

Wellspring: Poetry for the Journey

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Mind Wanting More

Only a beige slat of sun
above the horizon, like a shade
pulled not quite down. Otherwise,
clouds. Sea rippled here and
there. Birds reluctant to fly.
The mind wants a shaft of sun to
stir the grey porridge of clouds,
an osprey to stitch sea to sky
with its barred wings, some dramatic
music: a symphony, perhaps
a Chinese gong.

But the mind always
wants more than it has—
one more bright day of sun,
one more clear night in bed
with the moon; one more hour
to get the words right; one
more chance for the heart in hiding
to emerge from its thicket
in dried grasses—as if this quiet day
with its tentative light weren't enough,
as if joy weren't strewn all around.

Holly J. Hughes¹

Reflections

As I write this, the tentative light of morning is waking up the world though it appears it will be a day of clouds, just as the experts predicted. I know myself well enough—and the poem speaks for me—to know I will all day be hoping for sun, wanting more than I have. What to do, what to do; it seems we are wired for desire. More, more, more. I am guilty as the rest of wanting, wanting.

¹ "Mind Wanting More" by Holly J. Hughes from *Hold Fast*, Empty Bowl Press. Used by permission.

What I admire about this poem is its naming of a truth about most of us, a truth surely about me at least, but in a way that avoids shame or sermonizing; our “mind wanting more” is, the poet suggests, perhaps part of our human makeup, simply the way we are, and not the result of some moral failure or spiritual inadequacy. I admire also the poem’s clarity and the way its epiphany is not, after all, “a symphony...a Chinese gong” but rather a more gentle awakening from which we might all benefit—clear as that shaft of sun. We are gently stirred, reminded of the present joy available, but not scolded into finding it fast.

This lyric is crafted almost as a call and response: the fluidity and extension of a single sentence of the second stanza responds as a long exhale to the short sentences and fragments of the first stanza. They are of equal length—eleven lines apiece—and tonally similar, but syntactically, they are remarkably distinct. The effect for me is a poem that breathes, one that resolves itself calmly and assuredly: to say that it is “as if joy weren’t strewn all around” in one breath is to know with the next that joy *is*, in fact, strewn all around.

Epiphanies, I suppose, come in all kinds, just as the symphony is composed of small sounds and gongs, and the weather of both stillness and storm. Today’s epiphany, if I may call it that, is a quiet one—quiet comfort, quiet heart, quiet joy. It is hard to believe that the mind could want more than that.

✂ About the poet

Holly J. Hughes is the author of *Sailing by Ravens* (University of Alaska Press, 2014), coauthor of *The Pen and The Bell: Mindful Writing in a Busy World* (Skinner House Press, 2012), and editor of the award-winning anthology *Beyond Forgetting: Poetry and Prose about Alzheimer’s Disease* (Kent State University Press, 2009). She has spent more than 30 summers working on the water in Alaska in a variety of roles, including commercial salmon fishing, skippering a 65-foot schooner, and working as a naturalist on ships. She currently teaches writing workshops throughout the Pacific Northwest.



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