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Kindredwood Publishing



Love is a Verb

Poems and Photos
By
Karen Loffler



For my healing friends
for all your kindness, understanding, and support
You are the greatest!

And for George,
who helped me step into just who I *yam*.
Thanks, my Taoist friend.

The fisherman

His blue eyes reflect the river's image
The fresh water rushes beneath his feet
Swirling and hoping
Hiding the prey in the silky depths
Flirting with the fine thread he caresses the water
With a fly hanging on a line
Baiting the colorful fish closer to the surface

A nibble, a strike, fingers weaving through hair
A beginning that could only end in someone losing air
But the pull of the line is hard to resist
The fish, the fly, one will live and one will die

False tugging causes confusion as the waters splashes
The snared fish jumps and begins to reveal her colors
The fisherman respectfully lures her near
Teasing, cooing, jostling for a top spot
Wanting to be the only love in someone's heart
Waiting to see the sweet fish flipping about in his net
She reveals only a small stripe at a time

As his strength can pull her in
His strength can release
Knowing that this fish is not for him
He speaks a truth
That sometimes slightly different stripes
Can keep the fish from the frying pan

So with a gentle kiss when no one was looking
He caresses her fins and sets
Her back into the river's flow
And she glows
Free from the net he thought might fit her
Free from the grip of a kindred soul
She wishes him a bittersweet farewell
And swims back into the her river

Replaced

The party is over,
I give back your golden ring.
Only dim love remains,
Buried in the routine.

I don't think I want that.
You call me selfish and self-centered.
But I have paid my dues.
Sleepless nights with a pale child,
Lonely
Empty vases where the roses were suppose to go.

So, I sit here tonight and feel your guilt pressing down on me,
I sit here afraid cause I don't have two bones to make soup,
Afraid I will never know love again
Afraid I will
some stranger will have to see
these stretch marks and round thighs.

I feel compelled to leave.
If I could explain it on a white slip of paper
Slide it under your bedroom door
I would, if it might ease your pain.
But words cannot help here, I still could not stay.

I cannot point to one reason,
No one fault, no one wrinkle,
That's what makes it hurt more---
Like a sunburn heats from the inside out,
I feel I simply out grew our love.
It was a good love,
I drifted away to where you don't want to go.

So I will find my own supports from deep in the mud
Buried for 20 odd years,
I know I will love again,
Somewhere sometime,
And I wish the same for you,
I know how easy I am to replace.

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A conversation that never happened

You are right, Dan
 I do care about life... I just squirm away from such questions...
 I only meant that I don't care about spilled jasmine tea
 or spilled milk... they don't really mean much.

But if I am being honest and not hiding my thoughts
 I would say, *god, yes, I care*
 I care about being loved
 And loving
 It hurts some days because I feel so much
 And it rushes through my skin trying to get my heart
 I can change so little...

Someone once told me, I think I believe him
 That ticklish people have nerve endings closer to the edge of their skin
 That is why I wiggle away from probing questions.
 My emotions are ticklish,
 Close to the edge and I have to twist away
 Move back, close down
 It tickles too much to share
 Just how much I sense and ingest.

So if I am being honest
 That deep dark honesty that harshly
 Kisses you awake in the night
 I would say... I care about giant waves that cleanse the Oceanside
 Of humans just making a living
 I would say... sometimes while my gentle husband snores
 Beside me, I long for the passion of new love
 I would say... that I cry alone in the dark more that I ever will admit
 Because I am addicted to being a good victim
 But **only** if I am being honest
 Honesty is the worst kind of tickle
 It starts inside and comes out as tears
 Which turn my eyes dim
 So I stay alone in the night
 And don't have conversations with friends
 Cause I know they will understand
 That caring too much, holds me in stillness.



Snowflake Cont...

Then at long last I can swallow love,
 And just one briny tear tumbles from my right eye
 And burns down my cheek, and drops
 To the earth, to nourish the puddle
 That evaporates in the Autumn sun
 And floats down, come winter, as one perfect snowflake.

Snowflake

I feel judgment of myself
 When I look in the mirror
 And say, "my that was a harsh thing to think."
 Turn it around, turn it around
 Take the hardness and find a way to crack
 Open the shell for it's the heart that matters.
 See how the eyes shine so blue.
 See those luscious hips that a naked child passed through.

