And so when I start speaking a powerful right arm of words sweeping down, I know him from what I say, and how I say it, because there's a window open between us, mixing the night air of our beings.”

The youngest was, obviously, the laziest. He won.

ONLY BREATH

Not Christian or Jew or Muslim, not Hindu, Buddhist, sufi, or zen. Not any religion or cultural system. I am not from the East or the West, not out of the ocean or up from the ground, not natural or ethereal, not composed of elements at all. I do not exist, am not an entity in this world or the next, did not descend from Adam and Eve or any origin story. My place is placeless, a trace of the traceless. Neither body or soul.

I belong to the beloved, have seen the two worlds as one and that one call to and know, first, last, outer, inner, only that breath breathing human being.

There is a way between voice and presence where information flows.

In disciplined silence it opens.

With wandering talk it closes.

4 Spring Giddiness:
Stand in the Wake of This Chattering and Grow Airy

ON SPRING GIDDINESS

Springtime—when ecstasy seems the natural way to be and any other out of tune with the season of soul growth. Song, airy silence, a lively conversation between plants. No urgency about what gets said or not said. We feel part of some hilarious nut pulling up through the surface into light or lying back in a wagon going who knows where. The weather of Spring in Persia and Turkey and in the southeastern United States is all one long extravagant absorption with ground and sky, the fragrances and what unfolds from within. In lucky places such as these, Spring is not so much a metaphor for a state of attunement as it is that attunement. Or say it this way: for a mystic, the inner world is a weather that contains the universe and uses it as symbolic language.

SPRING

Again, the violet bows to the lily.
Again, the rose is tearing off her gown!

The green ones have come from the other world, tipsy like the breeze up to some new foolishness.

Again, near the top of the mountain the anemone's sweet features appear.

The hyacinth speaks formally to the jasmine, “Peace be with you.” “And peace to you, lad! Come walk with me in this meadow.”
Again, there are sufis everywhere!
The bud is shy, but the wind removes her veil suddenly, “My friend!”
The Friend is here like water in the stream, like a lotus on the water.
The narcissus winks at the wisteria, “Whenever you say.”
And the clove to the willow, “You are the one I hope for.” The willow replies, “Consider these chambers of mine yours. Welcome!”
The apple, “Orange, why the frown?” “So that those who mean harm will not see my beauty.”
The ringdove comes asking, “Where, where is the Friend?” With one note the nightingale indicates the rose.
Again, the season of Spring has come and a spring-source rises under everything, a moon sliding from the shadows.
Many things must be left unsaid, because it’s late, but whatever conversation we haven’t had tonight, we’ll have tomorrow.

WHERE EVERYTHING IS MUSIC

Don’t worry about saving these songs! And if one of our instruments breaks, it doesn’t matter.
We have fallen into the place where everything is music.

The strumming and the flute notes rise into the atmosphere, and even if the whole world’s harp should burn up, there will still be hidden instruments playing.
So the candle flickers and goes out. We have a piece of flint, and a spark.
This singing art is sea foam. The graceful movements come from a pearl somewhere on the ocean floor.
Poems reach up like spindrift and the edge of driftwood along the beach, wanting!
They derive from a slow and powerful root that we can’t see. Stop the words now. Open the window in the center of your chest, and let the spirits fly in and out.

A GREAT WAGON

When I see your face, the stones start spinning! You appear; all studying wanders. I lose my place.
Water turns pearly. Fire dies down and doesn’t destroy.
In your presence I don’t want what I thought I wanted, those three little hanging lamps. Inside your face the ancient manuscripts seem like rusty mirrors.
You breathe; new shapes appear,
and the music of a desire as widespread
as Spring begins to move
like a great wagon.

Drive slowly.
Some of us walking alongside
are lame!

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don’t open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I’ll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn’t make any sense.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don’t go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don’t go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don’t go back to sleep.

I would love to kiss you.
The price of kissing is your life.
Now my loving is running toward my life shouting,
What a bargain, let’s buy it.

Daylight, full of small dancing particles
and the one great turning, our souls
are dancing with you, without feet, they dance.
Can you see them when I whisper in your ear?

They try to say what you are, spiritual or sexual?
They wonder about Solomon and all his wives.
In the body of the world, they say, there is a soul
and you are that.
But we have ways within each other
that will never be said by anyone.

Come to the orchard in Spring.
There is light and wine, and sweethearts
in the pomegranate flowers.
If you do not come, these do not matter.
If you do come, these do not matter.

