Classic Poetry Series

Raymond Clevie Carver

- poems -

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An Afternoon

As he writes, without looking at the sea,
he feels the tip of his pen begin to tremble.
The tide is going out across the shingle.
But it isn't that. No,
it's because at that moment she chooses
to walk into the room without any clothes on.
Drowsy, not even sure where she is
for a moment. She waves the hair from her forehead.
Sits on the toilet with her eyes closed,
head down. Legs sprawled. He sees her
through the doorway. Maybe
she's remembering what happened that morning.
For after a time, she opens one eye and looks at him.
And sweetly smiles.

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

Circulation

And all at length are gathered in.
--LOUISE BOGAN

By the time I came around to feeling pain
and woke up, moonlight
flooded the room. My arm lay paralyzed,
propped up like an old anchor under
your back. You were in a dream,
you said later, where you'd arrived
early for the dance. But after
a moment's anxiety you were okay
because it was really a sidewalk
sale, and the shoes you were wearing,
or not wearing, were fine for that.

"Help me," I said. And tried to hoist
my arm. But it just lay there, aching,
unable to rise on its own. Even after
you said, "What is it? What's wrong?"
it stayed put -- deaf, unmoved
by any expression of fear or amazement.
We shouted at it, and grew afraid
when it didn't answer. "It's gone to sleep,"
I said, and hearing those words
knew how absurd this was. But
I couldn't laugh. Somehow,
between the two of us, we managed
to raise it. This can't be my arm
is what I kept thinking as
we thumped it, squeezed it, and
prodded it back to life. Shook it
until that stinging went away.

We said a few words to each other.
I don't remember what. Whatever
reassuring things people
who love each other say to each other
given the hour and such odd
circumstance. I do remember
you remarked how it was light
enough in the room that you could see
circles under my eyes.
You said I needed more regular sleep,
and I agreed. Each of us went
to the bathroom, and climbed back into bed
on our respective sides.
Pulled the covers up. "Good night,"
you said, for the second time that night.
And fell asleep. Maybe
into that same dream, or else another.

I lay until daybreak, holding
both arms fast across my chest.
Working my fingers now and then.
While my thoughts kept circling
around and around, but always going back
where they'd started from.
That one inescapable fact: even while
we undertake this trip,
there's another, far more bizarre,
we still have to make.

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

Happiness

So early it's still almost dark out.
I'm near the window with coffee,
and the usual early morning stuff
that passes for thought.

When I see the boy and his friend
walking up the road
to deliver the newspaper.

They wear caps and sweaters,
and one boy has a bag over his shoulder.
They are so happy
they aren't saying anything, these boys.

I think if they could, they would take
each other's arm.
It's early in the morning,
and they are doing this thing together.

They come on, slowly.
The sky is taking on light,
though the moon still hangs pale over the water.

Such beauty that for a minute
death and ambition, even love,
doesn't enter into this.

Happiness. It comes on
unexpectedly. And goes beyond, really,
any early morning talk about it.

Raymond Clevie Carver

Late Fragment

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

Stupid

It's what the kids nowadays call weed. And it drifts
like clouds from his lips. He hopes no one
comes along tonight, or calls to ask for help.
Help is what he's most short on tonight.
A storm thrashes outside. Heavy seas
with gale winds from the west. The table he sits at
is, say, two cubits long and one wide.
The darkness in the room teems with insight.
Could be he'll write an adventure novel. Or else
a children's story. A play for two female characters,
one of whom is blind. Cutthroat should be coming
into the river. One thing he'll do is learn
to tie his own flies. Maybe he should give
more money to each of his surviving
family members. The ones who already expect a little
something in the mail first of each month.
Every time they write they tell him
they're coming up short. He counts heads on his fingers
and finds they're all survivng. So what
if he'd rather be remembered in the dreams of strangers?
He raises his eyes to the skylights where rain
hammers on. After a while --
who knows how long? -- his eyes ask
that they be closed. And he closes them.
But the rain keeps hammering. Is this a cloudburst?
Should he do something? Secure the house
in some way? Uncle Bo stayed married to Aunt Ruby for 47 years. Then hanged himself.
He opens his eyes again. Nothing adds up.
It all adds up. How long will this storm go on?

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

The Cobweb

A few minutes ago, I stepped onto the deck
of the house. From there I could see and hear the water,
and everything that's happened to me all these years.
It was hot and still. The tide was out.
No birds sang. As I leaned against the railing
a cobweb touched my forehead.
It caught in my hair. No one can blame me that I turned
and went inside. There was no wind. The sea
was dead calm. I hung the cobweb from the lampshade.
Where I watch it shudder now and then when my breath
touches it. A fine thread. Intricate.
Before long, before anyone realizes,
I'll be gone from here.

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

This Morning

This morning was something. A little snow
lay on the ground. The sun floated in a clear
blue sky. The sea was blue, and blue-green,
as far as the eye could see.
Scarcely a ripple. Calm. I dressed and went
for a walk -- determined not to return
until I took in what Nature had to offer.
I passed close to some old, bent-over trees.
Crossed a field strewn with rocks
where snow had drifted. Kept going
until I reached the bluff.
Where I gazed at the sea, and the sky, and
the gulls wheeling over the white beach
far below. All lovely. All bathed in a pure
cold light. But, as usual, my thoughts
began to wander. I had to will
myself to see what I was seeing
and nothing else. I had to tell myself this is what
mattered, not the other. (And I did see it,
for a minute or two!) For a minute or two
it crowded out the usual musings on
what was right, and what was wrong -- duty,
tender memories, thoughts of death, how I should treat
with my former wife. All the things
I hoped would go away this morning.
The stuff I live with every day. What
I've trampled on in order to stay alive.
But for a minute or two I did forget
myself and everything else. I know I did.
For when I turned back i didn't know
where I was. Until some birds rose up
from the gnarled trees. And flew
in the direction I needed to be going.

Anonymous submission.

Raymond Clevie Carver

What The Doctor Said

He said it doesn't look good
he said it looks bad in fact real bad
he said I counted thirty-two of them on one lung before
I quit counting them
I said I'm glad I wouldn't want to know
about any more being there than that
he said are you a religious man do you kneel down
in forest groves and let yourself ask for help
when you come to a waterfall
mist blowing against your face and arms
do you stop and ask for understanding at those moments
I said not yet but I intend to start today
he said I'm real sorry he said
I wish I had some other kind of news to give you
I said Amen and he said something else
I didn't catch and not knowing what else to do
and not wanting him to have to repeat it
and me to have to fully digest it
I just looked at him
for a minute and he looked back it was then
I jumped up and shook hands with this man who'd just given me
something no one else on earth had ever given me
I may have even thanked him habit being so strong

Anonymous submission.

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