



WHY  
I WAKE  
EARLY

NEW POEMS BY

MARY  
OLIVER

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE FOR POETRY  
AND THE NATIONAL BOOK AWARD

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*Mary Oliver*

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This One



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## *Why I Wake Early*

Hello, sun in my face.  
Hello, you who make the morning  
and spread it over the fields  
and into the faces of the tulips  
and the nodding morning glories,  
and into the windows of, even, the  
miserable and the crotchety—

best preacher that ever was,  
dear star, that just happens  
to be where you are in the universe  
to keep us from ever-darkness,  
to ease us with warm touching,  
to hold us in the great hands of light—  
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day  
in happiness, in kindness.

## *Bone*

1.

Understand, I am always trying to figure out  
what the soul is,  
and where hidden,  
and what shape—

and so, last week,  
when I found on the beach  
the ear bone  
of a pilot whale that may have died

hundreds of years ago, I thought  
maybe I was close  
to discovering something—  
for the ear bone

2.

is the portion that lasts longest  
in any of us, man or whale; shaped  
like a squat spoon  
with a pink scoop where

once, in the lively swimmer's head,  
it joined its two sisters  
in the house of hearing,  
it was only

two inches long—  
and I thought: the soul  
might be like this—  
so hard, so necessary—

3.

yet almost nothing.  
Beside me  
the gray sea  
was opening and shutting its wave-doors,

unfolding over and over  
its time-ridiculing roar;  
I looked but I couldn't see anything  
through its dark-knit glare;

yet don't we all *know*, the golden sand  
is there at the bottom,  
though our eyes have never seen it,  
nor can our hands ever catch it

4.

lest we would sift it down  
into fractions, and facts—  
certainties—  
and what the soul is, also

I believe I will never quite know.  
Though I play at the edges of knowing,  
truly I know  
our part is not knowing,

but looking, and touching, and loving,  
    which is the way I walked on,  
        softly,  
through the pale-pink morning light.

## *Freshen the Flowers, She Said*

So I put them in the sink, for the cool porcelain  
was tender,  
and took out the tattered and cut each stem  
on a slant,  
trimmed the black and raggy leaves, and set them all—  
roses, delphiniums, daisies, iris, lilies,  
and more whose names I don't know, in bright new water—  
gave them

a bounce upward at the end to let them take  
their own choice of position, the wheels, the spurs,  
the little sheds of the buds. It took, to do this,  
perhaps fifteen minutes.  
Fifteen minutes of music  
with nothing playing.



*Where Does the Temple Begin,  
Where Does It End?*

There are things you can't reach. But  
you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,  
out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing  
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around  
as though with your arms open.

And thinking: maybe something will come, some  
shining coil of wind,  
or a few leaves from any old tree—  
they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.  
Everything in the world  
comes.

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake.  
Like goldfinches, little dolls of gold  
fluttering around the corner of the sky  
of God, the blue air.

## *Beans*

They're not like peaches or squash. Plumpness isn't for them. They like being lean, as if for the narrow path. The beans themselves sit quietly inside their green pods. Instinctively one picks with care, never tearing down the fine vine, never not noticing their crisp bodies, or feeling their willingness for the pot, for the fire.

I have thought sometimes that something—I can't name it—watches as I walk the rows, accepting the gift of their lives to assist mine.

I know what you think: this is foolishness. They're only vegetables. Even the blossoms with which they begin are small and pale, hardly significant. Our hands, or minds, our feet hold more intelligence. With this I have no quarrel.

But, what about virtue?

## *The Snow Cricket*

Just beyond the leaves and the white faces  
of the lilies,  
I saw the wings  
of the green snow cricket

as it went flying  
from vine to vine,  
searching, then finding a shadowed place in which  
to sit and sing—

and by singing I mean, in this instance,  
not just the work of the little mouth-cave,  
but of every enfoldment of the body—  
a singing that has no words

or a single bar of music  
or anything more, in fact, than one repeated  
rippling phrase  
built of loneliness

and its consequences: longing  
and hope.

Pale and humped,  
the snow cricket sat all evening

in a leafy hut, in the honeysuckle.

It was trembling  
with the force  
of its crying out,

The forty-seven new works in this volume include poems on crickets, toads, trout lilies, black snakes, goldenrod, bears, greeting the morning, watching the deer, and, finally, lingering in happiness. Each poem is imbued with the extraordinary perceptions of a poet who considers the everyday in our lives and the natural world around us and finds a multitude of reasons to wake early.

“Mary Oliver continues to tutor us in attention, gratitude, and reverence in this new collection.”

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“Mary Oliver’s poems are natural growths out of a loam of perception and feeling, and instinctive skill with language makes them seem effortless. Reading them is a sensual delight.”

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“The gift of Oliver’s poetry is that she communicates the beauty she finds in the world and makes it unforgettable.”

—*Miami Herald*

MARY OLIVER is one of the most celebrated and best-selling poets in America. Her poetry books include *Blue Iris; Owls and Other Fantasies; House of Light; New and Selected Poems, Volume One; DreamWork; White Pine; WestWind; The Leaf and the Cloud; and What Do We Know*. She has also published five books of prose, including *Blue Pastures, Rules for the Dance, Winter Hours*, and, most recently, *Long Life*. She lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts, with Molly Malone Cook.

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