SPRING IS CHRIST

Everyone has eaten and fallen asleep. The house is empty.
We walk out to the garden to let the apple meet the peach,
to carry messages between rose and jasmine.
Spring is Christ,
raising martyred plants from their shrouds.
Their mouths open in gratitude, wanting to be kissed. The glow of the rose and the tulip means a lamp is inside. A leaf trembles. I tremble in the wind-beauty like silk from Turkestan. The censer fans into flame.

This wind is the Holy Spirit. The trees are Mary. Watch how husband and wife play subtle games with their hands. Cloudy pearls from Aden are thrown across the lovers, as is the marriage custom.

The scent of Joseph’s shirt comes to Jacob. A red carnelian of Yemeni laughter is heard by Muhammad in Mecca.

We talk about this and that. There’s no rest except on these branching moments.

SHREDS OF STEAM

Light again, and the one who brings light! Change the way you live!

From the ocean vat, wine fire in each cup! Two or three of the long dead wake up. Two or three drunks become lion hunters.

Sunlight washes a dark face. The flower of what’s true opens in the face. Meadowgrass and garden ground grow damp again. A strong light like fingers massages our heads. No dividing these fingers from those.

Draw back the lock bolt. One level flows into another. Heat seeps into everything. The passionate pots boil. Clothing tears into the air. Poets fume shreds of steam, never so happy as out in the light!

THE STEAMBATH

Steam fills the bath, and frozen figures on the wall open their eyes, wet and round, Narcissus eyes that see enormous distances, and new ears that love the details of any story. The figures dance like friends diving and coming up and diving again.

Steam spills into the courtyard. It’s the noise of resurrection! They move from one corner laughing across to the opposite corner. No one notices how steam opens the rose of each mind, fills every beggar’s cup solid with coins. Hold out a basket. It fills up so well that emptiness becomes what you want.

The judge and the accused forget the sentencing. Someone stands up to speak, and the wood of the table becomes holy. The tavern in that second is actually made of wine. The dead drink it in.

Then the steam evaporates. Figures sink back into the wall, eyes blank, ears just lines. Now it’s happening again, outside. The garden fills with bird and leaf sounds. We stand in the wake of this chattering and grow airy. How can anyone say what happens, even if each of us dips a pen a hundred million times into ink?

THE GROUND CRIES OUT

I feel like the ground, astonished at what the atmosphere has brought to it. What I know is growing inside me. Rain makes every molecule pregnant with a mystery. We groan with women in labor. The ground cries out, I Am Truth and Glory Is Here, breaks open, and a camel is born out of it. A branch falls from a tree, and there’s a snake.
Muhammad said, *A faithful believer is a good camel, always looking to its master, who takes perfect care.*

He brands the flank.
He sets out hay.
He binds the knees with reasonable rules,
and now he loosens all bindings and lets his camel dance,
tearing the bridle and ripping the blankets.

The field itself sprouts new forms,
while the camel dances over them, imaginary
plants no one has thought of,
but all these new seeds, no matter how they try,
do not reveal the other sun.
They hide it.
Still, the effort is joy,
one by one to keep uncovering
pearls in oyster shells.

A vagrant wanders empty ruins.
Suddenly he’s wealthy.
But don’t be satisfied with stories, how things
have gone with others. Unfold your own myth, without complicated explanation,
so everyone will understand the passage,
*We have opened you.*

Start walking toward Shams. Your legs will get heavy
and tired. Then comes a moment
of feeling the wings you’ve grown,
lifting.

**NOT A DAY ON ANY CALENDAR**

Spring, and everything outside is growing,
even the tall cypress tree.
We must not leave this place.
Around the lip of the cup we share, these words,

*My Life Is Not Mine.*

If someone were to play music, it would have to be very sweet.
We’re drinking wine, but not through lips.
We’re sleeping it off, but not in bed.
Rub the cup across your forehead.
This day is outside living and dying.

Give up wanting what other people have.
That way you’re safe.
“Where, where can I be safe?” you ask.

This is not a day for asking questions,
not a day on any calendar.
This day is conscious of itself.
This day is a lover, bread, and gentleness,
more manifest than saying can say.

Thoughts take form with words,
but this daylight is beyond and before
thinking and imagining. Those two
they are so thirsty, but this gives smoothness to water. Their mouths are dry, and they are tired.

The rest of this poem is too blurry for them to read.

