

I

This sudden rush of heat at the end
of March has meant a crown of tight
pink clusters on the little peach tree

— O pious tree reminding us of the crown
which is Your throne on every human tree —
then a reckless mass of flowers on the weeping

cherry, its cracked and crumbling branches
so old, so frail I did not think they
would bear the weight of petals, the business

of life again; but nothing will erase the blight
of dead magnolias, each bud brown and withered,
born too soon in the arms of death, like my friend,

like my friend whose beauty and life were
borne away in a death out of season and time,
the exquisite light that was her life now

effaced in a frieze of death, a mask across
her breathless face, immobile and so mortal.

How soon the wind has blown away the soft
petals of our cherry tree; in a sudden gush
they appeared one night, lived a short day
in the bright hot sun, and fell like snow
across the rain, a meditation on the brevity
of life in the world, a commentary on that passing
sweetness we know for a moment yet lose forever
in the uprush of time. Capricious April, now your
churlish face is turned towards us, now your benign
and silky face is denied as the cool rain falls swiftly
from a darkened sky, but the incandescent green
of flowering trees up and down this street
is electric against the languish in grey, Your
fresh scent a fragrant reminder that grace
in the body of praise, in the heart of trust, this
will always flower through the dark of the world,
the purest petals blowing a straight path to You.

This cool and bright April day has closed
 the door on death, a door that opens wide
 sometimes for a moment, when you go part way
 on the final journey with someone you have deeply
 loved, showing fragments, intimations of what lies
 ahead, beyond, showing the reality of here and there
 along an avenue not open for us yet, breathing
 certain revelations to essence lodged in the soul,
 recognition and confirmation that continuity exists
 for the life of the soul, for the body of light, that
 sorrow which decorates the moment in a living
 shroud is merely a gateway to the truth already
 buried too deep for tears; so when the cool brightness
 of this worldly unreality slams the door shut on its
 dual hinge, remember God, turn Your face to Him,
 He is the reality holding truth in His arms, He is
 the mercy promising forgiveness for imperfection, for
 passing mischief we would not or could not subdue,
 remember God, be grateful, let your heart melt and
 run over with gratitude for the cool brightness
 of this day, for the time we have to contemplate
 our life, our death, for the wisdom to know
 what must be known, here, there and everywhere.

As the day became soft and warm the dogwood began to uncurl, azaleas presented bright fuchsia buds, and down below periwinkle ran along the ground, with filigrees of violet bursting through green grass everywhere; tulips like scarlet sentinels stood guard, the peach and cherry, the birch and maple became soaring canopies of pink and green, arching high above this street; then last night the scent of purest lilac exploded on the air. My God, You made our world a garden, a paradise if only we knew how to live respecting each other, spreading the grace and wisdom You bestowed on us, caring for one another, loving the truth You sent again and again. Even so I would not choose the world, nor would I choose any paradise, any bliss You might offer other than Yourself. My God, after all that I have seen, after all that I have done, know that my prayer is only for You, my heart is only for You, my life of longing is only for You, and when the Angel of Death comes to take me back again, my death will be only for You.

Spring came early this year, everything happened
 at once, flowers, bushes and the eloquent trees
 all speaking the same language, we could not

help but notice that spring came early this year,
 even though syllables of death were softly
 chanted too, a quiet antiphonal never going away

through each rapturous song of singing birds, or
 the slow frieze of flowers as days and nights
 abruptly cooled. Then we waited, we waited for this

season of days and enduring nights to catch up with
 itself, just as we wait for the beginning before
 the end. My beloved Lord, are You not willing to

let me see, do You not hear the urgent drama locked
 in my plea? Sometimes, sometimes I think You toss
 me the key, but look at me, You know I'm not good

with locks, if You can unlock this springtime
 with a single gesture, can You also unlock me?

Ah beloved, the grass is thick and soft
on your grave this year, the scent of clover
fills the air, fat black and yellow bees
hover close to the ground searching for
fragments of sweetness buried in the heart
of each flower growing in wild or cultivated
patches. Now I touch your name on the stone
which marks the place where you lie in your
other world, thinking like the bee of all
the buried sweetness in the heart of a life
which beats no more. Ah beloved, the bridges
in time are more fragile, harder to cross
these days as they stretch in a fine, thin line
between our worlds, moving away from each
other sometimes, moving towards each other
sometimes, and I look at the soft, thick grass
beside you where I will also lie one day,
buzzing with the sweetness in our light,
with our united lives breathing as one, living
and dying as one, returning as one to One.

Lilacs, azaleas and dogwood perfume the air,
the first wet maple leaves, their wings folded
like butterflies sit on the trees, brushing against
clusters of flowers apparently impervious to
destiny and the passage of time. There are
secrets in this seasonal rebirth which go far
beyond rebirth, it is affirmation, Your perfume
filling the heart with quiet bliss, with pure
happiness when the way lies open, when
our effort and Your permission coincide,
an axis of remembrance, ascent, a flowering
pilgrimage in the grace of revelation, taking us
where You want us to go, a secret every singing
bird recites in the morning light, a secret
the breathing heart of every flower proclaims.
The secret is One, Your totality, Your permanence
in each living thing is pure transcendence of all
that begins and ends, all that lives and dies, You
alone exist forever in our tiny mortal sphere.

A warm rain beginning last night kept
 falling this morning, the wet, electric green
 of grass and leaves was truly iridescent
 against a low hanging sky; all day a warmth
 persisted, a radiant background reminding me
 of summer behind this explosion of flowering
 trees up and down the long, curving street.
 Now I sit staring under the dome of our mosque,
 each colored panel of glass enclosing Your
 names, green and gold, rose and blue, brilliant
 flowers of light illuminating our lives, without
 reference to season, but still not escaping
 transitions from day to night, from night to
 day, as light stains across the sky then recedes,
 as darkness swallows up the whole world
 then gives it back again. O Allah, You alone
 can take us beyond the reach of season to a place
 where day never alternates with night, where
 Your reign of flowers means unending light, where
 I exist in You, You exist in me. You alone can write
 the letters of my heart, You alone can spell Your name
 with the subtle purity of lilacs blowing on the wind.

A dense screen of new green maples now blocks
the convent grounds from view, O strangest of Aprils
to hasten your riches this way, what treasures
will you leave for May if you squander all
these pleasures, as though some other wealth
lay hidden in the ground, a secret buried crop
of seeds in a different kind of paradise yet to be
explored, is this what you mean? O strangest of Aprils
to parade in new garments day after day, as though
each were a holiday, an undeclared festival to
celebrate Your truth, Your grace my God, my
master of seasons, of riches and secrets, even
silence, master of us all, everything and everyone.
And what does it mean, one world eclipsed while
another lies revealed in its own shadow? My God,
You are also master of every mystery guarding
Your truth, feeding our wisdom the grace to know.