I see self-esteem when my heart forgives my heart.
 Forgives the downs that push joy away,
 Forgives the ups that pull dependency too near.
 And for the pulses that beat indifferent---
 Let me find a lighted corridor,
 To bring them to the back to center,
 And know that I only need look inward for approval.

I smell fire when I balance the vitality,
 The circus performer twirling glowing batons,
 Sometimes burning hot and slow
 Sometimes simmering warm and fast.
 A fire that vibrates behind my heart:
 Red leaves in the sun, gold of autumn,
 Bluer than a Bunsen burner flame and whiter than grandmother's
 pearls.

I hear my strength
 When I ask, with respect, for fear to stand aside,
 I need to pass by...
 Into what awaits and trust it is just what I need.
 And my deepest strength will be tasted
 When it blends into the life's heartiness
 Merely as a courier with a bag and a bike,
 Dashing in and out of taxis and busses,
 Delivering food for thought,
 Intuitive messages to go,
 Can I have fries with that?

I steal a wild apple

I steal a wild apple in the fall
 Let the sweet juice sour my lips and tongue
 Toss the core into the woods
 And get back on my bike and ride away.

Of course, the ripest and sweetest of apples
 Seem out of reach, perfect
 In the sunlight, tantalizing red
 Longings waiting at the end of a branch...

So, soon I will return,
 With a tall and sturdy friend...
 His arms are longer than mine,
 He can reach higher into sunbeams

Maybe together we will make a wild apple pie,
 A flaky crust full of butter
 Apple peels tossed in the compost
 Peppery cinnamon and gentle allspice

Just the way we like it
 Tart and sweet and no rules.
 Simple honesty, kindness, and respect.
 Coupling with the pie's bubbles and spice.



Laura's Birthday Poem

She hides behind clear blue eyes
Stumbles gently in the dark.
She stands
Fifty sliver moons reached for her hands
Never quite grasping her sureness.
 Gentle silence mimics her awareness
 But her shadow feels betrayed.
 She listens
 The chick-a-dee sings in the morning
 But is silent the all the night.
Weeping heart longs to be seen,
Fears enfold the tender flesh.
She holds
A tiger jaw clenched
Tight against love's tender clutches.
 Softness yearns to tumble out
 A landslide waits to be shaken free.
 She trembles
 Let the fear step aside---ride it down
 To get to where you want to be.
Freedom pulses in the veins
A push, a pull, a pounding sound.
She waits
Echoing heart to sympathy
Breathe, and be vulnerable enough to take a hold.
 She is half way home,
 She is half way here.
 She feels.
 Earth is the plane in time
Dive in, dear friend, and enjoy.

Afraid

Afraid to look
 Into your eyes
 That crisp night
 When all the musicians
 Focused on their music
 You focused on me.
Afraid I'd see passion
 Dancing in your smile
 Longing,
 As the candle wax
 Droplets, slinking down
 The ivory stick.
Afraid to feel
 My reaction
 To eyes so full of spirit
 Ready to swallow
 My songs.
Afraid
 I would not want
 To look away
 And contentedly simmer
 Lost inside you forever.



Love

You smooth me,
As the water
Smooths the sand.
I stomp my footprint
Into the wet earth
Feeling
The need for texture.

Spider in My Pocket

I have learned not to freak-out
When I find a spider in my pocket
It's only a small leggy thing
Looking for some darkness to hide in.
He is happy to leave
If you nudge him gently away
Don't fight or frighten him
Just a small vibration and touch can curl
Him into a ball and send him rolling out and away

The threads he leaves might be sticky and fine
They may tangle in my fingers or drift across my cheek,
Yet they can show me the miracle
of the magic in his labor
The fine thread that binds human to spirit
The tenuous connection we might be just lucky enough to find.
One thread in a starburst of direction to follow
Just the right and best thread
You need to see.

So, tomorrow I may find a master weaver in my pocket
And I can choose to freak-out
Or not
But maybe that brown creepy spider, is a clue
And suddenly I'll know there is no place to go
And this thread is here for me to see and hold
A piece of tangible tangle
In this foggy and messy life.

The amphibian in me

I walk home in a gentle rain,
A female rain that nurtures and caresses.
And I think, yes, this is me: walking in the rain.
Right now it maybe the finest part of me
This walking in the rain.