FLUTES FOR DANCING

It's lucky to hear the flutes for dancing coming down the road. The ground is glowing. The table set in the yard. We will drink all this wine tonight because it's Spring. It is. It's a growing sea. We're clouds over the sea, or flecks of matter in the ocean when the ocean seems lit from within. I know I'm drunk when I start this ocean talk. Would you like to see the moon split in half with one throw?

THE SHAPE OF MY TONGUE

This mirror inside me shows . . . I can't say what, but I can't not know!

I run from body. I run from spirit. I do not belong anywhere.

I'm not alive!

You smell the decay?

You talk about my craziness. Listen rather to the honed-blade sanity I say.

This gourd head on top of a dervish robe, do I look like someone you know?

This dipper gourd full of liquid, upsidetown and not spilling a drop! Or if it spills, it drops into God and rounds into pearls.

I form a cloud over that ocean and gather spillings. When Shams is here, I rain. After a day or two, lilies sprout, the shape of my tongue.

THE GRASSES

The same wind that uproots trees makes the grasses shine.

The lordly wind loves the weakness and the lowness of grasses. Never brag of being strong.

The axe doesn't worry how thick the branches are. It cuts them to pieces. But not the leaves. It leaves the leaves alone.

A flame doesn't consider the size of the woodpile. A butcher doesn't run from a flock of sheep.

What is form in the presence of reality? Very feeble. Reality keeps the sky turned over like a cup above us, revolving. Who turns the sky wheel? The universal intelligence.

And the motion of the body comes from the spirit like a waterwheel that's held in a stream.

The inhaling-exhaling is from spirit, now angry, now peaceful.
Wind destroys, and wind protects.  
*There is no reality but God,*  
says the completely surrendered sheikh,  
who is an ocean for all beings.

The levels of creation are straws in that ocean.  
The movement of the straws comes from an agitation  
in the water. When the ocean wants the straws calm,  
it sends them close to shore. When it wants them  
back in the deep surge, it does with them  
as the wind does with the grasses.  
This never ends.

THE SHEIKH WHO PLAYED WITH CHILDREN

A certain young man was asking around,  
"I need to find a wise person. I have a problem."

A bystander said, "There's no one with intelligence  
in our town except that man over there  
playing with the children,  
the one riding the stick-horse.

He has keen, fiery insight and vast dignity  
like the night sky, but he conceals it  
in the madness of child's play."

The young seeker approached the children, "Dear father,  
you who have become as a child, tell me a secret."

"Go away. This is not a day  
for secrets."

"But please! Ride your horse this way,  
just for a minute."

The sheikh play-galloped over.

"Speak quickly. I can't hold this one still for long.  
Whoops. Don't let him kick you.  
This is a wild one!"

The young man felt he couldn't ask his serious question  
in the crazy atmosphere, so he joked,  
"I need to get married.  
Is there someone suitable on this street?"

"There are three kinds of women in the world.  
Two are griefs, and one is a treasure to the soul.  
The first, when you marry her, is all yours.  
The second is half-yours, and the third  
is not yours at all.  
Now get out of here,  
before this horse kicks you in the head! Easy now!"

The sheikh rode off among the children.  
The young man shouted, "Tell me more about the kinds of  
women!"

The sheikh, on his cane horsie, came closer,  
"The virgin of your first love is all yours.  
She will make you feel happy and free. A childless widow  
is the second. She will be half-yours. The third,  
who is nothing to you, is a married woman with a child.  
By her first husband she had a child, and all her love  
goes into that child. She will have no connection with you.  
Now watch out.  
Back away.  
I'm going to turn this rascal around!"

He gave a loud whoop and rode back,  
calling the children around him.

"One more question, Master!"

"What is it? Quickly! That rider over there needs me.  
I think I'm in love."

"What is this playing that you do?  
Why do you hide your intelligence so?"

"The people here  
want to put me in charge. They want me to be  
judge, magistrate, and interpreter of all the texts.
The knowing I have doesn't want that. It wants to enjoy itself. I am a plantation of sugarcane, and at the same time I'm eating the sweetness."

Knowledge that is acquired is not like this. Those who have it worry if audiences like it or not. It's a bait for popularity.

Disputational knowing wants customers. It has no soul. Robust and energetic before a responsive crowd, it slumps when no one is there. The only real customer is God.

Chew quietly your sweet sugarcane God-Love, and stay playfully childish. Your face will turn rosy with illumination like the redbud flowers.

Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy, absentminded. Someone sober will worry about things going badly. Let the lover be.

All day and night, music, a quiet, bright reedsong. If it fades, we fade.

