Funeral Blues
(Song IX / from Two Songs for Hedli Anderson)

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone.
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling in the sky the message He is Dead,
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever, I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun.
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

— Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-1973)

Ride a Wild Horse

Ride a wild horse
with purple wings
striped yellow and black
except the head
which must be red.

Ride a wild horse
against the sky --
hold tight to his wings

Before you die
whatever else you leave undone—
ride a wild horse
into the sun.

— Hannah Kahn
Advice to My Son

The trick is, to live your days
as if each one may be your last
(for they go fast, and young men lose their lives
in strange and unimaginable ways)
but at the same time, plan long range
(for they go slow; if you survive
the shattered windshield and the bursting shell
you will arrive
at our approximation here below
of heaven or hell).

To be specific, between the peony and the rose
plant squash and spinach, turnips and tomatoes;
beauty is nectar
and nectar, in a desert, saves,
but the stomach craves stronger sustenance
than the honied vine.
Therefore, marry a pretty girl
after seeing her mother;
Show your soul to one man,
work with another;
and always serve bread with your wine.

But son,
always serve wine.

— Peter Meinke

China

I am an ant inside a blue bowl
on the table of a cruel prince.

Battle plans are being discussed.
Much rice wine is poured.

But even when he angers
and drives a long knife into the table,

I continue to quietly circle
the bowl, hand-painted with oranges and green vines.

— Billy Collins
The Preacher Ruminates Behind The Sermon

I think it must be lonely to be God.  
Nobody loves a master. No. Despite  
The bright hosannas, bright dear-Lords, and bright  
Determined reverence of Sunday eyes.

Picture Jehovah striding through the hall  
Of his importance, creatures running out  
From servant-corners to acclaim, to shout  
Appreciation of His merit’s glare.

But who walks with Him?—dares to take His arm,  
To slap Him on the shoulder, tweak His ear,  
Buy Him a Coca-Cola or a beer,  
Pooh-pooh His politics, call Him a fool?

Perhaps—who knows?—He tires of looking down.  
Those eyes are never lifted. Never straight.  
Perhaps sometimes He tires of being great  
In solitude. Without a hand to hold.

— Gwendolyn Brooks

After the Voices

Youth is gone from the place where I was young  
even the language that I heard here once  
its cadences that went on echoing  
a youth forgotten and the great singing  
of the beginning have fallen silent  
with the voices that were the spirit of them  
and their absences were no more noticed  
than were those of the unreturning birds  
each spring until there were no words at all  
for what was gone but it was always so  
I have no way of telling what I miss  
I am only the one who misses it

— W. S. Merwin
Days

Each one is a gift, no doubt,
ministeriously placed in your waking hand
or set upon your forehead
moments before you open your eyes.

Today begins cold and bright,
the ground heavy with snow
and the thick masonry of ice,
the sun glinting off the turrets of clouds.

Through the calm eye of the window
everything is in its place
but so precariously
this day might be resting somehow

on the one before it,
all the days of the past stacked high
like the impossible tower of dishes
entertainers used to build on stage.

No wonder you find yourself
perched on the top of a tall ladder
hoping to add one more.
Just another Wednesday

you whisper,
then holding your breath,
place this cup on yesterday’s saucer
without the slightest clink.

— Billy Collins
The Word

Down near the bottom
of the crossed-out list
of things you have to do today,

between “green thread”
and “broccoli” you find
that you have penciled “sunlight.”

Resting on the page, the word
is as beautiful, it touches you
as if you had a friend

and sunlight were a present
he had sent you from some place distant as this morning --to cheer you up,

and to remind you that,
among your duties, pleasure
is a thing,

that also needs accomplishing
Do you remember?
that time and light are kinds

of love, and love
is no less practical
than a coffee grinder

or a safe spare tire?
Tomorrow you may be utterly
without a clue

but today you get a telegram,
from the heart in exile
proclaiming that the kingdom

still exists,
the king and queen alive,
still speaking to their children,

-to any one among them
who can find the time,
to sit out in the sun and listen.

— Tony Hoagland
Aimless Love

This morning as I walked along the lakeshore,  
I fell in love with a wren  
and later in the day with a mouse  
the cat had dropped under the dining room table.

In the shadows of an autumn evening,  
I fell for a seamstress  
still at her machine in the tailor’s window,  
and later for a bowl of broth,  
steam rising like smoke from a nasal battle.

This is the best kind of love, I thought,  
without recompense, without gifts,  
or unkind words; without suspicion,  
or silence on the telephone.

The love of the chestnut,  
the jazz cap and one hand on the wheel.

No lust, no slam of the door-  
the love of the miniature orange tree,  
the clean white shirt, the hot evening shower,  
the highway that cuts across Florida.

No waiting, no huffiness, or rancor—  
just a twinge every now and then

for the wren who had built her nest  
on a low branch overhanging the water  
and for the dead mouse,  
still dressed in its light brown suit.

But my heart is always propped up  
in a field on its tripod,  
ready for the next arrow.

After I carried the mouse by the tail  
to a pile of leaves in the woods,  
I found myself standing at the bathroom sink  
gazing down affectionately at the soap,

so patient and soluble,  
so at home in its pale green soap dish.  
I could feel myself falling again  
as I felt its turning in my wet hands  
and caught the scent of lavender and stone.

— Billy Collins