning to sail!
I get to know
I will never speak
German!

I get to snuggle all
morning
with my snuggler
of choice:
counting the hours
by how many times

we get up
to pee!

I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!

I get to eat chocolate
with my salad.

Or even as a first course!

I get to forget!

I get to paint
with colors

I mix myself!

Colors

I've never seen
before.

I get to sleep

with my dog

& pray never to outlive
my cat!

I get to play

music

without reading
a note!

I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!

I get to sleep

in a

hammock

under the same

stars

wherever I am!

I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!

I get to laugh

at all the things

I don't know

& cannot

find!

I get to greet
people I don't remember
as if I know them
very well.
After all, how different
can they be?

I get to grow
my entire
garden
in a few
pots!
I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!

I get to see
& feel
the suffering
of the whole
world
& to take
a nap
when I feel
like it
anyway!

I get to spend time with myself
whenever I want!

I get to feel
more love
than I ever thought
existed!
Everything appears to be made
of the stuff!

I feel this
especially for You! Though I may not remember
exactly which You
you are!
How cool is this!
Still, I get to spend time with myself

whenever I want!
And that is just a taste
as the old people used to say
down in Georgia
when I was a child
of what you get
for getting old.

Reminding us, as they witnessed our curiosity about them, that no matter the losses, there's something fabulous going on at every stage of Life, something to let go of, maybe, but for darn sure, something to get!

Alice Walker

Be Nobody's Darling

Be nobody's darling;
Be an outcast.
Take the contradictions
Of your life
And wrap around
You like a shawl,
To parry stones
To keep you warm.
Watch the people succumb
To madness
With ample cheer;
Let them look askance at you
And you askance reply.
Be an outcast;
Be pleased to walk alone
(Uncool)
Or line the crowded
River beds
With other impetuous
Fools.

Make a merry gathering
On the bank
Where thousands perished
For brave hurt words
They said.

But be nobody's darling;
Be an outcast.
Qualified to live
Among your dead.

Alice Walker

Before I Leave The Stage

Before I leave the stage
I will sing the only song
I was meant truly to sing.

It is the song
of I AM.
Yes: I am Me
&
You.
WE ARE.

I love Us with every drop
of our blood
every atom of our cells
our waving particles
-undaunted flags of our Being-
neither here nor there.

Alice Walker

Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

Did you ever understand this?
If my spirit was poor, how could I enter heaven?
Was I depressed?
Understanding editing,
I see how a comma, removed or inserted
with careful plan,
can change everything.
I was reminded of this
when a poor young man
in Tunisia
desperate to live
and humiliated for trying
set himself ablaze;
I felt uncomfortably warm
as if scalded by his shame.
I do not have to sell vegetables from a cart as he did
or live in narrow rooms too small for spacious thought;
and, at this late date,
I do not worry that someone will
remove every single opportunity
for me to thrive.
Still, I am connected to, inseparable from,
this young man.
Blessed are the poor, in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Jesus. (Commas restored) .
Jesus was as usual talking about solidarity: about how we join with others
and, in spirit, feel the world, and suffering, the same as them.
This is the kingdom of owning the other as self, the self as other;
that transforms grief into
peace and delight.
I, and you, might enter the heaven
of right here
through this door.
In this spirit, knowing we are blessed,
we might remain poor

Alice Walker

Desire

My desire
is always the same; wherever Life
deposits me:
I want to stick my toe
& soon my whole body
into the water.
I want to shake out a fat broom
& sweep dried leaves
bruised blossoms
dead insects
& dust.
I want to grow
something.
It seems impossible that desire
can sometimes transform into devotion;
but this has happened.
And that is how I've survived:
how the hole
I carefully tended
in the garden of my heart
grew a heart
to fill it.

Alice Walker

Don't Be Like Those Who Ask For Everything

Don't be like those who ask for everything:
praise, a blurb, a free ride in my rented
limousine. They ask for everything but never offer
anything in return.

Be like those who can see that my feet ache
from across a crowded room
that a foot rub
if I'm agreeable
never mind the staring
is the best way to smile
& say hello
to me.

Alice Walker

Expect Nothing

Expect nothing. Live frugally
On surprise.
become a stranger
To need of pity
Or, if compassion be freely
Given out
Take only enough
Stop short of urge to plead
Then purge away the need.

Wish for nothing larger
Than your own small heart
Or greater than a star;
Tame wild disappointment
With caress unmoved and cold
Make of it a parka
For your soul.

Discover the reason why
So tiny human midget
Exists at all
So scared unwise
But expect nothing. Live frugally
On surprise.