I think I am part amphibian.
A silky frog or a camouflaged toad
The rain awakens my primal essences:
The ones snapping behind the brain,
The ones below the belt.
I want to throw my head back
Expose my white rounded belly
And croak to the seeping sky
“I am frog hear me roar!”

When I was a little girl,
The bullfrogs of summer
Would croak and groan and sing
‘Til just before dawn.
Their bodies hidden in the marsh
Voices thrown to the stars.
I wanted to be a bullfrog
To feel the joy of hiding, yet to sing in such a full voice,
To find love in the darkened marsh.

Tonight, the gentle pat pattering in puddles on the pavement
Eases me into thinking: it is a night for slow love---
The love the seeps between the lips of lovers
To the un-matched passion that lingers there.
A mist rising, swirling, and then echoing quiet.
Indeed, it is a night for quiet tap tapping love.
Permissions from the heart to enter.
Clinging of the hearts not wanting to leave.
Finding gentle need between fingers and dreams.
Slipping between marsh grasses and swaying on cattails---
Alive from the very center.

Yes, I am: walking in the rain.

Across the hillside let us climb

Walk along this path in springtime
Where white trillium soon will grow
Across the hillside. Let us climb

High on rocks wet with mossy slime,
Picking steps between ice and loam.
Walking along this path in springtime

The air is moist and peach, sublime.
Inhale as the eager winds flows
Across the hillside. Let us climb

The trail where rabbits dart and mime,
Yet scattered prints are all we know.
Walk along this path in springtime

Where groves unclose verdant and lime,
And the buck scents the impassioned doe
Across the hillside. Let us climb

Among the sun’s touches divine,
And stretch tendons and rusty bones
As we walk this path in the springtime.
Come---across the hillside let us climb.

April Moon

The poke-a-dot stars gleam dull and faint
In the halo of the beaming moon.
The night sky stirs blue paint
With the movement on song and balloon.

The trees cast inky shadows
That bend and arc in the under-brush.
The soft-white music twirls and echoes
To the roots of the trees and then settle with a hush.

The silent hum strokes the curves of the hill
And tumbles with the singing rays
Until all is tossed among the leaves. The glowing trill
Lingers for awhile, then turns and sways.

The forest shines phosphorescent as pearls,
As around the trees the melodious-light curls.



The love life of a lily

A bulb, cold round rather ugly
Settles into the dirt, dry
Water turns the dirt around the bulb to nourishing mud...
It softens the outer shell,
Then the inner one,
Allowing a root to dig into the soil

Talking hold in the dirt, dry
And more water, more wine for the bulb
The root grows and pulls in meaty particles
To feed itself...
Growing toward something that will bloom and smell sweet

Once the root settles deep in the heart of the dirt,
A shoot heads for the fresh air
Ready to be sprung free of the soil
That holds it steady
Following a path to the light

Emerging the shoot breathes and sighs
As the light pulses in its veins
Pushing ever upward
Reaching and branching
Til the blooms bulge
Ecstatic with sweet color and smell

Only to fade within a day or two
Crumbling despite the water and air
Sometimes there is simply nothing more there
Then a pretty flower, wanting to be seen
And two lonely hearts wishing.

Storm Cont...

Now the spring thunder bends
The shadowy pine
And I move from the lamp
Because it had blown before
And I dashed to where you
Curled around your work, pulling words
From yellow paper with a fountain pen.
Your words turned to letters
I fell inside a "c"
And it twirled around me as gentle as a cat's tail.

I move closer to the woodstove
Next to the wet dog
Who looks for your laugh
And towel-dry my hair.
I twirl the ends like a helicopter
And pretend to take-off.

Storm

I turn on the lamp
 That I just turned off,
 Because the jellied darkness stuck to my face,
 And I write this for you
 So you'll know what it's like to be home
 When you're not.

The rain beats the windowpane
 Like the sound of a steel drum
 As it fights the screen
 And tries to invade my silence
 The flatten drops
 Leave a dark trail
 As they slip down the sill
 Next to the dead fly
 Caught between glass and the night.

