

FOREWORD BY
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HOW LOVELY THE RUINS

INSPIRATIONAL
POEMS AND
WORDS FOR
DIFFICULT TIMES

I AM RUNNING INTO A NEW YEAR

Lucille Clifton

i am running into a new year
and the old years blow back
like a wind

that i catch in my hair
like strong fingers like
all my old promises and
it will be hard to let go
of what i said to myself
about myself

when i was sixteen and
twentysix and thirtysix
even thirtysix but
i am running into a new year
and i beg what i love and
i leave to forgive me

You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring
from coming.

—PABLO NERUDA

FROM BLOSSOMS

Li-Young Lee

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned toward
signs painted *Peaches*.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background; from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

FROM
"IN MEMORIAM,
[RING OUT, WILD BELLS]"

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

IF I CAN STOP ONE HEART FROM BREAKING

Emily Dickinson

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

THE THING IS

Ellen Bass

to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you've held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands,
your throat filled with the silt of it.
When grief sits with you, its tropical heat
thickening the air, heavy as water
more fit for gills than lungs;
when grief weights you like your own flesh
only more of it, an obesity of grief,
you think, *How can a body withstand this?*
Then you hold life like a face
between your palms, a plain face,
no charming smile, no violet eyes,
and you say, yes, I will take you
I will love you, again.

PROTEST

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

To sin by silence, when we should protest,
Makes cowards out of men. The human race
Has climbed on protest. Had no voice been raised
Against injustice, ignorance, and lust,
The inquisition yet would serve the law,
And guillotines decide our least disputes.
The few who dare, must speak and speak again
To right the wrongs of many. Speech, thank God,
No vested power in this great day and land
Can gag or throttle. Press and voice may cry
Loud disapproval of existing ills;
May criticise oppression and condemn
The lawlessness of wealth-protecting laws
That let the children and childbearers toil
To purchase ease for idle millionaires.

Therefore I do protest against the boast
Of independence in this mighty land.
Call no chain strong, which holds one rusted link.
Call no land free, that holds one fettered slave.
Until the manacled slim wrists of babes
Are loosed to toss in childish sport and glee,
Until the mother bears no burden, save
The precious one beneath her heart, until
God's soil is rescued from the clutch of greed
And given back to labor, let no man
Call this the land of freedom.

Choose your leaders with wisdom and forethought.

To be led by a coward is to be controlled by all that the coward fears.

To be led by a fool is to be led by the opportunists who control the fool.

To be led by a thief is to offer up your most precious treasures to be stolen.

To be led by a liar is to ask to be told lies.

To be led by a tyrant is to sell yourself and those you love into slavery.

—OCTAVIA E. BUTLER, *Parable of the Talents*

It is a sign of great inner insecurity to be hostile to the unfamiliar.

—ANAÏS NIN

I, Too
Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

NOW THAT WE HAVE TASTED HOPE
Khaled Mattawa

Now that we have come out of hiding,
Why would we live again in the tombs we'd made out of our
souls?

And the sundered bodies that we've reassembled
With prayers and consolations,
What would their torn parts be, other than flesh?

Now that we have tasted hope
And dressed each other's wounds with the legends of our
oneness
Would we not prefer to close our mouths forever shut
On the wine that swilled inside them?

Having dreamed the same dream,
Having found the water behind a thousand mirages,
Why would we hide from the sun again
Or fear the night sky after we've reached the ends of darkness,
Live in death again after all the life our dead have given us?

Listen to me Zow'ya, Beida, Ajdabya, Tobruk, Nalut,
Listen to me Derna, Musrata, Benghazi, Zintan,
Listen to me houses, alleys, courtyards, and streets that throng
my veins,
Some day soon, in your freed light, in the shade of your proud
trees,

Your excavated heroes will return to their thrones in your
martyrs' squares,
Lovers will hold each other's hands.

I need not look far to imagine the nerves dying,
Rejecting the life that blood sends them.
I need not look deep into my past to seek a thousand hopeless
vistas.

But now that I have tasted hope
I have fallen into the embrace of my own rugged innocence.

How long were my ancient days?
I no longer care to count.
I no longer care to measure.
How bitter was the bread of bitterness?
I no longer care to recall.

Now that we have tasted hope, this hard-earned crust,
We would sooner die than seek any other taste to life,
Any other way of being human.

do you know what it's like to live
someplace that loves you back?

—DANEZ SMITH, from
“summer, somewhere”

TO BE A WOMAN

Alice Walker

To be a woman
Does not mean
To Wear
A shroud;

The feminine
Is not
Dead
Nor is she
Sleeping

Angry, yes,
Seething, yes.

Biding her time;

Yes.

Yes.