Alice Walker

From: Poems To My Girls

I
How can Humanity
look the deer
in
the face?

How can Mommy,
having erected
my fence?

Alice Walker

Going Out To The Garden

Going out to the garden
this morning
to plant seeds
for my winter greens
-the strong, fiery mustard
& the milder
broadleaf turnip-
I saw a gecko
who
like the rest of us
has been
reeling
from the heat.

Geckos like heat
I know this
but the heat
these last few days
has been excessive
for us
& for them.

A spray of water
from the hose
touched its skin:
I thought it would
run away.
There are crevices
aplenty
to hide in:
the garden wall
is made of stones.

But no
not only
did the gecko
not run away
it appeared
to raise

its eyes
& head
looking for more.

I gave it.

Squirt after
squirt
of cooling
spray
from the green
garden hose.

Is it the end
of the world?
It seemed to ask.
This bliss,
is it Paradise?

I bathed it
until we were both
washed clean
of the troubles
of this world
at least for this moment:
this moment of pleasure
of gecko
joy
as I with so much happiness
played Goddess
to Gecko.

Alice Walker

I Will Keep Broken Things

I will keep
Broken
Things:
The big clay
Pot
With raised
Iguanas
Chasing
Their
Tails;
Two
Of their
Wise

Heads
Sheared
Off;

I will keep
Broken
things:
The old
Slave
Market
Basket
Brought
To my
Door

By Mississippi
A jagged
Hole
Gouged
In its sturdy
Dark
Oak
Side.

I will keep

Broken
things:
The memory
Of
Those
Long
Delicious
Night
Swims
With
You;

I will keep
Broken
things:
In my house
There
Remains
An

Honored
Shelf
On which
I will
Keep
Broken
Things.

Their beauty
Is
They
Need
Not
Ever
Be
'fixed.'

I will keep
Your
Wild
Free
Laughter

Though
It is now
Missing
Its
Reassuring
And
Graceful
Hinge.

I will keep
Broken
Things:

Thank you
So much!

I will keep
Broken
Things.

I will keep
You:

Pilgrim
Of
Sorrow.

I will keep
Myself.

Alice Walker

If I Was President

If I was President

The first thing I would do
is call Mumia Abu-Jamal.

No,

if I was president

the first thing I would do
is call Leonard Peltier.

No,

if I was president

the first person I would call
is that rascal

John Trudell.

No,

the first person I'd call

is that other rascal

Dennis Banks.

I would also call

Alice Walker.

I would make a conference call.

And I would say this:

Yo, you troublemakers,

it is time to let all of us
out of prison.

Pack up your things:

Dennis and John,

collect Alice Walker

If you can find her:

In Mendocino, Molokai, Mexico or

Gaza,

& head out to the prisons

where Mumia and Leonard
are waiting for you.

They will be traveling

light.

Mumia used to own a lot

of papers

but they took most of those
away from him.

Leonard

will probably want to drag along
some of his
canvases.

Alice

who may well be
shopping

in New Delhi

will no doubt want to
dress up for the occasion
in a sparkly shalwar kameez.

My next call is going to be
to the Cubans

all five of them;
so stop worrying.

For now, you're my fish.

I just had this long letter
from Alice and she has begged me
to put an end
to her suffering.

What? she said.

You think these men are the only ones who suffer
when Old Style America locks them up
& throws away
the key?

I can't tell you, she goes on,
the changes
this viciousness
has put me through,
and I have had a child to raise
& classes to teach

& food to buy
and just because

I'm a poet
it doesn't mean

I don't have to
pay the mortgage
or the rent.

Yet all these years,
nearly thirty or something
of them

I have been running around
the country

and the world
trying to arouse justice
for these men.
Tonsillitis
hasn't stopped me.
Migraine,
hasn't stopped me.
Lyme disease
hasn't stopped me.
And why?
Because
knowing the country
that I'm in,
as you are destined to learn
it too,
I know wrong
when I see it.
If that chair you're sitting in
could speak
you would have it moved
to another room.
You would burn it.
So, amigos,
pack your things.
Alice and John and Dennis
are on their way.
They are bringing prayers from Nilak Butler and Bill Wapepah;
they are bringing sweet grass and white sage
from Pine Ridge.
I am the president
at least until the Corporations
purchase the next election,
and this is what I choose
to do
on my first day.