The lightning highlights the snow
 And the birdfeeder and white pines
 Shine ghostly white, casting their shadows on the yard.
 Funny---to have lightning and snow
 They shine from my fingernails.
 You know I hate lightning,
 Since that time in Montana
 It pushed me down the mountainside
 Dodging stubble pines and tripping on gravel
 From a day spent among wildflowers and glaciers.
 You remained behind, somewhere under a ledge
 As the storm passed
 I ate ripe plums in the empty car
 And waited with the beat
 Of my heart and the fruitless pit pressing the roof of my mouth.

If I don't see you

If I don't see you,
 you don't fill up the space between my mind and legs.
 I don't want to meet you someplace by the lake,
 watch you stroke your canoe toward my camp-site,
 and dream of droplets of heat falling inside my tent.

No if I don't see you,
 Your voice leaves my ears, falls away from my lips.
 Leaving me gasping, my hands caressing the echo
 Of your laugh, of your inflections
 that I want to match breath for breath

No if I don't see you,
 You don't fill my common sense with colors of crimsons.
 I don't reach for my pillow in the night
 Hoping it will encircle me and sigh,
 "I need you close tonight; I waited forever for you."

No, prince, if I don't see you,
 You don't exist and skew my fairy tale days.
 I might see another frog with bulging warts
 And feel compelled to kiss, slimy wet lips
 and dive into the unfathomable depths of authenticity.

What I have learned so far

Sometimes emotions can overwhelm a brain.
The past is not buried deep, just ignored.
Butterflies' wings make swooping sounds
 when they pass close enough to kiss.
Porcupines can swim. Even hummingbirds pee.
It takes hard work to keep a marriage working and sometimes it
just doesn't.
Love is a verb.
Four cats may be just one too many.
A dragonfly's empty shell
 looks eerie when swaying from a cattail leaf.
Some day's life is wonderful
Some day's staying under the covers
 seems a better option.
Good lovers are not born with skills.
Milk spilled on the floor leaves
 neat patterns for the cats to lick up.
Children who spill milk
 need to watch the cats lick up the patterns.
Happiness in finding warm mittens.
Everyone ought to have colored pencils.
Lack of conversation only means one is quiet.
Some times I need to say, "I care." Some times I don't.
Every raindrop has the potential to be a prism.
Every choice you make changes who you are.
There is only the present, no past, no future; time is not linear.
Wood-smoke can sting your nose while it heats your butt.
Children are little eggs: You can poach, fry, or scramble
 And they still are pretty yummy.

Catalog

Long ago I searched
The pages
Of the Sears Catalog
To find my dreams...

Visions of crisp rooms
 Rugs with vacuum lines
Stoves without stains
 All the flames burning bright
Table clothes spread for show
 Not to hid scratches
Yellow dishes that twinkled
 And never ever broke
Men with crooked smiles
 But never deviant
 Waiting for me...

I knew if
I stared hard
 Enough
Leafed fast
 Enough
Priced carefully
 Enough
My dreams would fall
From the glossy pages.

But somehow
They remained folded
Neatly, inside, smoldering.

Skeleton Women

She sees the wind pulsing
Pressing brown rushes
Pushing sword grass
Pause to rest.

She senses rising tempers
Pressing for answers
Pushing the edge
Pause at no control.

She hears aggravated voices
Pressing the damp air
Pushing green fears
Pause not to listen.

She smells masculine fumes
Pressing down arms
Pushing face to mud
Pause with a handful of auburn hair.

She dies, skeleton women
Gently on rusty grasses
Receptor of grubs
Stillness pushes her.

What I have learned so far cont...

Do fish hold their breath when they jump out of the water?
Felt pens work best, when doodling on the funny pages.
Walking on fallen leaves makes a sound like eating M&M's.
Animals don't really talk on New Year's Eve, the Champaign does.
It is fun to blow big bubbles with your chewing gum.
You can see the shape of each snowflake against a dark sweater.
Empty hearts hurt, empty brains are sad, empty calories taste the best.
Visions are real if you see them.
Daydreams heal us from the inside out.
Curiosity keeps us alive.
so, you tell me, was the big bang noisy?



To A Friend (Lorraine 2008)

You, so full of love and light, gone,
Released by a turning of your eyes.
I began poem for you once before,
I started it the day I drove you home
From your last treatment...

