

Secular Poems

*For Someone
You Love*

*Compiled by Johnny Monsarrat
Soulburners.org*

Kissing

Brian Mueller

Kissing someone on the lips
is like sharing a ripe fruit
while dancing in the snow
you try to devour them until sparks
fly and you spin in a circle
and you fall and you feel
like you fell in the ocean. She
whispers in your ear “I love you.”

Love One Another

Kahlil Gibran

(1883-1931)

Love one another, but make not a bond of love:
Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your
souls.

Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the
same loaf.

Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one
of you be alone,

Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver
with the same music.

Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping.

For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts.

And stand together yet not too near together:

For the pillars of the temple stand apart,

And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's
shadow.

From this Day Forward

Author Unknown

From this day forward,
You shall not walk alone.
My heart will be your shelter,
And my arms will be your home.

**somewhere i have never travelled,
gladly beyond**

e. e. cummings
(1894-1962)

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence;
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclothe me
through i have closed myself as fingers,
you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
(touching skilfully, mysteriously) her first rose

or if your wish be to close me, i and
my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
as when the heart of this flower imagines
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

Love Recognized

Robert Penn Warren

(1905-1988)

There are many things in the world and you
Are one of them. Many things keep happening and
You are one of them, and the happening that
Is you keeps falling like snow
On the landscape of not-you, hiding hideousness, until
The streets and the world of wrath are choked with snow.

How many things have become silent? Traffic
Is throttled. The mayor
Has been, clearly, remiss, and the city
Was totally unprepared for such a crisis. Nor
Was I —yes, why should this happen to me?
I have always been a law-abiding citizen.

But you, like snow, like love, keep falling,

And it is not certain that the world will not be
Covered in a glitter of crystalline whiteness.

Silence.

Apache Wedding Blessing

Author Unknown

Now you will feel no rain,

For each of you will be a shelter to the other.

Now you will feel no cold,

For each of you will be warmth to the other.

Now you will feel no loneliness

For each of you will be companion to the other.

Now you are two bodies,

But there is only one life before you.

Go now to your dwelling place,

To enter into the days of your togetherness.

May beauty surround you both in the journey ahead

And through all the years.

May happiness be your companion

To the place where the river meets the sun.

And may your days be good and long on the earth.

Solo for Saturday Night Guitar

Carl Sandburg
(1878-1967)

Time was. Time is. Time shall be.
Man invented time to be used.
Love was. Love is. Love shall be.
Yet man never invented love
Nor is love to be used like time.
A clock wears numbers one to twelve
And you look and read its face
And tell the time pre-cise-ly ex-act-ly.
Yet who reads the face of love?
Who tells love numbers pre-cise-ly ex-act-ly?
Holding love in a tight hold for keeps,
Fastening love down and saying
"It's here now and here for always."
You don't do this offhand, careless-like.
Love costs. Love is not so easy
Nor is the shimmering of star dust
Nor the smooth flow of new blossoms
Nor the drag of a heavy hungering for someone.
 Love is a white horse you ride
 or wheels and hammers leaving you lonely
 or a rock in the moonlight for rest
 or a sea where phantom ships cross always
 or a tall shadow always whispering
 or a circle of spray and prisms –
 maybe a rainbow round your shoulder.
 Heavy heavy is love to carry

and light as one rose petal,
light as a bubble, a blossom,
a remembering bar of music
or a finger or a wisp of hair
never forgotten.

She Tells Her Love While Half Asleep

Robert Graves

(1895-1985)

She tells her love while half asleep,
In the dark hours,
 With half-words whispered low:
As Earth stirs in her winter sleep
And puts out grass and flowers
 Despite the snow,
 Despite the falling snow.

