

PEOPLE ALSO ASK: HOW DO I SAY “I LOVE YOU” IN POETRY?

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That morning at the lake, where the trailhead meets
the parking lot by the shore we call Dog Beach,
the woman stood before the man who on one knee
had bent to tie her shoe. His slow hands worked
as if practicing an old art, drawing the laces up,
crossing them, swooping down, then looping,
pulling tight. Seeing them, I tried to remember
who taught me, when I learned to tie my own,
and how many times my mother must have bowed
like this, kneeling in the dirt, showing me the way.
Everything is metaphor if you bend to it, bow to it,
vow to stay long enough looking at the real thing,
the heart. They both were silvered, unsteady,
the woman balancing herself with one hand
resting on his shoulder, and he, wobbly as he stooped
to serve her with this small and tender act.
As he stood, stepped back from her, I saw
the shining newness of her foot, the ankle's
bright titanium, the socket snug below her knee.
He kissed her on the forehead. She took his hand.
Up the path into the woods, careful, they went,
speaking, as they walked, of ordinary things.

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SOMMELIER OF CANA, IN GALILEE

No one here can choose the job and call.
My father's father's father was a man
swilling moonlight, teaching grapes
to praise the one who crushed them.
Before that, our bloodline bore the royal cup,
drinking for the king in case of poison.
We take what we inherit—flock or herd,
kiln or field. The wine chose me.

When the banquet master called me in
at midnight, I was ready with my script.
Harvest sun. A westward slope.
Sweat of a gelded horse's withers
dried into the rope. Early rain.
Green barley chewed at dawn.
The smoke of a young priest's altar fire.
It's all performance art, this naming of the notes—
a show to prove whose palate is the brightest,
whose mind can taste the stars.

The master shoved the ladle to my lips.
Taste and see, he said, *the finest wine this side of Zion*.
Above my head burned lanterns for the feast.

Blood-rust spiked with milk, spiked with iron tang,
myrrh and bitter gall and honeycomb
and garden dark. Teeth cinched with ashes.
Stone and stone and stone. What flowered
in my mouth, I held.

Petals of an almond tree, I said. *A fig in spring*.
The yeast and gold of Sabbath bread. All sweet, no bitter.
The master and his guests held out their empty vessels.
The wedding party spilled into the street.
The bride lay waiting in her tent.

If a body can be marked by what it knows
it never knew, if blood can bear the cup
even when that cup is suffering, all other wine
is water to me now. My tongue's gone dumb.
In every vineyard, I'm still searching for that vine.

NORTHERN BUSH CAMP, CHRISTMAS EVE

When I consider those shepherds of the Bethlehem hills,
those rough-around-the-edges men of the redneck peasant class
with dirt beneath their fingernails and dung on their sandals,
men who spat and belched and likely cussed,
I can't help but think of my dad and his trucker buddies
wintering out in bush camp, pulling their own late shifts,
hauling timber from the block to the mill.

Grease-stained, steel-toe-booted, blue-collar guys,
they smelled of smoke and whiskey, diesel and sawdust,
a northern logger cologne that wafted where they walked.
They had nicknames like Pinto and Packsack, Sparky and Clem,
names earned more by mockery than honour.
Like most within that rural realm, they worked
for the next paycheque, next weekend off, next holiday in Reno,
their longings modest, their lives unlit by glory.

If the sky above a little town in the region of Judea
could hold a host of angels, why not the heavens
over a clearcut down the Kluskus Forest Service road?
If God would choose to bring good news
to a crew of common shepherds, why not
a bunch of loggers on a shift break in the bush?
Beside their idling machines, they'd swig their coffee,
puff their smokes, bellyache and bicker
over which rig is better—Kenworth vs. Peterbilt,
expecting nothing extraordinary of this night like any night.
But why not their darkness cracked with a trumpet blast

that knocks them to their knees? Why not great joy
for Pinto and Packsack, Sparky and Clem,
and even for my dad? At the shock of light,
he'd drop his cigarette in the snow, shield his eyes.
Ho-ly, he'd say, the word incarnate on his lips,
his whole face radiant in the glow.