

29

*Poems*

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## Contents

<i>After Years</i> by Ted Kooser.....	3
<i>Boys At The Edge</i> by Leonard Nathan.....	4
<i>Chorus</i> by Antonella Anedda.....	5
<i>Elegy</i> by Thomas Gray.....	6
<i>Ghost Story</i> by Gordon Sumner.....	7
<i>Horse Names</i> by Josh Bryars.....	9
<i>Immigrant Stars</i> by Vasko Popa.....	10
<i>Into My Heart</i> by A.E. Housman.....	11
<i>Lines</i> by Martha Collins.....	12
<i>Lines in Praise of a Date Made Praiseworthy Solely by Something Very Nice That Happened to It</i> by Ogden Nash.....	13
<i>Precautions</i> by Marin Sorescu.....	14
<i>Proverbs From Purgatory</i> by Lloyd Schwartz.....	15
<i>Rain Travel</i> by W.S. Merwin.....	17
<i>Semi-Literate</i> by Joyce Sutphen.....	18
<i>The Best of It</i> by Kay Ryan.....	19
<i>The Loon</i> by James Tate.....	20
<i>The Master Speed (excerpt)</i> by Robert Frost.....	21
<i>The Patience of Ordinary Things</i> by Pat Schneider.....	22
<i>The Shadow Maker</i> by Vasko Popa.....	23
<i>The Trail Is Not a Trail</i> by Gary Snyder.....	24
<i>The Yawn</i> by Paul Blackburn.....	25
<i>Things to Do in the Belly of the Whale</i> by Dan Albergotti.....	26
<i>Those Winter Sundays</i> by Robert Hayden.....	27
<i>Time With You</i> by Gary Soto.....	28
<i>Toward Paris</i> by Peter Makuck.....	29
<i>Walking to Work</i> by Ted Kooser.....	30
<i>When We Sold the Tent</i> by Rhina P. Espailat.....	31
<i>Where Go the Boats</i> by Robert Louis Stevenson.....	32
<i>Yes</i> by William Stafford.....	33

*After Years* by Ted Kooser

Today, from a distance, I saw you  
walking away, and without a sound  
the glittering face of a glacier  
slid into the sea. An ancient oak  
fell in the Cumberlands, holding only  
a handful of leaves, and an old woman  
scattering corn to her chickens looked up  
for an instant. At the other side  
of the galaxy, a star thirty-five times  
the size of our own sun exploded  
and vanished, leaving a small green spot  
on the astronomer's retina  
as he stood on the great open dome  
of my heart with no one to tell.

*Boys At The Edge* by Leonard Nathan

Boys at the edge  
lean far over it and dare  
each other to jump.  
One drops a stone instead  
and waits for it to strike bottom.  
Time passes. Years it seems.

Years it is –  
husband, father, grandfather  
dozing by the fire,

listening at the edge.

*Chorus* by Antonella Anedda

Come thoughts let us think you deeply  
now that morning has come.  
The light makes you seem strong enough  
to scrape off the darkness  
as though we had a shard and the night  
were skin.

There's a gecko on the granite floor.  
His belly pulses like spring water.  
He's frightened. He's alert.  
He waits without understanding.  
As with us  
when suddenly a hello turns into a  
goodbye.

*Elegy* by Thomas Gray

The curfew tolls the knells of parting day,  
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.  
Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree's shade  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,  
The rude Forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the Poor.

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands, that the rod of empire might have sway'd,  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre:  
Full may a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:  
Full may a flower is born to blush unseen;  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

## *Ghost Story* by Gordon Sumner

I watch the western sky  
The sun is sinking  
The geese are flying south  
It sets me thinking  
I did not miss you much  
I did not suffer  
What did not kill me  
Just made me tougher

I feel the winter come  
His icy sinews  
Now in the firelight  
The case continues  
Another night in court  
The same old trial  
The same old questions asked  
The same denial

The shadows close me round  
Like jury members  
I look for answers in  
The fire's embers  
Why was I missing then  
That whole December?  
I give my usual line,  
"I don't remember."

Another winter comes  
His ice fingers creep  
Into these bones of mine  
These memories never sleep  
And all these differences  
A cloak I borrowed  
We kept our distances  
Why should it follow that  
I must have loved you?

What is the force that binds the stars?  
I wore this mask to hide my scars  
What is the power that pulls the tide?  
Never could find a place to hide

What moves the earth around the sun?  
What could I do but run and run and run  
Afraid to love, afraid to fail  
A mast without a sail

The moon's a fingernail  
And slowly sinking  
Another day begins  
And now I'm thinking  
That this indifference  
Was my invention  
When everything I did  
Sought your attention  
You were my compass star  
You were my measure  
You were a pirate's map  
Of buried treasure  
If this was all correct  
The last thing I'd expect  
The prosecution rests  
It's time that I confessed  
I must have loved you.