Strawberries

Edwin Morgan

(b. 1920)

There were never strawberries
like the ones we had
that sultry afternoon
sitting on the step
of the open french window
facing each other
your knees held in mine
the blue plates in our laps
the strawberries glistening
in the hot sunlight
we dipped them in sugar
looking at each other
not hurrying the feast
for one to come
the empty plates
laid on the stone together
with the two forks crossed
and I bent towards you
sweet in that air
abandoned like a child
from your eager mouth
the taste of strawberries
in my memory

lean back again

let me love you
let the sun beat
on our forgetfulness

one hour of all
the heat intense
and summer lightning
on the Kilpatrick hills

let the storm wash the plates

True Love

James Russell Lowell
(1819-1891)

True love is but an humble, low-born thing,
And hath its food served up in earthen ware;
It is a thing to walk with hand in hand
Through the every-dayness of this work-day world,

Baring its tender feet to every flint,
Yet letting not one heart-beat go astray;
A simple, fire-side thing, whose quiet smile
Can warm earth's poorest hovel to a home.

Such is true love, which steals into the heart
With feet as silent as the lightsome dawn,
That kisses smooth the rough brows of the dark,
And hath its will through blissful gentleness:

A love that gives and takes, that seeth faults,
Not with flaw-seeing eyes like needle points,
But loving-kindly ever looks them down,
With the o'ercoming faith that still forgives;

A love that shall be new and fresh each hour,
As is the sunset's golden mystery,
Or the sweet coming of the evening star.

True Love

Judith Viorst

(b. 1931)

It is true love because

I put on eyeliner and a concerto and make pungent
observations about the great issues of the day

Even when there's no one here but him,

And because

I do not resent watching the Green Bay Packers

Even though I am philosophically opposed to football,

And because

When he is late for dinner and I know he must be either
having an affair or lying dead in the middle of the
street,

I always hope he's dead.

It's true love because

If he said quit drinking martinis but I kept drinking them
and the next morning I couldn't get out of bed,

He wouldn't tell me he told me,

And because

He is willing to wear unironed undershorts

Out of respect for the fact that I am philosophically
opposed to ironing,

And because

If his mother was drowning and I was drowning and he
had to choose one of us to save,

He says he'd save me.

It's true love because
When he went to San Francisco on business while I had
to stay home with the painters and the exterminator
and the baby who was getting the chicken pox,
He understood why I hated him,
And because
When I said that playing the stock market was juvenile
and irresponsible and then the stock I wouldn't let
him buy went up twenty-six points,
I understood why he hated me,
And because
Despite cigarette cough, tooth decay, acid indigestion,
dandruff, and other features of married life that tend
to dampen the fires of passion,
We still feel something
We can call
True love.

All Paths Lead to You
Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff

All paths lead to you
Where e'er I stray,
You are the evening star
At the end of day.

All paths lead to you
Hill-top or low,
You are the white birch
In the sun's glow.

All paths lead to you
Where e'er I roam.
You are the lark-song
Calling me home!

Sonnet CXVI

William Shakespeare

(1564-1616)

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments: love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove;
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom:
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

What She Said

Maturai Eruttalan Centamputan
ca. 100 BC-250 AD

Before I laughed with him
nightly,

the slow waves beating
on his wide shores
and the palmyra
bringing forth heron-like flowers
near the waters,

my eyes were like the lotus
my arms had the grace of the bamboo
my forehead was mistaken for the moon.

But now

translated by A. K. Ramanujan in "The Tamil Anthologies"

Not from Pride, but from Humility

James Lawson

(b. 1938)

Not from pride, but from humility
As mortals, with human weaknesses
And strengths
You stand alone today
And promise faith.
Your faith you find as you live,
Each moment consecrated to
A search for Truth
And for that Good
Whose presence you have deeply felt.

NOW:

From this time, until
The time you must rejoin the
Earth from which you came,
Love the love in you that underlies
Your actions.
And with each other,
Share your wonder at the beauty
That you find
As Man and Wife.

This is Just to Say
William Carlos Williams
(1883-1963)

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

To F. C.
Mortimer Collins
(1827-1876)

Fast falls the snow, O lady mine,
Sprinkling the lawn with crystals fine,
But by the gods we won't repine
 While we're together,
We'll chat and rhyme and kiss and dine,
 Defying weather.

