

THE INVITATION

by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing. It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love, for your dream, for the adventure of being alive.

It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon. I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain! I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own, without moving to hide it or fade it, or fix it.

I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own, if you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic, to remember the limitations of being human.

It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself; if you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul; if you can be faithless and therefore trustworthy.

I want to know if you can see beauty even when it's not pretty, every day, and if you can source your own life from its presence. I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine, and still stand on the edge of the lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"

It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up, after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done to feed the children. It doesn't interest me who you know or how you came to be here. I want to know if you will stand in the center of the fire with me and not shrink back.

It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you, from the inside, when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

WHERE DOES THE DANCE BEGIN, WHERE DOES IT END?

Don't call this world adorable, or useful, that's not it.
It's frisky, and a theatre for more than fair winds.
The eyelash of lightening is neither good nor evil.
The struck tree burns like a pillar of gold.

But the blue rain sinks, straight to the white
feet of the trees
whose mouths are open.
Doesn't the wind, turning in circles, invent the dance?
Haven't the flowers moved, slowly, across Asia, then Europe,
until at last, now, they shine
in your own yard?

Don't call this world an explanation, or even an education.

When the Sufi poet whirled, was he looking
outward, to the mountains so solidly there
in a white-capped ring, or was he looking

to the center of everything: the seed, the egg, the idea
that was also there,
beautiful as a thumb
curved and touching the finger, tenderly,
little love-ring,

as he whirled,
oh jug of breath,
in the garden of dust?

Rumi

EVERYTHING HAS A DEEP DREAM

I've spent many years learning
how to fix life, only to discover
at the end of the day
that life is not broken.
There is a hidden seed
of greater wholeness
in everyone and everything.
We serve life best
when we water it
and befriend it.
When we listen before we act.
In befriending life,
we do not make things happen
according to our own design.
We uncover something that is already happening
in us and around us and
create conditions that enable it.
Everything is moving towards its place of wholeness
always struggling against the odds.
Everything has a deep dream of itself and its fulfillment.
Rachel Naomi Remem

After a while you learn the subtle difference
between holding a hand and chaining a soul.
And you learn that love does not mean leaning
and that company does not mean security.

And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts
and presents aren't promises.
And you begin to accept your defeats
with your head up and your eyes open
with the grace of an adult
and not the grief of a child.

And you learn to build all your roads today
because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans,

and the future has a way of falling down
in mid flight.

After awhile you learn that sunshine burns
if you get too much.
So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul
instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.

And you learn that you really can endure...
That you are strong and you have worth.
And you learn and learn.
With every good bye you learn.
And with every hello.

Jorge Borges

JUST AS THE WINGED ENERGY OF DELIGHT

Just as the winged energy of delight
carried you over many chasms early on,
now raise the daringly imagined arch
holding up the astounding bridges.

Miracle doesn't lie only in the amazing
living through and defeat of danger;
miracles become miracles in the clear
achievement that is earned.

To work with things is not hubris
when building the association beyond words;
denser and denser the pattern becomes—
being carried along is not enough.

Take your well-disciplined strengths
and stretch them between two
opposing poles. Because inside human beings
is where God learns.

Rainer Maria Rilke

KINDNESS

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters
and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
Like a shadow or a friend.
Naomi Shihab Nye

SELF-PORTRAIT

It doesn't interest me if there is one God or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned.

If you know despair or can see it in others.

I want to know if you are prepared to live in the world
with its harsh need to change you.

If you can look back with firm eyes saying this is where I stand.
I want to know if you know how to melt into that fierce heat of living
falling toward the center of your longing.

I want to know if you are willing to live, day by day,
with the consequence of love and the bitter
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard, in that fierce embrace, even
the gods speak of God.

David Whyte

BUOYANCY

Love has taken away all my practices
And filled me with poetry.

I tried to keep quietly repeating,
No strength but yours,
But I couldn't.
I had to clap and sing.

I used to be respectable and chaste and stable,
but who can stand in this strong wind
and remember those things?

A mountain keeps an echo deep inside itself.
That's how I hold your voice.

I am scrap wood thrown in your fire,
and quickly reduced to smoke.

I saw you and became empty.
This emptiness, more beautiful than existence,
it obliterates existence, and yet when it comes,
existence thrives and creates more existence.

The sky is blue. The world is a blind man
squatting on the road.

But whoever sees your emptiness
sees beyond blue and beyond the blind man.
A great soul hides like Mohammed, or Jesus,
moving through a crowd in a city
where no one knows him.

To praise is to praise
how one surrenders
to the emptiness.

To praise the sun is to praise your own eyes.
Praise, the ocean. What we say, a little ship.