## *Horse Names* by Josh Bryars

Abracadabra & Apple Jack  
Brass Plum & Buckaroo  
Candlelight & Crumpet  
Dropdeadgorgeous & Doodlebug  
European Blend & Edelweiss  
Fortune Cookie & Flying Trapeze  
Glass Slippers & Ginger Snap  
Hug Me Henry & Happenstance  
Indepth & Isn't She Something  
Just Because & Jesse James  
Kalypso & Kiss Me Kate  
Little Moonlight & Licketysplit  
Mouse Over & Meadow Skipper  
Nevarra & Nottachance  
Okefenoke & Occasional Flurries  
Promises Promises & Paint Bye Numbers  
Questionable & Quebert  
Rock-Me-Amadeus & Ransom Paycheck  
Snap Dragon & Standing Ovation  
Touch of Frost & Try Me Hot  
Under Par & Unannounced Pleasure  
Vanilla Sky & Velvet  
Without Makeup & Will If I Want  
Xanadu & Xanaroo  
Yoyo & Yellow Daisey  
Zanzibar & Zippity Doodah

*Immigrant Stars* by Vasko Popa (translated by Charles Simic)

You looked at each other stars  
On the sly so the sky won't see you  
You meant well  
Got it all backwards  
The morning found you cold  
Far from the hearth  
Far from the heaven's gate  
Look at me stars  
On the sly so the earth won't see it  
Give me secret signs  
I'll give you a stick of cherry wood  
One of my wrinkles for a path  
One of my eyelashes for a guide  
To take you back home

*Into My Heart* by A.E. Housman

Into my heart an air that kills  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?  
That is the land of lost content,  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again.

*Lines* by Martha Collins

Draw a line. Write a line. There.  
Stay in line, hold the line, a glance  
between the lines is fine but don't  
turn corners, cross, cut in, go over  
or out, between two points of no  
return's a line of flight, between  
two points of view's a line of vision.  
But a line of thought is rarely  
straight, an open line's no party  
line, however fine your point.  
A line of fire communicates, but drop  
your weapons and drop your line,  
consider the shortest distance from x to y,  
let x be me, let y be you.

*Lines in Praise of a Date Made Praiseworthy Solely by  
Something Very Nice That Happened to It* by Ogden Nash

As through the calendar I delve  
I pause to rejoice in April twelve.

Yea, be I in sickness or be I in health  
My favorite date is April twealth.

It comes upon us, as a rule,  
Eleven days after April fool,

And eighteen days ahead of May Day,  
When spring is generally in its heyday.

Down in New Mexico in the chapparal  
Is doing nicely by the twelfth of Apparal,

And Bay State towns such as Lowell and Pepperell  
Begin to bloom on the twelfth of Epperell.

But regardless of the matter of weather, There isn't any question whether.

No, not till the trumpet is blown by Gabriel  
Shall we have such a day as the twelfth of Abriel.

*Precautions* by Marin Sorescu

I pulled on a suit of mail  
made of pebbles  
worn smooth by water.  
I balanced a pair of glasses  
on my neck  
so as to keep an eye  
on whatever  
was coming behind me.  
I gloved and greaved  
my hands, my legs, my thoughts,  
leaving no part of my person  
exposed to touch  
or other poisons.  
Then I fashioned a breastplate  
from the shell  
of an eight-hundred-year-old  
turtle.  
And when everything was just so  
I tenderly replied:  
-- I love you too.

## *Proverbs From Purgatory* by Lloyd Schwartz

It was deja vu all over again.  
I know this town like the back of my head.  
People who live in glass houses are worth two in the bush.  
One hand scratches the other.  
A friend in need is worth two in the bush.  
A bird in the hand makes waste.  
Life isn't all it's crapped up to be.  
It's like finding a needle in the eye of the beholder.  
It's like killing one bird with two stones.  
My motto in life has always been: Get It Over With.  
Two heads are better than none.  
A rolling stone deserves another.  
All things wait for those who come.  
A friend in need deserves another.  
I'd trust him as long as I could throw him.  
He smokes like a fish.  
He's just a chip off the old tooth.  
I'll have him eating out of my lap.  
A friend in need opens a can of worms.  
Too many cooks spoil the child.  
An ill wind keeps the doctor away.  
The wolf at the door keeps the doctor away.  
People who live in glass houses keep the doctor away.  
A friend in need shouldn't throw stones.  
A friend in need washes the other.  
A friend in need keeps the doctor away.  
A stitch in time is only skin deep.