So stir the fire and pour the wine,
And let those sea-green eyes divine
Pour their love-madness into mine:
 I don't care whether
'Tis snow or sun or rain or shine
 If we're together.

Love's Philosophy

Percy Bysshe Shelley

(1792-1822)

The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean;
The winds of heaven mix forever,
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle:—
Why not I with thine?

See! the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:—
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?

Juliet

Hilaire Belloc

(1870-1953)

How did the party go in Portman Square?
I cannot tell you; Juliet was not there.
And how did Lady Gaster's party go?
Juliet was next me and I do not know.

The Quarrel

Conrad Aiken

(1889-1973)

Suddenly, after the quarrel, while we waited,
Disenheartened, silent, with downcast looks, nor stirred
Eyelid nor finger, hopeless both, yet hoping
 Against all hope to unsay the sundering word:

While all the room's stillness deepened, deepened about
 us,
And each of us crept his thought's way to discover
How, with as little sound as the fall of a leaf,
The shadow had fallen, and lover quarreled with lover;

And while, in the quiet, I marveled – alas, alas –
At your deep beauty, your tragic beauty, torn
As the pale flower is torn by the wanton sparrow –
This beauty, pitied and loved, and now forsworn;

It was then, when the instant darkened to its darkest, —
When faith was lost with hope, and the rain conspired
To strike its gray arpeggios against our heartstrings, —
When love no longer dared, and scarcely desired:

It was then that suddenly, in the neighbor's room,
The music started: that brave quartette of strings
Breaking out of the stillness, as out of our stillness,
Like the indomitable heart of life that sings

When all is lost; and startled from our sorrow,
Tranced from our grief by that diviner grief,
We raised remembering eyes, each looked at other,
Blinded with tears of joy; and another leaf

Fell silently as that first; and in the instant
The shadow had gone, our quarrel became absurd;
And we rose, to the angelic voices of the music,
And I touched your hand, and we kissed, without a
word.

Meeting at Night

Robert Browning

(1812-1889)

The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

Marriage Morning

Alfred, Lord Tennyson
(1809-1892)

Light, so low upon earth,
You send a flash to the sun.
Here is the golden close of love,
All my wooing is done.
Oh, the woods and the meadows,
Woods where we hid from the wet,
Stiles where we stay'd to be kind,
Meadows in which we met!

Light, so low in the vale
You flash and lighten afar,
For this is the golden morning of love,
And you are his morning star.
Flash, I am coming, I come,
By meadow and stile and wood,
Oh, lighten into my eyes and heart,
Into my heart and my blood!

Heart, are you great enough
For a love that never tires?
O heart, are you great enough for love?
I have heard of thorns and briers.

Over the thorns and briers,
Over the meadows and stiles,

Over the world to the end of it
Flash for a million miles.

I Love You

Susan Polis Schutz

When we first met
I held back so much
afraid to show my deepest feelings
As I got to know you better
your gentleness and honesty
encouraged me to open up
and I started a trust
in you that I never had
with anyone else
Once I started to express
my feelings
I realized that
this is the only way
to have a relationship
It is such a
wonderful feeling
to let myself
be completely known to you
Thank you
so much
for showing me
what two people can
share together
I look forward to
spending many beautiful
times with you

A Dedication To My Wife

T. S. Eliot
(1888-1965)

To whom I owe the leaping delight
That quickens my senses in our wakingtime
And the rhythm that governs the repose of our
 sleepingtime,
 The breathing in unison.

Of lovers whose bodies smell of each other
Who think the same thoughts without need of speech
And babble the same speech without need of meaning.

No peevish winter wind shall chill
No sullen tropic sun shall wither
The roses in the rose-garden which is ours and ours only

But this dedication is for others to read:
These are private words addressed to you in public.

