

UNSONNETS

by

Caitlin Donnelly

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Caitlin Donnelly

## L'ENVOI

I've called these poems 'unsonnets' because once  
When I was very young, I wrote two poems  
And sent them to a contest. One I liked:  
It was pure Tennyson, all *Sturm und Drang*  
With rigid rhythm and unlikely rhyme.  
The other one I sent because I thought  
It needed saying. And it won a prize  
For the wrong reason: "It's a perfect sonnet  
If one just waives the usual rhyming scheme..."  
And on and on *ad nauseam*. I thought,  
"I didn't write a *sonnet*, for Pete's sake,  
I wrote a *poem*. I didn't count the lines!"  
And so with these. Enjoy them as they are,  
But, please, don't count, or beat, or look for rhyme.  
They don't work that way.

-- Caitlin Donnelly  
Burien, Washington 1994

## ONE

Somehow it doesn't smell like winter rain.  
Even though it's January and cold,  
And by tonight it will have turned to snow, still --  
It doesn't smell like winter rain, somehow.  
From deep catch-pockets in the soft, dark earth  
The drops evoke a scent of growing things,  
Of the year turning again toward the light,  
Of tender green -- a quickening  
That echoes in my spirit. And I know  
Tomorrow, underneath the snow,  
It will be hiding, like a joyous child,  
This scent of spring.

## TWO

You never have to ask, my Love,  
Just reach out to me.  
Your hand will carry your message,  
And my hand will answer.  
Reach out to me:  
I will see your hand extended --  
An offer, a question, a response --  
And I will understand you through your touch.  
I'll take your hand and my soul will follow  
Wherever your mind and heart may lead.

## TROIS

-- Mais, qui t'a ainsi blessée?

-- Personne. Je l'ai fait moi-même.

Par trop de désires, trop de besoin,

Trop d'espoir, par trop de rêves

Je me délue.

Comme la mer à la plage je me blesse toujours

Entre les ondes de mes illusions

Et les rochers de la réalité.

## FOUR

I drew a line today.  
I did it quietly,  
Without challenge or recrimination.  
No threats, no promises --  
Just a hope drawn thin  
Across my heart.

## FIVE

It's true the day is constantly in flux,  
The sunlight shifting through angles and intensities,  
But it's of a piece with my impatient nature  
That I prefer the rising day or falling night.  
It has to do with changes I can see.  
And then there are the colors  
And the textures of the sky  
As it moves from voile to velvet.  
Daytime has clouds, true, and so does night.  
But so, especially, do the changing times --  
Twilight and dawn.

## SIX

The difference is esoteric but profound --  
It has to do with ethos and morality.  
It twines around each facet of our lives  
And separates us, when we would be one.  
It's this: to him, the ethic exists alone,  
A structure crystalline, pristine,  
Apart from humanity.  
To me, the structures are outgrowths  
Of Mankind's evolution toward godhead,  
And thus are organic and in flux,  
As are we all. He is my love, and yet  
He would adjust the Spirit to the Structure,  
While I, on the other hand,  
Adapt the Structure to fit the Soul.

## SEVEN

The first time we made love, it was a dream  
Come true after long waiting. And it was  
A gift of trust to you of all of me:  
My womanhood, my faith, my love, my soul.  
A way of saying, "Look, Love, here I am --  
All of me here, beneath your hand. Come, learn  
To know me as I hope to learn to love  
And know you even better over time."  
I've never learned to play boy/girl games well,  
To increase tension with a well-timed lie  
Or feign reluctance when my heart says "Yes!"  
It's cost me, though. I know you've often said  
You value honesty, but I have found  
You value your illusions even more.

## EIGHT

That first little time apart from you is grief.  
Each time you leave, or I hang up the phone,  
It hurts.  
When we're together, actively exchanging thoughts,  
You are a light, a source of warmth and joy.  
And when we separate  
It's like closing a window on a spring day.  
Most times, after you've been gone a while,  
I can internalize the glow, and then it's with me  
Until I see you again.  
Will it ever get easier?  
Will I eventually be able to watch you leave  
With equanimity? And if I could,  
What would that mean?

## NINE

Grief is so selfish.  
The whole world seems to center around the pain,  
And everything relates to it one way or another --  
All thought, all conversation, all experience  
Wind back around into that aching void  
Until slowly, slowly, from the center out  
It fills and heals  
And finally ceases to draw everything into itself.  
The maelstrom stills,  
And from its heart I look out, astonished by the hush,  
And see color and light and joy --  
A revelation! There's a world out there  
Beyond my tedious concerns.  
Grief is so selfish.

## TEN

The weary Knight, despairing of his quest,  
Entered the glade on his exhausted steed,  
His armor battered and his soul worn raw.  
He stared in fear. The forest all around him  
Was ablaze -- even the stream and pool  
Sparkled with flame, and yet were not destroyed.  
He reached his hand toward one vibrant leaf,  
And at its touch, his heart began to glow  
With life and hope. What kind of fire was this  
That warmed and nourished, and did not consume?  
The Lady watched him, smiling, her soft hair  
Haloed in flame. She moved toward him then,  
And with her kiss, his soul at last burst out  
From its dark prison, joyous, glowing, free.

ELEVEN (2007)

A few weeks back, right after Samhain,  
It seemed like a cosmic duty to get the garlic planted.  
Garlic cloves from the store were sprouting on my sink,  
Green spears bursting through their papery skin to seek the light.  
Separating the cloves from fifty heads made hours of happy busy-work  
And left my hands in a whinge of arthritic protest.  
The earth, softened by autumn rain, opened readily  
To receive the fragrant bulbs and wrap them in the promise of summer's bounty.  
But today, Rosie discovered the garden-- a fenced playground all her own.  
I watched amazed as she flew over the beds, tail waving, tongue lolling  
In a dog-ly joy too immense to contain.  
Soft-turned earth flew behind her  
Like confetti mixed with pungent green streamers,  
And we laughed together as she danced her happiness.