Alice Walker

Knowing You Might Some Day Come

Knowing you might some day come
and how unprepared I've always
been
like Mr. Sloppy
in Charles Dickens'
our Mutual Friend
I made a list:
not meat, vegetables, beer and pudding
but number 1, warmth.
number 2, warmth.
number 3, warmth.
number 4, a good snuggler.
number 5, someone who sings
while he/she works.
number 6, a dancer.
number 7, someone who grows & is
intrigued by
the mind. And
by the spirit too.
Number 7, someone who is loved
by animals; and loves
them back without
a thought.
number 8, someone who smells
delicious.
number 9, someone whose anger
lasts no longer than mine.
number 10, someone who
stands beside me. behind me. If necessary
in front of me.
number 11, someone who
is a passable cook.
number 12, Someone who laughs
a lot, thinks I have a fine
sense
of humor
& has friends.
number 13, someone who can be
original in dress:

stylish
warlock –In silver, lapis
& black – to my witch.

Alice Walker

Our Martyr

When the people
have won a victory
whether small
or large
do you ever wonder
at that moment
where the martyrs
might be?
They who sacrificed
themselves
to bring to life
something unknown
though nonetheless more precious
than their blood.
I like to think of them
hovering over us
wherever we have gathered
to weep and to rejoice;
smiling and laughing,
actually slapping each other's palms
in glee.
Their blood has dried
and become rose petals.
What you feel brushing your cheek
is not only your tears
but these.
Martyrs never regret
what they have done
having done it.
Amazing too
they never frown.
It is all so mysterious
the way they remain
above us
beside us
within us;
how they beam
a human sunrise
and are so proud.

Alice Walker

Remember

Remember
When we ended
It all
-for a weekend-
& how
We knew?
You took
The tea bowl
That I
Broke
In
Carelessness
To glue together
Again
At your
House.

Alice Walker

She

She is the one
who will notice
that the first snapdragon
of Spring
is
in bloom;

She is the one
who will tell the most
funny
&
complicated
joke.

She is the one
who will surprise you
by knowing the difference
between turnips
and collard
Greens;

& between biscuits
& scones.

She is the one who knows where
to take you
for dancing
or where the food
& the restaurant's
decor
are not
to be
missed.

She is the one
who is saintly.

She is the one
who reserves the right

to dress
like a slut.

She is the one
who takes you shopping;

She is the one
who knows where
the best clothes
are bought
cheap.

She is the one
who warms your
home
with her fragrance;

the one who brings
music, magic & joy.

She is the one
speaking
the truth
from her heart.

She is the one at the bedside
wedding, funerals
or divorce
of all the best people
you dearly love.

She is the one
with courage.

She is the one
who speaks
her bright mind;

She is the one
who encourages young &
old
to do the same.

She is the one
on the picket line, at the barricade,
at the prison, in jail;

She is the one
who is there.

If they come for me
& I am at her house
I know
she will hide me.

If I tell her
where I have hidden
my heart
she will keep
my secret
safe.

She is the one
who
without hesitation
comes to my aid &
my defense.

She is the one
who believes
my side of the story
First;

She is the one
whose heart
is open.

She is the one who loves.

She is the one who makes
activism
the most compelling
because she is the one
who is irresistible

her own self.

She is our sister, our teacher, our friend:

Gloria Steinem.

Born 75 years ago

Glorious

To your parents

& still

Radiant

Today.

Happy Birthday, Beloved.

The grand feast

Of your noble Spirit

Has been

& is the cake

that nourishes

Us.

We thank you for your Beauty

& your Being.

Namaste.

Alice Walker

The Tree Of Life Has Fallen

The tree of life
has fallen on my small house.
I thought it was so much bigger!
But it is not.
There in the distance I see the mountains
still.
The view of vast water stretching before me
is superb.
My boat is grand and I still command the captain
of it; not having learned myself to sail.
But I am adrift
without my tree of life
that has fallen heavy
without grace or pity
on this small place.
For the departing dictator, in perpetuity.

Alice Walker

The Ways Of Water

With your unknown
to me
Odd magic
You came
To me:
Your truck
Backfiring
As if sending
Out
Rockets
To the
Stars

You came
In
So gracefully
Rockets
Silenced
Behind you &
Set
To work
As if nothing
Brought you
Greater
Joy.

I did not see Life was
About to change, as it does,
When odd magic appears:
There was
No music
Yet.

Chatting
About relationships, our freedom
From same,
Which we
So defended;
About water, faucet

Drips;
The gifts
Of growing older;
You set to work
& I, standing above you
As you lay on
Your back
Studied
Your feet:
Well cared for
In ocean blue
Sandals
Made of tough
Plastic.

Buddies,
We said, we agreed
That's what we
Needed.
How about going out
Together as buddies
For a night of music
& dance? My first
Indication
That song
Had a place
In
Your world.