A verbal agreement isn't worth the paper it's written on.  
A cat may look like a king.  
Know which side of the bed your butter is on.  
Nothing is cut and dried in stone.  
You can eat more flies with honey than with vinegar.  
Don't let the cat out of the barn.  
Let's burn that bridge when we get to it.  
When you come to a fork in the road, take it.  
Don't cross your chickens before they hatch.  
DO NOT READ THIS SIGN.  
Throw discretion to the wolves.  
After the twig is bent, the barn door is locked.  
After the barn door is locked, you can come in out of the rain.  
A friend in need locks the barn door.  
There's no fool like a friend in need.  
We've passed a lot of water since then.  
At least we got home in two pieces.  
All's well that ends.  
It ain't over till it's over.  
There's always one step further down you can go.  
It's a milestone hanging around my neck.  
Include me out.  
It was déjà vu all over again.

*Rain Travel* by W.S. Merwin

I wake in the dark and remember  
it is the morning when I must start  
by myself on the journey  
I lie listening to the black hour  
before dawn and you are  
still asleep beside me while  
around us the trees full of night lean  
hushed in their dream that bears  
us up asleep and awake then I hear  
drops falling one by one into  
the sightless leaves and I  
do not know when they began but  
all at once there is no sound but rain  
and the stream below us roaring  
away into the rushing darkness.

*Semi-Literate* by Joyce Sutphen

Once I had no sense of the alphabet's  
Song, of its long train that wound along  
The top of the chalkboard in the schoolroom.

I was anxious about little pairs of letters  
That seemed to hold hands and go off into  
The woods together: c and d; e and...

F (that's right!); h and I (hi!); j and k.  
And then there was the caterpillar of  
l-m-n-o-p. What could that be?

I was sure it meant something, something  
Important, but I've never met one yet.  
Q-r-s was curious, that was certain,

T-u-v I liked because it reminded  
Me of a little cabin by a lake  
Where waves crashed on rocks all night. W.

Was that only one letter? One piece  
Of the alphabet? Or did it come apart  
To make another u and v? X, oh

Yes -- that one made sense, but Y didn't  
Sound the way it looked, and when you asked  
"Why?" that wasn't it, but z was something

I could love: a little striped horse, gazing  
Out the window, longing to go home.

*The Best of It* by Kay Ryan

However carved up  
or pared down we get,  
we keep on making  
the best of it as though  
it doesn't matter that  
our acre's down to  
a square foot. As  
though our garden  
could be one bean  
and we'd rejoice if  
it flourishes, as  
though one bean  
could nourish us.

## *The Loon* by James Tate

A loon woke me this morning. It was like waking up in another world. I had no idea what was expected of me. I waited for instructions. Someone called and asked me if I wanted a free trip to Florida. I said, "Sure. Can I go today?" A man in a uniform picked me up in a limousine, and the next thing I know I'm being chased by an alligator across a parking lot. A crowd gathers and cheers me on. Of course, none of this really happened. I'm still sleeping. I don't want to go to work. I want to know what the loon is saying. It sounds like ecstasy tinged with unfathomable terror. One thing is certain: at least they are not speaking of tax shelters. The phone rings. It's my boss. She says, "Where are you?" I say, "I don't know. I don't recognize my surroundings. I think I've been kidnapped. If they make demands of you, don't give in. That's my professional advice." Just then, the loon let out a tremendous looping, soaring, swirling, quadruple whoop. "My god, are you alright?" my boss said. "In case we do not meet again, I want you to know that I've always loved you, Agnes," I said. "What?" she said. "What are you saying?" "Good-bye, my darling. Try to remember me as your loyal servant," I said. "Did you say you loved me?" she said. I said, "Yes," and hung up. I tried to go back to sleep, but the idea of being kidnapped had me quite worked up. I looked in the mirror for signs of torture. Every time the loon cried, I screamed and contorted my face in agony. They were going to cut off my head and place it on a stake. I overheard them talking. They seemed like very reasonable men, even, one might say, likeable.

*The Master Speed (excerpt)* by Robert Frost

No speed of wind or water rushing by  
But you have speed far greater. You can climb  
Back up a stream of radiance to the sky,  
And back through history up the stream of time.  
And you were given this swiftness, not for haste  
Nor chiefly that you may go where you will,  
But in the rush of everything to waste,  
That you may have the power of standing still...

*The Patience of Ordinary Things* by Pat Schneider

It is a kind of love, is it not?  
How the cup holds the tea,  
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,  
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes  
Or toes. How soles of feet know  
Where they're supposed to be.  
I've been thinking about the patience  
Of ordinary things, how clothes  
Wait respectfully in closets  
And soap dries quietly in the dish,  
And towels drink the wet  
From the skin of the back.  
And the lovely repetition of stairs.  
And what is more generous than a window?

