

A Commonplace Garden

*In the darkening June evening
I draw a blossom near, and bending close
search it as a woman searches
a loved one's face.*

~Jane Kenyon, "Peonies at Dusk"

*How astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world
improve a sense of its natural beauties upon us! Like poor
Falstaff, though I do not 'babble,' I think of green fields; I muse
with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from
my infancy—their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I
had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because
they are connected with the most thoughtless and the happiest
moments of our lives. I have seen foreign flowers in hothouses,
of the most beautiful nature, but I do not care a straw for them.
The simple flowers of our Spring are what I want to see again.*

~John Keats writing to James Rice, 16 February 1820,
twelve months before the poet's death in 1821.

*This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers
and they open—*

~Mary Oliver, "Peonies"

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The Garden Quarto

Still
in a way
nobody sees a flower
really
it is so small
we haven't the time
and to see takes time
like to have a friend takes
time

~Georgia O'Keefe



Spring 2020

Vegetables in Space

In between the launching of satellites, the sipping of orange drink,
and the wondering if their toenails were growing faster up there,
the men in their glorious repeated arc beyond rainbows
tended the garden peas. Round-faced Mendel the monk
could not have bent with more grave tenderness
over his smooth and angular seeds, his long and short stems,
and his beautiful, ever so slightly cooked tables of figures
than these unshaven pilots, left without steering to do,
over their small and tentative passengers.
Plants were company of a sort, something to do besides exercise,
and they had a secret: Would noble generations yet unborn,
hurtling toward Andromeda, eat fresh peas?

Enclosed in their state-of-the-science greenhouse mist,
some never sprouted at all. Some broke into tendrils
whose spirals wandered in their weakened wits
and then lay down. A few, and who knew why,
opened their dimpled fists into resolute stems,
translucent, with a sheen like babies' eyelids,
that found their way in weightlessness, or the gravity
exerted by the mass of a spheroid seed.
Nobody heard them say, We came so high
but we don't see the sun from here, there must be none,
or, There is no *up*, we can grow any way we please,
or, Which way? Which way? From the food toward the light.

~Sarah Lindsay

Author of *Primate Behavior*, *Mount Clutter*,
and *Debt to the Bone-Eating Snotflower*

EPA Chief Claims Carbon Dioxide Is Not a Primary Contributor to Climate Change

Clemmensen et al. now show that most of the stored carbon . . . is in fact derived from mycorrhizal mycelium rather than from plant litter. . . . Studies show that carbon sequestration is regulated by . . . shifts in the mycorrhizal fungal community. The results will need to be explicitly considered in models of . . . the global carbon cycle.
—*Science* 29, vol. 339 (March 2013): 1615.

In my new garden, peas and lettuce
germinate, and I water the seeds

daily, hoping for deep roots. Before
the sun reaches my backyard, I pull

on boots, bow down to examine
tiny green whorls and buds, watching the damp

pool and sink. Raised beds layer
soil, peat moss, composted cow dung,

leaf litter—a habitat for spreading
essential mycorrhizae, but I wonder

if their mycelium trails have spiderwebbed
through yet, if the environment

is quite right. When I step out of the shower,
I squeeze water from my hair, imagine

collecting it before it disappears
down the drain. In the mirror-fog

I see a bloom of reddish skin—between
my breasts fungus multiplies, mushroom's

cousins in the moisture of my tender
creases. A splash, as if the spores

exploded from my chest, radiating
outward from a central cavity,

the impact crater where nothing grows.
I wish I could peel my own skin—scratch

where the fungus flakes and collect
the duff—sprinkle discarded cells

over the surface and begin
a colony; a network of hyphae

and roots evolved to convert biomass, fix
carbon into the ground.

In the backyard I submerge myself
in a bathtub of soil, soak with the hose,

spray my hair. I sink deeper, pulling
radishes from between my toes.

~Gwendolyn Ann Hill
MFA, University of Arkansas

Miracle On St David's Day

All you need to know about this poem is that
it is a true story. It happened in the '70s,
and it took me years to find a way to write the poem.

*'They flash upon that inward eye
which is the bliss of solitude'*
(from 'The Daffodils' by William Wordsworth)

An afternoon yellow and open-mouthed
with daffodils. The sun treads the path
among cedars and enormous oaks.
It might be a country house, guests strolling,
the rumps of gardeners between nursery shrubs.

I am reading poetry to the insane.
An old woman, interrupting, offers
as many buckets of coal as I need.
A beautiful chestnut-haired boy listens
entirely absorbed. A schizophrenic

on a good day, they tell me later.
In a cage of first March sun a woman
sits not listening, not seeing, not feeling.
In her neat clothes the woman is absent.
A big, mild man is tenderly led

to his chair. He has never spoken.
His labourer's hands on his knees, he rocks
gently to the rhythms of the poems.
I read to their presences, absences,
to the big, dumb labouring man as he rocks.

He is suddenly standing, silently,
huge and mild, but I feel afraid. Like slow
movement of spring water or the first bird
of the year in the breaking darkness,
the labourer's voice recites 'The Daffodils'.

The nurses are frozen, alert; the patients
seem to listen. He is hoarse but word-perfect.
Outside the daffodils are still as wax,
a thousand, ten thousand, their syllables
unspoken, their creams and yellows still.

Forty years ago, in a Valleys school,
the class recited poetry by rote.
Since the dumbness of misery fell
he has remembered there was a music
of speech and that once he had something to say.

When he's done, before the applause, we observe
the flowers' silence. A thrush sings
and the daffodils are flame.

~Gillian Clarke
National Poet of Wales, 2008-2016

*Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen
but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers;
they hold up Adam's profession.*
~Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act V, sc. I