Two years later
The leak
In my kitchen
Sink
Remains
Fixed
As well as
The leak
I never mentioned
In my spirit.

Early and late
We savor

The music
That comes
From
Your horn
The Golden Phoenix
That travels
With us
Everywhere

Your sound
Your love of Miles & Bird
& Wynton
Making
Friends of strangers
Around
The globe.

In Poor
Countries
Where
The grass
Has died
& the ponies
& oxen
Also
& the people
Have nothing
To bath in
Or to drink
&
Yet are soothed
By your cool
& liquid
Music, which
You pour over them
So freely,
I want to tell them:
Yes, he is also
A water man.

Yes, he also knows
The ways

Of water.

But they know this.

Alice Walker

To Change The World Enough

To change the world enough
you must cease to be afraid
of the poor.

We experience your fear as the least pardonable of
humiliations; in the past
it has sent us scurrying off
daunted and ashamed
into the shadows.

Now,
the world ending
the only one all of us have known
we seek the same
fresh light
you do:
the same high place
and ample table.

The poor always believe
there is room enough
for all of us;
the very rich never seem to have heard
of this.

In us there is wisdom of how to share
loaves and fishes
however few;
we do this everyday.

Learn from us,
we ask you.

We enter now
the dreaded location
of Earth's reckoning;
no longer far
off
or hidden in books
that claim to disclose
revelations;
it is here.

We must walk together without fear.
There is no path without us

Torture

When they torture your mother
plant a tree
When they torture your father
plant a tree
When they torture your brother
and your sister
plant a tree
When they assassinate
your leaders
and lovers
plant a tree
When they torture you
too bad
to talk
plant a tree.
When they begin to torture
the trees
and cut down the forest
they have made
start another.

Alice Walker

Turning Madness Into Flowers #1

If my sorrow were deeper
I'd be, along with you, under
the ocean's floor;
but today I learn that the oil
that pools beneath the ocean floor
is essence
residue
remains
of all our
relations
all
our ancestors who have died and turned to oil
without our witness
eons ago.
We've always belonged to them.
Speaking for you, hanging, weeping, over the water's edge
as well as for myself.
It is our grief
heavy, relentless,
trudging
us, however resistant,
to the decaying and rotten
bottom of things:
our grief bringing
us home.

Alice Walker

What It Feels Like

As if I've swallowed
A watermelon
And
Sidestepping
My digestive tract
It has lodged
In my heart.
There it lies
Green
& whole
with a luscious
red
heart of its own
daring me
to cut.

Alice Walker

What Makes The Dalai Lama Lovable?

His posture
From so many years
Holding his robe with one hand
Is odd.

His gait
Also.

One's own body
Aches
Witnessing
The sloping
Shoulders
& Angled
Neck;

One hopes
He
Attends
Yoga class
Or does Yoga
On his own
As part
Of prayer.

He smiles
As he bows
To Everything:
Accepting
The heavy
Burdens
Of
This earth;

It's
Toxic
Evils
& Prolific
Insults.

Even so,
He sleeps
Through
The night
Like a child
Because
Thank goodness
That is something
Else
Daylong
Meditation
Assures.

You could cry
Yourself to sleep
On his behalf
& He
Has done that
Too.

Life
Has been
A great
Endless
Tearing away
For
Him.

From
Mother, Father, Siblings, Country, Home.
And yet
Clearly
His mother
Loved him;
His brother & sister
Too:
Even his
Not so constant father,
Who
When Tenzin was
A boy

Shared
With him
Delicious
Scraps
Of
Succulent
Pork.

He laughs
Telling this
Story
Over half a century
Later
&
To who knows
How many
Puzzled
Vegetarians:
About
The way he sat
Behind
His father's chair
Like a dog,
Relishing
Each juicy
Greasy
Bite.

Whenever I see
The Dalai Lama
My first impulse
Is to laugh
I am so happy
To
Lay eyes
On
One
So effortlessly
Beautiful.

That balding head
That holds

A shine;
Those wire framed
Glasses
That might
Have come
From
Anywhere.

His look of having given
All he has.

He is my teacher;
Just staying alive.

Other teachers
I have had
Resemble him
In some way;

They too
Were
&
Are
Smart
And Humble;
Fascinated
By Science & things like
Time,
Eternity,
Cause & Effect;
The Evolution
Of the Soul.

A soul
That
Might
Or might not
Exist.

They too
See all of us
-Banker, murderer, gardener, thief -

When they look
Out across
The world:

But that is not all
They see.

They see our suffering;
Our striving
To find
The right path;
The one with heart
We may only
Have heard
About.

The Dalai Lama is Cool
A modern word
For
"Divine";
Because he wants
Only
Our collective
Health
& Happiness.