*The Shadow Maker* by Vasko Popa

You walk forever and ever  
Over your own individual infinity  
From head to heel and back

You're your own source of light  
The zenith is in your head  
In your heel its setting

Before it dies you let your shadows out  
To lengthen to estrange themselves  
To work miracles and shame  
And bow down only to themselves

At zenith you reduce the shadows  
To their proper size  
You teach them to bow to you  
And as they bow down to disappear

You're coming this way even today  
But the shadows won't let us see you

*The Trail Is Not a Trail* by Gary Snyder

I drove down the Freeway  
And turned off at an exit  
And went along a highway  
Til it came to a sideroad  
Drove up the sideroad  
Til it turned to a dirt road  
Full of bumps, and stopped.  
Walked up a trail  
But the trail got rough  
And it faded away –  
Out in the open,  
Everywhere to go.

*The Yawn* by Paul Blackburn

The black-haired girl  
with the big  
brown  
eyes  
on the Queens train coming  
in to work, so  
opens her mouth so beautifully  
wide  
in a ya-aawn, that  
two stops after she has left the train  
I have only to think of her and I  
o-oh-aaaww-hm  
wow!

*Things to Do in the Belly of the Whale* by Dan Albergotti

Measure the walls.

Count the ribs.

Notch the long days.

Look up for blue sky through the spout. Make small fires with the broken hulls of fishing boats. Practice smoke signals.

Call old friends, and listen for echoes of distant voices.

Organize your calendar. Dream of the beach. Look each way for the dim glow of light.

Work on your reports. Review

each of your life's ten million choices. Endure moments of self-loathing. Find the evidence of those before you.

Destroy it. Try to be very quiet, and listen for the sound of gears and moving water. Listen for the sound of your heart.

Be thankful that you are here, swallowed with all hope, where you can rest and wait. Be nostalgic. Think of all

the things you did and could have done. Remember

treading water in the center of the still night sea, your toes pointing again and again down, down into the black depths.

*Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden

Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labor in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him, who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

*Time With You* by Gary Soto

We're thirteen, almost fourteen,  
And so much in love  
We want the years to pass –  
Clouds roll at super speed, rains fall,  
Flowers unfold and die at the snap  
Of our fingers. I want to stuff sand  
Through a fat hourglass,  
And rip the pages from the calendar.  
Let me blow candles from my cake.  
Let my puppy stretch to full size.  
When we turn eighteen,  
Time will become a canoe on a still lake.

*Toward Paris* by Peter Makuck

My first time on the night train  
I couldn't sleep  
With expectation, the lucky  
Shapes of houses wrapped in dream –  
Trees slowed, then creaked to a stop.  
4:00 a.m. under country stars.  
Lower the window: new air,  
A deserted dirt road and  
A peasant pedaling away,  
A wand-like loaf in his hand,  
Tail-light growing weak  
Red in the dark, as if his work  
Was to bring fresh light  
To woods and fields. He did,  
Keeping me there at that  
Balanced blue hour even later  
In the Sainte Chappelle,  
The blur of the Louvre and after.

*Walking to Work* by Ted Kooser

Today, it's the obsidian  
ice on the sidewalk  
with its milk white bubbles  
popping under my shoes  
that pleases me, and upon it  
a lump of old snow  
with a trail like a comet,  
that somebody,  
probably falling in in love,  
has kicked  
all the way to the corner.

*When We Sold the Tent* by Rhina P. Espaillat

When we sold the tent  
we threw in the Grand Canyon  
with its shawl of pines,  
lap full of cones and chipmunks  
and crooked seams of river.

We let them have the  
parched white moonscapes of Utah,  
and Colorado's  
magnificat of flowers  
sunbursting hill after hill.

Long gentle stretches  
of Wyoming, rain outside  
some sad Idaho  
town where the children, giddy  
with strange places, clowned all night.

Eyes like small veiled moons  
circling our single light, sleek  
shadows with pawprints,  
all went with the outfit; and  
youth, a river of campfires.

*Where Go the Boats* by Robert Louis Stevenson

Dark brown is the river,  
Golden is the sand.  
It flows along for ever,  
With trees on either hand.

Green leaves a-floating,  
Castles of the foam,  
Boats of mine a-boating—  
Where will all come home?

On goes the river  
And out past the mill,  
Away down the valley,  
Away down the hill.

Away down the river,  
A hundred miles or more,  
Other little children  
Shall bring my boats ashore.

## **Yes** by William Stafford

It could happen any time, tornado,  
earthquake, Armageddon. It could happen.  
Or sunshine, love, salvation.

It could you know. That's why we wake  
and look out--no guarantees  
in this life.

But some bonuses, like morning,  
like right now, like noon,  
like evening.