Daybreak

Stephen Spender

(b. 1909)

At dawn she lay with her profile at that angle
Which, sleeping, seems the stone face of an angel;
Her hair a harp the hand of a breeze follows
To play, against the white cloud of the pillows.
Then in flush of rose she woke, and her eyes were open
Swimming with blue through the rose of dawn.
From her dew of lips, the drop of one word
Fell, from a dawn of fountains, when she murmured
“Darling” upon my heart the song of the first bird.
“My dream glides in my dream,” she said, “come true.
I waken from you to my dream of you.”
O then my waking dream dared assume
The audacity of her sleep. Our dreams
Flowed into each other’s arms, like dreams.

O Tell Me The Truth About Love

W.H. Auden

(1907-1973)

Some say love's a little boy,
 And some say it's a bird,
Some say it makes the world go around,
 And some say that's absurd,
And when I asked the man next-door,
 Who looked as if he knew,
His wife got very cross indeed,
 And said it wouldn't do.

Does it look like a pair of pyjamas,
 Or the ham in a temperance hotel?
Does its odour remind one of llamas,
 Or has it a comforting smell?
Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is,
 Or soft as eiderdown fluff?
Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?
 O tell me the truth about love.

Our history books refer to it
 In cryptic little notes,
It's quite a common topic on
 The Transatlantic boats;

I've found the subject mentioned in

Accounts of suicides,
And even seen it scribbled on
The backs of railway-guides.

Does it howl like a hungry Alsatian,
Or boom like a military band?
Could one give a first-rate imitation
On a saw or a Steinway Grand?
Is its singing at parties a riot?
Does it only like Classical stuff?
Will it stop when one wants to be quiet?
O tell me the truth about love.

I looked inside the summer-house;
It wasn't ever there;
I tried the Thames at Maidenhead,
And Brighton's bracing air.
I don't know what the blackbird sang,
Or what the tulip said;
But it wasn't in the chicken-run,
Or underneath the bed.

Can it pull extraordinary faces?
Is it usually sick on a swing?
Does it spend all its time at the races,
Or fiddling with pieces of string?

Has it views of its own about money?

Does it think Patriotism enough?
Are its stories vulgar but funny?
O tell me the truth about love.

When it comes, will it come without warning
Just as I'm picking my nose?
Will it knock on my door in the morning,
Or tread in the bus on my toes?

Will it come like a change in the weather?
Will its greeting be courteous or rough?
Will it alter my life altogether?
O tell me the truth about love.

Sonnet XVIII

William Shakespeare

(1564-1616)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

To Cloris

Sir Charles Sedley
(1639-1701)

Cloris, I cannot say your eyes
Did my unwary heart surprise;
Nor will I swear it was your face,
Your shape, nor any nameless grace:
For you are so entirely fair,
To love a part, injustice were;
No drowning man can know which drop
Of water his last breath did stop;
So when the stars in heaven appear,
And join to make the night look clear;
The light we no one's bounty call,
But the obliging gift of all.
He that does lips or hands adore
Deserves them only, and no more;
But I love all, and every part,
And nothing less can ease my heart.
Cupid, that lover weakly strikes,
Who can express what 'tis he likes.

Love

Roy Croft
(1907-1973)

I love you,
Not only for what you are,
But for what I am
When I am with you.

I love you,
Not only for what
You have made of yourself,
But for what
You are making of me.

I love you
For the part of me
That you bring out;
I love you
For putting your hand
Into my heaped-up heart
And passing over
All the foolish, weak things
That you can't help
Dimly seeing there,
And for drawing out
Into the light
All the beautiful belongings
That no one else had looked
Quite far enough to find.

I love you because you
Are helping me to make
Of the lumber of my life
Not a tavern
But a temple;
Out of the works
Of my every day
Not a reproach
But a song.

I love you
Because you have done
More than any creed
Could have done
To make me good,
And more than any fate
Could have done
To make me happy.

You have done it
Without a touch,
Without a word,
Without a sign.
You have done it
By being yourself.
Perhaps that is what
Being a friend means,
After all.

