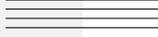


O N W A N T I N G T O S A Y

[S P O K E N S L O W L Y , B Y A P O O R L Y R E C E I V E D
W R I T E R T O A P O E T]



W I L L I A M H . G A S S

I just wanted to say . . .

I wanted to say how much . . .

But you coughed and the moment passed. You coughed and turned away. The moment disappeared. In which I was about to say . . . then thought better of it . . . I caught your coldness, consequently turned away to cough. So how could you listen, coughing, or how could I say anything significant, doing the same? I would have shown you how droplets from yesterday's rain remained in the veins of the whitebud's leaves. There they sparkle in the least breeze. Butterflies flutter, flutter away. Like a garment's sneeze, sneezed in the breeze. But the moment did not last.

Why do I still breathe? To be confronted by a cold shoulder? To harry those around me and burn purpose? To wait for kisses that never arrive?

I wanted to say that I have seen such light growing in the grass, and on flower petals where the bees hide, or on a pavement's oiled but randomly pitted face. The street's cracks have been patched with tar until its veins are black, and its heart has been trod by the ruthless rollover of motor cars.

I wanted to say . . . but oh dear what I might have said – oh dear oh dearest – a membership card might have been pinned to my

coat, its lapel, a shield made by facts hardly known: where to store sentences, paragraphs, enrasures, postures, points of views – and the glares one gets from unimportant things. Accumulate a pocket of loose threads? Hide in a green drawer. I know of a nest of wind which only the owls’ eyes see beneath the bark of the whitebud tree. For combat? at what altitude? Whee! Wheel No matter. We shall leave a trail. Shit and such. We shall earn the disrespect of Sweet Needlers. Look, those wounds are simply pretending to bleed. Like the wind that lives in the tree – that’s whee to me – the squirrel that chews the berries that are a parish to birds – that’s whee of me – who sent through fluttering grimaces their distaste. Like the jacket on which my name is pinned as at a party, everyone breathing happiness on their lips, laps unsure, nevertheless good looks, yes: how do you do? how do I do? I am ill as a broken stick. Haw. Ha.le.haha. You expected “sick as a stick,” didn’t you? Ah.bah.wah. She will coast across the room from your aquired smile. Collecting glances all the while. The way they are gathered in the cinemas. Pasted into a much soiled book about “o.” Where saliva sums it up.

Yesterday’s rain
remains in the veins
of the whitebud’s leaves,
sparkling like unlikely glass
at the least breeze.

I have seen such light in the grass,
in flower petals or on window sash,
skids upon the pavement’s face,
a rinse, a shrug, that shows my rage,

as if the streets weren’t driven,
like windows hammered shut,
because the noise that floats near us
is the gurgle of a truck.

If you felt my breath like a bug upon an ear lobe, if you felt it about to be expelled, be about to buzz . . . fuss . . . my god . . . something heard . . . blah blah . . . anything . . . you would be suddenly sorrowful for us all, burdened by the glisten on each petal . . . because I remember you turned away. You could have

turned away because you knew what I was about to say; because you had said it to yourself, over and over like the turn of a truck's wheel, where it doesn't count, only spins about. Oh, you know, most poetry is prose, silly as sink, easy as if you had spilled ink. You didn't want to hear it, didn't want it said, even though you knew that what I wanted to say or what I refused to say . . . what I shouted in the silence of myself . . . oh! My! GOD! . . . as if the wolves were out and we could hear the asses bray.

Yesterday's raindrops sparkle like unexpected glass among the white-bud's branches. I have seen such drizzle on flower petals before, or on window panes, on a pavement's oily face, and other glorious remnants of disgrace, as if the street were thus forgiven and, assisted by its ruts, made a wry face-saving face.

We remember disrobing one another with all the determination of the printed page, where I might have written what I wanted to say in such a way I would seem not to have said it, and didn't, hadn't said it, because if They heard it, They wouldn't understand it, They wouldn't believe it, and would cast their reading eye upward as if searching for the sort of leaf that lives at the very tip of things, all the others lost in the sea of greenery below. I, She, We, unzip her. A listless skin kiss. She suppresses a groan, a shudder. She postpones a sigh, a shiver. You turned away as leaves do when about to lose their color.

A snow ago this snow
 was still spotted
 with tree ash and seed hull
 piled on the North Pole of the porch,
 a snow smutch like an itch
 you can't quite reach,
 snow hiding under new snow
 that's come to its rescue
 as does a surprise for a party.

This snow-ago snow
 survives to greet survivors.
 Seeds, soot, leaves, my stare,
 are not just lying there,

but are perched on a patch
 the shovel is too square
 to scrape, too old to dispose.

We were shivering. Each in our own skins.

This snow survives because it lies, pretending to be clean and soft and permanent, a helpmake of its summer shade, when in fact it is composed of dusty water, gurgle vomit, and infant pee.

I wanted to say . . . say silent things . . . slow as slow smoke.
 Instead I wrote about the poetry of prose, and danced the syllabic waltz, and howled with the wolves. You get the idea.

I used to delight in being naked as an uncapped pen. Now – rubbered, stretched – shaped in military lines that were not quite what I wanted but were almost what I wanted – speech not screech – I might’ve said something acceptable about freshly worn shoes, or the skins of soiled sheets – the loss of myth – Apollo, Zeus, naked in my mirth – I really do think it’s my shamfully wide girth – enduring the loss of all that’s worth, in the oceans of the earth – nothing to amuse you except rhyme-a-dime alliteration, and opinion as pungent as peeled onion – I told my nurse, sternly, loudly, crudely as a curse, slippery as my birch, sing song from hymn to lurch, chants made for verbal triumph and other rites of church. Oh my God, how loud the asses bray. Measure it all the way around my middle like a dancing doll, listen to leafspeak, live at least as long as a droplet – no – couplet – in an hysteric frame of mind.

There’s never been anything like it, which is not a brag, breasts that sag with milk are necessary to infant maginations. Green velvet in a damp drawer. I fought a war with forks. Drew infested jelly from my ear. The silence was as threatening – worse – as a cork going plop. Never sure what was up, I withdrew my expectations. None of all this. I just wanted . . .

Obviously I didn’t want – what I wanted to say – to succeed so sufficiently – that I’d say it – say what it was I wanted to say: “hey, listen, I want to tell you, speak your leaf, say your mouth, say your thigh, say my fears . . .” Geez . . . I admire the lemon green leaves of the birch and the thin peel of its bark. Clean. Its errors shed like season’s fur . . . as does kittycat’s when dogs get surly. Draw it up: a

street swept by yesterday's rain, a vase full of overnight's blossom, an inquisitive bumble, a seaside made of broken rock, feelings of shame, shadows of trees, that's what I have to work with – oh yes – and a clock.

“O who could have foretold / That the heart grows old?” All I wanted was someone to do me . . . me . . . to say robbledecrook . . . before she knew, she knew she would feel it . . . Here! Where? There, dummy, on the shelf of the mouth. She has always known. But it never got said. Well the world is made of excuses more plentiful than clouds. Because what I wanted to do was . . . slowly . . . to say . . . say, when you turned away . . . In what direction . . . ? To the town of Normalcy? Toward the kitchen where a kitty cat coughs up a bag of hair. To scrub and rub the counters. Hear me swear and then back off. Never mind. Why did I say what I said when what I wanted to say was . . . was . . . use – less – ly . . . this. This . . . Then you turned away. A calm white sliver of ice says – melt some more remorse. But not just yet. Light is glowing in the moist grass. Not just yet. SpittleWet. I know. If a body is burnt to ash it cannot say goodbye.