

Poems

by [Mary Oliver](#) in the [November 28, 2006](#) issue

Heavy

That time
I thought I could not
go any closer to grief
without dying

I went closer,
and I did not die.
Surely God
had His hand in this,

as well as friends.
Still, I was bent,
and my laughter,
as the poets said,

was nowhere to be found.
Then said my friend Daniel
(brave even among lions),
“It’s not the weight you carry

but how you carry it—
books, bricks, grief—
it’s all in the way
you embrace it, balance it, carry it

when you cannot, and would not,
put it down.”
So I went practicing.
Have you noticed?

Have you heard
the laughter
that comes, now and again,
out of my startled mouth?

How I linger
to admire, admire, admire
the things of this world
that are kind, and maybe

also troubled—
roses in the wind,
the sea geese on the steep waves,
a love
to which there is no reply?

Coming to God: First days

Lord, what shall I do that I
can't quiet myself?
Here is the bread, and
here is the cup, and
I can't quiet myself.

To enter the language of transformation!
To learn the importance of stillness,
with one's hands folded!

When will my eyes of rejoicing turn peaceful?
When will my joyful feet grow still?
When will my heart stop its prancing
as over the summer grass?

Lord, I would run for you, loving the miles for your sake.
I would climb the highest tree

to be that much closer.

Lord, I will learn also to kneel down
into the world of the invisible,
the inscrutable and the everlasting.
Then I will move no more than the leaves of a tree
on a day of no wind,
bathed in light,
like the wanderer who has come home at last
and kneels in peace, done with all unnecessary things;
every motion; even words.

Cormorants

All afternoon the sea was a muddle of birds
black and spiky,
long-necked, slippery.

Down they went
into the waters for the poor
blunt-headed silver
they live on, for a little while.

God, how did it ever come to you to
invent Time?

I dream at night
of the birds, of the beautiful, dark seas
they push through.

These poems are excerpted from Mary Oliver's book Thirst (Houghton Mifflin), used with permission of the publisher and the author.