So the sea-journey goes on, and who knows where!
Just to be held by the ocean is the best luck
we could have. It's a total waking up!

Why should we grieve that we've been sleeping?
It doesn't matter how long we've been unconscious.

We're groggy, but let the guilt go.
Feel the motions of tenderness
around you, the buoyancy.

Rumi

PSALM 122

I rejoiced
when I heard
them announce,
"The time of warfare is past.
No more
will brother hate brother
or violence have its way.
No more
will they drown out
God's silence
and shut their hearts
to his song."

Pray for peace
in the cities
and harmony
among the races.
May peace come
to live on our streets
and justice within
our walls.
With all my heart
I will pray
that peace come
to live among us.
For the sake of all
earth's people,
I will do
my utmost for peace.

The Psalms
translated by Stephen Mitchell

OUT OF THIS MESS

Pray
To be humble
So that God does not
Have to appear to be so stingy.
O pray to be honest,
Strong,
Kind,
And pure.
So that the Beloved is never miscast
As a cruel great miser.
I know you have a hundred complex cases
Against God in court,
But never mind, wayfarer,
Let's just get out of this mess
And pray to be loving and humble
So that the Friend will be forced to reveal
Himself

So
Near!
Hafiz

MINDFUL

Every day
I see or hear
something
that more or less

kills me
with delight
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.

It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

Mary Oliver

Now I lay me down to stay
awake. Pray the Lord my soul

to take into your wakefulness,
so that I can get this one bit

of wisdom clear: grace comes to
forgive and then forgive again.

Rumi

THE WELL OF GRIEF

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief

turning downward through its black water
to the place we cannot breathe

will never know the source from which we drink,
the secret water, cold and clear,

nor find in the darkness glimmering
the small round coins
thrown by those who wished for something else.

David Whyte

WE HAVE NOT COME TO TAKE PRISONERS

We have not come here to take prisoners,
But to surrender ever more deeply
To freedom and joy.

We have not come into this exquisite world
To hold ourselves hostage from love.

Run my dear,
From anything
That may not strengthen
Your precious budding wings.

Run like hell my dear,
From anyone likely
To put a sharp knife

Into the sacred tender vision
Of your beautiful heart.

We have a duty to befriend
Those aspects of obedience
That stand outside of our house
And shout to reason
“O please, O please,
Come out and play.”

For we have not come here to take prisoners
Or to confine our wonderous spirits,
But to experience ever and ever more deeply
Our divine courage, freedom and

Light!

Hafiz

LOVE

Love means to look at yourself
The way one looks at distant things
For you are only one thing among many.
And whoever sees that way heals his heart,
Without knowing it, from various ills—
A bird and a tree say to him: Friend.

Then he wants to use himself and things
So that they stand in the glow of ripeness.
It doesn't matter whether he knows what he
serves:

Who serves best doesn't always understand.
Czaslaw Milosz

TO HAVE WITHOUT HOLDING

Learning to love differently is hard,
Love with the hands wide open, love
with the doors banging on their hinges,
the cupboard unlocked, the wind
roaring and whimpering in the rooms
rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds
that thwack like rubber bands
in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open
stretching the muscles that feel
as if they are made of wet plaster,
then of blunt knives, then
of sharp knives.

It hurts to thwart the reflexes
of grab, of clutch; to love and let
go again and again.
It pesters to remember
the lover who is not in the bed,
to hold back what is owed to the work
that gutters like a candle in a cave
without air, to love consciously,
conscientiously, concretely, constructively.

I can't do it, you say it's killing
me, but you thrive, you glow
on the street like a neon raspberry,
you float and sail, a helium balloon
bright bachelor's button blue and bobbing
on the cold and hot winds of our breath,
as we make and unmake in passionate
diastole and systole the rhythm
of our unbound bonding, to love
with minimized malice, hunger
and anger moment by moment balanced.

Marge Piercy

Spring

Violets have many leaves, each one so earnestly
heart-shaped that you could not imagine the plants have
thought of anything else to do. But they have: they make
blossoms, which rise yellow or violet, in multitudes, the
violet ones with violet-colored spurs. They like
dampness, they like hillsides and are comfortable also
in the shady woods. They like to be alone, or congregated
together in the grass, looking up as you pass by, saying
Hello, Hello. And what else do you imagine

they might do? Sing? I don't think so, I suspect
they know when any further ambition would be
unseemly. So all their time is used up in happiness—
in becoming the best they can be
for the greater glory of_____.

In fact, they know it's okay to rest for the rest
of your life just saying: Thank you. Oh cast of thousands,
as are the stars of heaven, Thank you. *Mary Oliver*