In Redford, we stopped and ate chicken noodle soup
And strawberry short cake with ice cream
And we talked about what your summer would bring:
Re-gaining your strength, making love to your husband.
That made you cry, how much was taken from you...
How badly you needed that physical connection
To the man you love so dearly.
To that life you once had.

The poem started out with the line
“When I drove away, there was a hole
in the space where you had been sitting.”
But you see, dear friend, I was not ready to write that poem.
So it lay unfinished among my carving knives on a bench.
I was not ready to admit that you might indeed leave here
Leave us.

But you did. Your spirit
Simply to big for this world.
The illness brought in much light,
Yes, it also brought pain and fear
And, you wove them into grace,
A braid for us to have and to hold.

When I eat strawberry shortcake, this spring,
With strawberries I picked myself,
I will know you are contented
You have grown into your spirit,
But a spirit cannot taste fresh strawberries.
I will savor them for you,
And I will make love with my husband tonight
Because tomorrow--- one of us maybe gone.

What happens when loves goes out?

What happens when the love goes out?
Simply falls away one day
Into the void it left behind
Where all the fairy tale princesses go to hide.

Am I the last of the unaware women
Who still believes in fairytales,
White horses and all
Men who bring flowers,
Chocolates and chivalry.

Where have all the flowers gone?
Out dated like coil phone wires
The ones that kept you tethered
To a wall
No matter how far you tied to stretch it
It was only a matter of time
Til you got to the end.

I stand alone, no dreams, no hopes
No more beliefs in fairytales.
Sad, not cause I have to start over,
But sad because I cannot not find
That one simple thing to believe in...

Do dreams come true?
Does it happen to you?

No, I dare not believe that,
So then what is this hope
Edging my heart?

Good Morning, Kayaker

I dream out
 the window of this Holiday Inn
 and spy you kayaking
 on the silky lake

so calm and stretched
 in the mist this morning.

I am bewitched
 by your arms,
 tan, curved muscles
 snaking veins,
 as they dance the double blade
 one twist two
 one twist two.

Your kayak parts
 the water, low friction, well oiled
 chased by a V...

Your muscles flex
 veins constrict, blood pumps
 my face hot with sweat
 my knees shake.

My vision deepens
 your luscious arms
 encircle my waist
 your breath on my neck
 my breasts searching
 for your pulse

your kayak
 lying on the sand
 paddle pressing
 making a cross.
 Are you the father, the son, or a Holy Ghost?

Your rhythmic pull stops
 the kayak twirls an extension of your body
 legs unseen
 Did my chimera
 invade
 our silence?

Or did you just stop to see the silky mist rising?

Life gives joy everyday

The moonlight shines clear
 Touching my lover's shoulder,
 Night dawns sweetly.

Coffee drifts upstairs
 Steamy, hot, kindly on tongues,
 Morning last til noon.

Life gives joy everyday,
 Gifts tumble gently onto
 Fine wrinkles and pasts.



Walking the Beach

In the spring sun,
I walk barefoot at the edge of the lake
The sand hot on the surface
But close to frozen underneath.
I have twenty minutes to ease
My-self back into myself.

I ask my spirit guides to show me something pretty on the beach
today,
Beauty helps revive me after a trying day.
I walk and I watch.

Where the water licks the land a deer carcass lies
White rib-bones reflect on the water
A furry pelt sparkles with diamonds of sand
Not the pretty I was looking for
But here it is in front of me
I can only see with my eyes
And when I look close pretty is here.

Grace rests in the curve of the bleached ribs
Lover's arms long to hold a heart now recycled
They held an opening for the dead deer's very being
A broken rib sticks epicormicly into the sand
Trying to find a last hold on the beach

Gentleness ebbs in the decaying fur that shifts
in the wind and water
The wind echoing mother's hand shaking
the dirt from a child's hair
Only this hair is dead, melting back into the earth.
Breaking down into nibbly food for the bugs
The grays and goldens fading, yet still shining in the sun

Here is my pretty, my spirit guide nods.

Walking the Beach cont...

I breathe deep, no smell yet,
The carcass freshly washed out of the frozen lake
Hours from now it will scent the air and the foxes
Will come looking for flesh and a meal
The bugs already feast. I am ribs in the sand.

There is pretty in the elegance of it all
Pretty in the arch of a white rib
Pretty in a dead sculpture of fur and bones
Pretty in the corner of this older women's seeking eyes.

