

## POETRY OF PASSION

### CLASS FOUR: PASSION FOR CARING

FIVE A.M.

Marc Heidish

Cleansed  
by submersion  
in its nightly  
bath of darkness  
the tall tense city  
stretches toward  
the yawning dawn  
as its grid-work  
and its towers  
glass steel stone  
dress themselves  
in shades of copper  
deepening to bronze  
while a young doctor  
runs down the stairs  
in a hospital to an  
operating room  
five high floors  
above the city's  
gleaming streets  
where the surgeon  
gowned and gloved  
tells a nurse to  
take a step back  
before he straddles  
the operating table  
to wrest from a man's  
throbbing stolid chest  
an icepick

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### BRINGING FLOWERS TO SALINAS VALLEY STATE PRISON

By Ellen Bass

When Mr. H. saw the little meadow blooming  
On the steel table, he bowed to the starry faces of jasmine.

“This is the first flower I’ve smelled in twenty years.”  
And when I slid each man a bouquet in a paper cup  
Mr. M. said, “I’ll have such a short time with these.”  
We spoke then about Beauty and Loss,  
The great themes of poetry.  
And when our time was done,  
And the guard said they had to leave the flowers,  
Most of the men acquiesced but Mr. S.  
Insisted that, as a Native American, he had a right  
To his rituals --- sage, sweet corn, tobacco---  
And no one could stop him -- it was the law---  
From taking these sacred plants back to his cell.  
Then he raised his cup and drank  
The water the flowers were drinking  
And a small wind stirred in that windowless room  
As we watched Mr. S. quietly bite  
The heads off the Peruvian lilies,  
Crushing their pink sepals and the gold  
Inner petals flecked with maroon, swallowing  
The silvery filaments, the dark  
Pollen-laden antlers, his mouth frothing with blossoms.

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#### FOR THE SAKE OF STRANGERS

By Dorianne Laux

No matter what the grief, its weight,  
We are obliged to carry it.  
We rise and gather momentum, the dull strength  
That pushes us through crowds.  
And then a young boy gives me directions  
So avidly. A woman holds a glass door open,  
Waits patiently for my empty body to pass through.  
All days it continues, each kindness  
Reaching toward another --- a stranger  
Singing to no one as I pass on the path, trees  
Offering their blossoms, a retarded child  
Who lifts his almond eyes and smiles.  
Somehow they always find me, seem even  
To be waiting, determined to keep me  
From myself, from the thing that calls to me  
As it must once have called to them ---  
This temptation to step off the edge

And fall weightless, away from the world.

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### THE SAME INSIDE

Anna Swir

Walking to your place for a love feast  
I saw at a street corner  
an old beggar woman.

I took her hand,  
kissed her delicate cheek,  
we talked, she was  
the same inside as I am,  
from the same kind,  
I sensed this instantly  
as a dog knows by scent  
another dog.

I gave her money.  
I could not part from her.  
After all, one needs  
someone who is close.

And then I no longer knew  
why I was walking to your place.

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### BATHING THE NEW BORN

Sharon Olds

I love with an almost fearful love  
to remember the first baths I gave him -  
our second child, our first son -  
I laid the little torso along  
my left forearm, nape of the neck  
in the crook of my elbow, hips nearly as  
small as a least tern's hips  
against my wrist, thigh held loosely  
in the loop of thumb and forefinger,  
the sign that means exactly right. I'd soap him,  
the long, violet, cold feet,

the scrotum wrinkled as a waved whelk shell  
so new it was flexible yet, the chest,  
the hands, the clavicles, the throat, the gummy  
furze of the scalp. When I got him too soapy he'd  
slide in my grip like an armful of buttered  
noodles, but I'd hold him not too tight,  
I felt that I was good for him,  
I'd tell him about his wonderful body  
and the wonderful soap, and he'd look up at me,  
one week old, his eyes still wide  
and apprehensive. I love that time  
when you croon and croon to them, you can see  
the calm slowly entering them, you can  
sense it in your clasping hand,  
the little spine relaxing against  
the muscle of your forearm, you feel the fear  
leaving their bodies, he lay in the blue  
oval plastic baby tub and  
looked at me in wonder and began to  
move his silky limbs at will in the water.

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#### IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

Patrick Kavanagh

I do not think of you lying in the wet clay  
Of a Monaghan graveyard; I see  
You walking down a lane among the poplars  
On your way to the station, or happily

Going to second Mass on a summer Sunday -  
You meet me and you say:  
'Don't forget to see about the cattle - '  
Among your earthiest words the angels stray.

And I think of you walking along a headland  
Of green oats in June,  
So full of repose, so rich with life -  
And I see us meeting at the end of a town

On a fair day by accident, after  
The bargains are all made and we can walk  
Together through the shops and stalls and markets

Free in the oriental streets of thought.

O you are not lying in the wet clay,  
For it is a harvest evening now and we  
Are piling up the ricks against the moonlight  
And you smile up at us - eternally.

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FOR MY MOTHER

Seamus Heaney

When all the others were away at Mass  
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.  
They broke the silence, let fall one by one  
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron.  
Cold comfort set between us, things to share  
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.  
And again let fall little pleasant splashes  
From each other's work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside  
Went hammer and tongs at prayers for the dying  
And some were responding and some crying  
I remembered her head bent toward my head,  
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives---  
Never closer in the whole rest of our lives.

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RAIN, NEW YEAR'S EVE

by Maggie Smith

The rain is a broken piano,  
playing the same note over and over.

My five-year-old said that.  
Already she knows loving the world

means loving the wobbles  
you can't shim, the creaks you can't

oil silent—the jerry-rigged parts,  
MacGyvered with twine and chewing gum.

Let me love the cold rain's plinking.  
Let me love the world the way I love

my young son, not only when  
he cups my face in his sticky hands,

but when, roughhousing,  
he accidentally splits my lip.

Let me love the world like a mother.  
Let me be tender when it lets me down.

Let me listen to the rain's one note  
and hear a beginner's song.  
The bog spreads, raw and  
rich, reaching beyond time.

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