That's it!

What makes
Him
Lovable
Is
His holiness.

Alice Walker

When You See Water

When you see water in a stream
you say: oh, this is stream
water;

When you see water in the river
you say: oh, this is water
of the river;

When you see ocean
water
you say: This is the ocean's
water!

But actually water is always
only itself
and does not belong
to any of these containers
though it creates them.
And so it is with you.

Alice Walker

When You Thought Me Poor

When you thought me poor,
my poverty was shaming.
When blackness was unwelcome
we found it best
that I stay home.

When by the miracle
of fierce dreaming and hard work
Life fulfilled our every want
you found me crassly
well off;
not trimly,
inconspicuously wealthy
like your rich friends.

Still black too,
now
I owned too much and too many
of everything.

Woe is me: I became a
success! Blackness, who
knows how?
Became suddenly
in!

What to do?
Now that Fate appears
(for the moment anyhow)
to have dismissed
abject failure
in any case?
Now that moonlight and night
have blessed me.

Now that the sun
unaffected by criticism
of any sort,
implacably beams

the kiss filled magic that creates
the dark and radiant wonder
of my face.

Alice Walker

Word Reaches Us

Word reaches us

that you are sleeping, sleeping.

Dismayed

we have turned to the sea.

We encounter among others

walking there

a sense of what we have lost:

the broad expanse of humanity's

sensitivity to the oneness of itself.

Gabrielle,

while you sleep, resting your nimble

brain, we think of walking with you

in the valley

of the shadow of death; holding

you up.

We hope you can feel our grief;

our sorrow vast

like the ocean that draws us.

We know in this moment you teach us many things:

how all across the world

there is no one who deserves this fate.

We know we must bleach and sterilize our

tongues,

brighten with understanding

all our dark thoughts.

Sister, whom I never met

except in this pain that has so

wounded you

thank you for reminding us

through your suffering

and your suspenseful sleep

that we must change.

Alice Walker

Working Class Hero

My brothers knew
The things you know.
I did not scorn
learning them;
It's just my mind
Was busy being trained

For "Other Things":

Poetry, Philosophy, Literature.
Survival, for a girl.

But now,
What a relief
To see you understand
The ways
Of horses
Their shyness
& hatred
Of
Loneliness:

That you will not
Hesitate
To rescue
An old horse,
Dying on

His feet
&
That you will
Cheerfully
Wash him,
Aged
&
Incontinent
Head
To
Toe. Missing

With your bucket
&
Rag
Not
One
Hidden
Crevice
As he
Trembles
& weeps.

What peace
To see
Raising chickens
Does not
Mystify you
and
Hot water heaters
& their ways
Are well known;
That electricity
& how it
Works
Is something
Within
Your grasp.

That you can
Get a car
To run
By poking
It in
A few mysterious
Places
Under
The hood.

That you can
Fix a
Broken
Anything: battery, truck, stove,
Door, fridge, lamp, chicken coop hinge

While teaching me
The ins and outs
Of Opera
Or
While singing
Lusty
Italian
Tenor
That
Shakes
The walls.

That you can
Sit, comfy,
Unperturbed
By traffic
In the womb-like
Back seat
Of my
Aging
Chariot
While I drive
& you
Ride
The silver
Black
& Golden
Horses
Of
Your
Trumpet.

Alice Walker

You Want To Grow Old Like The Carters

Let other leaders
Retire
To play golf
& write
Memoirs
About bombing
Villages
They've never seen.

Growing old
Presents a peril
They may not
Expect.

It is to lose
One's soul
In trivia
& irrelevance
The nerve
Endings
Blunted
By the constant
Pressure
Of moral
Indifference.

Growing old
A curse:
Not even
Generally speaking
Able
To relate
To whoever
Shares

Your house. Not the mansion
You inhabit
On the
Lovely stolen hill

Above the sea
Or the interior one:
The darkened
Desolate
Shack.

You want to grow old
Like
The Carters;
Curing blindness
&
Building houses
For
The Poor;

Making friends of those
Who believe
They must fight.

You want to grow old
Like
The Carters
Holding hands
With someone
You love
&
Riding bicycles
Leisurely
Where the ground
Is well known
& perfectly
Flat.

You want to find
And keep to the path
Laid down
Inside you
Such a long time
Ago.

You want to grow old
Like

The Carters:
Serene. Eyes
Twinkling
To be accused
Of
Not getting
It right.

Upfront, upright.
Speaking what to you is true.

A person rich in Mothers.
Beloved.

And:
Honoring what is black
In you.

Alice Walker