5. Feeling Separation:
Don't Come Near Me

ON SEPARATION

We know separation so well because we've tasted the union. The reed flute makes music because it has already experienced changing mud and rain and light into sugarcane. Longing becomes more poignant if in the distance you can't tell whether your friend is going away or coming back. The pushing away pulls you in.

SOMETIMES I FORGET COMPLETELY

Sometimes I forget completely what companionship is. Unconscious and insane, I spill sad energy everywhere. My story gets told in various ways: a romance, a dirty joke, a war, a vacancy.

Divide up my forgetfulness to any number, it will go around. These dark suggestions that I follow, are they part of some plan? Friends, be careful. Don't come near me out of curiosity, or sympathy.

You do not need to read the marked out text below.

A MAN AND A WOMAN ARGUING

One night in the desert a poor Bedouin woman has this to say to her husband:
I am all orders of being, the circling galaxy, the evolutionary intelligence, the lift, and the falling away. What is, and what isn't. You who know. Jelaluddin, You the one in all, say who I am. Say I am You.

27  The Turn: Dance in Your Blood

ON THE TURN

The “turn,” the moving meditation done by Mevlevi dervishes, originated with Rumi. The story goes that he was walking in the goldsmithing section of Konya when he heard a beautiful music in their hammering. He began turning in harmony with it, an ecstatic dance of surrender and yet with great centered discipline. He arrived at a place where ego dissolves and a resonance with universal soul comes in. Dervish literally means “doorway.” When what is communicated moves from presence to presence, darshan occurs, with language inside the seeing. When the gravitational pull gets even stronger, the two become one turning that is molecular and galactic and a spiritual remembering of the presence at the center of the universe. Turning is an image of how the dervish becomes an empty place where human and divine can meet. To approach the whole the part must become mad, by conventional standards at least. These ecstatic holy people, called matzubs in the sufi tradition, redefine this sort of madness as true health.

When he saw the dervishes in Cairo in 1910, Rainer Maria Rilke, the great spiritual poet of this century, said the turn was a form of kneeling. “It is so truly the mystery of the kneeling of the deeply kneeling man. With Rumi the scale is shifted, for in following the peculiar weight and strength in his knees, he belongs to that world in which height is depth. This is the night of radiant depth unfolded.” December 17 is celebrated each year as Rumi’s Wedding Night, the night he died in 1273 and reached full union.
Inside water, a waterwheel turns.
A star circulates with the moon.
We live in the night ocean wondering,
What are these lights?

You have said what you are.
I am what I am.
Your actions in my head,
my head here in my hands
with something circling inside.
I have no name
for what circles
so perfectly.

A secret turning in us
makes the universe turn.
Head unaware of feet,
and feet head. Neither cares.
They keep turning.

This moment this love comes to rest in me,
many beings in one being.
In one wheat grain a thousand sheaf stacks.
Inside the needle's eye a turning night of stars.

Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.
Don't try to see through the distances.
That's not for human beings. Move within,
but don't move the way fear makes you move.

Walk to the well.
Turn as the earth and the moon turn,
circling what they love.
Whatever circles comes from the center.

I circle your nest tonight,
around and around until morning
when a breath of air says, Now,
and the Friend holds up like a goblet
some anonymous skull.

No better love than love with no object,
no more satisfying work than work with no purpose.
If you could give up tricks and cleverness,
that would be the cleverest trick!

Some nights stay up till dawn,
as the moon sometimes does for the sun.
Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way
of a well, then lifted out into light.

I am so small I can barely be seen.
How can this great love be inside me?
Look at your eyes. They are small,
but they see enormous things.
When you feel your lips becoming infinite and sweet, like the moon in a sky, when you feel that spaciousness inside, Shams of Tabriz will be there too.

The sun is love. The lover, a speck circling the sun. A Spring wind moves to dance any branch that isn’t dead.

Something opens our wings. Something makes boredom and hurt disappear. Someone fills the cup in front of us. We taste only sacredness.

Held like this, to draw in milk, no will, tasting clouds of milk, never so content.

I stand up, and this one of me turns into a hundred of me. They say I circle around you. Nonsense. I circle around me.

I have lived on the lip of insanity, wanting to know reasons, knocking on a door. It opens. I’ve been knocking from the inside!

Real value comes with madness, matzub below, scientist above. Whoever finds love beneath hurt and grief disappears into emptiness with a thousand new disguises.

Dance, when you’re broken open. Dance, if you’ve torn the bandage off. Dance in the middle of the fighting. Dance in your blood. Dance, when you’re perfectly free.