

## Mary Oliver & The Witchery of Living by Mary Oliver

"To Begin With, the Sweet Grass"

Will the hungry ox stand in the field and not eat  
of the sweet grass?  
Will the owl bite off its own wings?  
Will the lark forget to lift its body in the air or  
forget to sing?  
Will the rivers run upstream?

Behold, I say—behold  
the reliability and the finery and the teachings  
of this gritty earth gift.

2.

Eat bread and understand comfort.  
Drink water, and understand delight.  
Visit the garden where the scarlet trumpets  
are opening their bodies for the hummingbirds  
who are drinking the sweetness, who are  
thrillingly gluttonous.

For one thing leads to another.  
Soon you will notice how stones shine underfoot.  
Eventually tides will be the only calendar you believe in.

And someone's face, whom you love, will be as a star  
both intimate and ultimate,  
and you will be both heart-shaken and respectful.

And you will hear the air itself, like a beloved, whisper:  
oh, let me, for a while longer, enter the two  
beautiful bodies of your lungs.

3.

The witchery of living  
is my whole conversation  
with you, my darlings.  
All I can tell you is what I know.

Look, and look again.

This world is not just a little thrill for the eyes.

It's more than bones.

It's more than the delicate wrist with its personal pulse.

It's more than the beating of the single heart.

It's praising.

It's giving until the giving feels like receiving.

You have a life—just imagine that!

You have this day, and maybe another, and maybe  
still another.

4.

Someday I am going to ask my friend Paulus,  
the dancer, the potter,  
to make me a begging bowl  
which I believe  
my soul needs.

And if I come to you,  
to the door of your comfortable house  
with unwashed clothes and unclean fingernails,  
will you put something into it?

I would like to take this chance.  
I would like to give you this chance.

5.

We do one thing or another; we stay the same, or we  
change.

Congratulations, if  
you have changed.

6.

Let me ask you this.  
Do you also think that beauty exists for some  
fabulous reason?

And, if you have not been enchanted by this adventure—  
your life—  
what would do for you?

7.

What I loved in the beginning, I think, was mostly myself.

Never mind that I had to, since somebody had to.

That was many years ago.

Since then I have gone out from my confinements,  
though with difficulty.

I mean the ones that thought to rule my heart.

I cast them out, I put them on the mush pile.

They will be nourishment somehow (everything is nourishment  
somehow or another).

And I have become the child of the clouds, and of hope.  
I have become the friend of the enemy, whoever that is.  
I have become older and, cherishing what I have learned,  
I have become younger.

And what do I risk to tell you this, which is all I know?  
Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world.

- Mary Oliver