Between Us a New Morning

Paul Eluard

(1895-1952)

Between us a new morning
Is being born from our flesh
Just the right way
To put everything into shape
We are moving just the right footsteps ahead
And the earth says hello to us
The day has all our rainbows
The fireplace is lit with our eyes
And the ocean celebrates our marriage

translated by Walter Lowenfels

The Thinker

William Carlos Williams
(1883-1963)

My wife's new pink slippers
have gay pom-poms.
There is not a spot or a stain
on their satin toes or their sides.
All night they lie together
under her bed's edge.
Shivering I catch sight of them
and smile, in the morning.
Later I watch them
descending the stair,
hurrying through the doors
and round the table,
moving stiffly
with a shake of their gay pom-poms!
And I talk to them
in my secret mind
out of pure happiness.

She Walks in Beauty

George Gordon, Lord Byron

(1788-1824)

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling place.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

Sonnet CXXX

William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The Winner

Ogden Nash
(1902-1971)

Ecstatic poets through the ages
Have writ their love on golden pages,
Treading on one another's toes
Till Bartlett brims and overflows,
And all their memorable phrases
Are common as goldenrod or daisies.
Why should I vie with such, my sweet,
When I descry in you, complete,
That ultimate sonnet, sunset-bright,
That Shakespeare always meant to write?

The Double Bubble of Infinity

Kate Farrell

(b. 1946)

The night before the day of our wedding
I dreamed that the universe had a party,
All the stars were invited,
Beneath sparkling chandeliers,
the planets rejoiced;
In all its beautiful, candle-lit galaxies,
Crowded with glass-clinking revellers,
The Cosmos was Laughing with
Lasting Love and Light.

i carry your heart with me

e. e. cummings

(1894-1962)

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart) i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear

no fate (for you are my fate, my sweet) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

In the Midst of Possibility

Gabriel Fitzmaurice

(b. 1952)

Now I love you
Free of me:
In this loving I can see
The YOU of you
Apart from me—
The YOU of you that's ever free.

This is the YOU I love.
This is the YOU I'll never have:
This is the YOU beyond possession—

The YOU that's ever true
While ever changing,
Ever new.

Now,
Naked
Free,
The YOU of you
Meets the ME of me
And to see is love;
To love, to see:

In the midst of possibility
We agree.

Beauty That Is Never Old

James Weldon Johnson

(1871-1938)

When buffeted and beaten by life's storms,
When by the bitter cares of life oppressed,
I want no surer haven than your arms,
I want no sweeter heaven than your breast.

When over my life's way there falls the blight
Of sunless days, and nights of starless skies;
Enough for me, the calm and steadfast light
That softly shines within your loving eyes.

The world, for me, and all the world can hold
Is circled by your arms; for me there lies,
Within the lights and shadows of your eyes,
The only beauty that is never old.

The Garden

Jacques Prévert
(1900-1977)

On the thousands and thousands of years
Time would take to prepare
They would not suffice
To entice
That small second of eternity
When you kissed me
When I kissed you
One morning in the light of winter
In Parc Montsouris in Paris
In Paris
On earth
Earth that is a star.

Jenny Kissed Me

James Henry Leigh Hunt
(1784-1859)

Jenny kissed me when we met,
 Jumping from the chair she sat in.
Time, you thief! who love to get
 Sweets into your list, put that in.
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad;
 Say that health and wealth have missed me;
Say I'm growing old, but add –
 Jenny kissed me!

If Thou Must Love Me, Let It Be For Nought

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

(1806-1861)

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile – her look – her way
Of speaking gently, – for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' –
For these things in themselves, Belovéd, may
Be changed, or change for thee, – and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, –
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Plucking the Rushes

Anonymous

ca. 350 AD

A boy and a girl are sent to gather rushes for thatching

Green rushes with red shoots,
Long leaves bending to the wind —
You and I in the same boat
Plucking rushes at the Five Lakes.

We started at dawn from the orchid-island:
We rested under elms till noon.
You and I plucking rushes
Had not plucked a handful when night came!

translated from the Chinese by Arthur Waley

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