

The Heart's
Necessities

LIFE IN POETRY

JANE TYSON CLEMENT *with* BECCA STEVENS

The Heart's Necessities

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L I F E I N P O E T R Y

Jane Tyson Clement
with Becca Stevens

Edited by Veery Huleatt



P L O U G H P U B L I S H I N G H O U S E

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NOTE ON PHOTOGRAPHY

The ocean and outdoor photos in this book were taken at Bay Head, New Jersey, by Tim Clement (Jane Tyson Clement's son, pictured above), October 2018.

The photos of Becca and her home in Brooklyn were taken by Clare Stober, Richard Mommsen, and Melinda Goodwin, October 2018.

The photos of Jane and her family are used courtesy of the Clement family.

Editor's Note

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE STORY here, and this little book contains several parts. First, selected poems by Jane Tyson Clement, presented more or less chronologically. In between the poetry I've sketched the details of Jane's life to give some context, and to make this remarkable woman's life available to those who love her remarkable words. But what makes it more than another biography or poetry collection is the interspersed commentary by Becca Stevens, a singer-songwriter who, decades later, is giving Jane's words new life even as the poems help her express the essence of her own art.

What could Jane and Becca have in common? As I worked with Becca on this book, the connections between these two women sometimes seemed too tenuous, the differences separating them all too concrete. What could Jane's life—a

Manhattan upbringing, Smith College, courtship and marriage in the midst of World War II, a home and a big family, and then the radical decision to join the Bruderhof community, a rag-tag bunch of Christian pacifists – possibly have to do with Becca, child of a musical North Carolina family raised on Bach and bluegrass, a graduate of the School of Jazz at the New School, a musician who has collaborated with the likes of David Crosby, Troy Miller, and Jacob Collier, based in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, but always on the go, taking her music all over the world?

But when I listened to these two artists, instead of looking at the particulars of their lives, a clear pattern began to emerge. The art of both women is a tribute to authenticity and personal integrity, the fruit of hard decisions taken to find and stay faithful to the truth about themselves and the world. In this book, and in Becca’s music, you can hear them in conversation, and in harmony.

What are the heart’s necessities? Jane and Becca both have far better answers than I, so I’ll let them tell you. Or, I should say, if you let their art and their lives speak to you, they might guide you to answers of your own. I hope that through this book many others will hear and heed the wisdom in Jane’s poetry and Becca’s music and feel, with them, the divine discontent that moves us to love, to believe, to question, and to create.

*Veery Huleatt
Walden, New York*

Prelude

TWO YEARS AFTER THE PASSING of my dear friend and musical collaborator Kenya Tillery, I was still struggling to find the words to honor her life through song. I had tried many times to write a song for Kenya, but the words I chose either fell flat or seemed heavy-handed – rooted in sorrow rather than the celebration of Kenya’s life. She was passionate about bringing people together to share and create, so it is easy to imagine her smiling down the day I opened a book of poems by Jane Tyson Clement and found the perfect words to finish her song. Kenya would have treasured this book not only because of her deep appreciation of artistic collaboration, but also because her love planted the seeds that brought it all together.

KENYA WAS THE KIND OF PERSON who inspired everyone fortunate enough to cross her path. Her infectious attitude

moved even chronic pessimists to see the preciousness of life. Thinking back, it's hard to believe I only knew her for about six months.

Kenya first reached out to me through Myspace, early in my career, announcing herself as my "biggest fan" and requesting my presence at her birthday bash in our hometown of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. We had many mutual friends, and her letter made me smile, so I called her to find out more.

On the phone, Kenya shared that it was her dream to celebrate an evening of performances by her favorite musicians with her family and closest friends. She offered to fly me home early for Christmas, so that we could spend a few days together in her home studio working on songs for the party and recording vocals for her upcoming album.

The conversation took a turn when Kenya said, "Full disclosure: I've recently undergone treatment for a relapse of breast cancer. I've lost my hair, and I'm sporting only half a pair up top, but I promise that what I lack, I make up for in determination and admiration!" She paused, and added, "I know this is a little intense, and I hope it won't deter you, but I completely understand if you choose not to come."

She apologized for not being able to pay more – she was using her savings and "extra money" from insurance for treatment to throw this party. Without hesitation I responded, "I'm in!" We stayed on the phone for hours, making a long list of our favorite songs, enthusing over our shared Elliott Smith

obsession, and figuring out vocal parts she could sing on my originals. I distinctly remember feeling, the moment I hung up, that I had just found a long-lost sister.

Kenya had already been through treatment twice, and from our conversation I assumed that she was on the mend. But even at that point she must have had some premonition that her cancer would return. She had lost a great deal of time already, and wanted to enjoy the time she had left. I think that's why the party meant so much to her.

A few months later, we met at her home studio in the garage of her mother's house in Winston-Salem. When I pulled up, she came running out in a flowing white linen dress, grinning ear to ear, confidently owning her bald head and altered figure. We spent four days laughing, singing, writing music, and working on her album. Her songs were so strong both musically and lyrically, addressing her fears and drawing light from her struggles.



Kenya, 2004

We'd occasionally take "tea breaks," and it was during one of these that Kenya told me about her dreams. She yearned to take her music on the road and share it with the world, but she was held back by cancer, by having to stay close to home for treatments and rest, and by the fear of more cancer. She said she could speak to me in a way that she was reluctant to with her close friends and family because she felt so much guilt for putting them through this struggle for the second time.

Kenya's birthday bash was on January 26, 2008, and her friends and heroes flew in from all over the world. The event was a celebration of love and great music. Kenya was overjoyed.



*The birthday bash:
Becca (L) and Kenya*

A few days later she made a guest appearance on one of my local gigs, singing for my friends and family, and I noticed her energy was down. Less than a week later, on the morning that I was scheduled to return to New York, she called me from the hospital. She'd had another relapse, but this time the cancer had spread much further than before. My dad and I rushed to the hospital so we could hug her before driving to the airport. I spoke to her on the phone a few more times after that, usually late at night when her spirits were down. I was convinced she would get through.

Kenya passed away on March 7, 2008. The invitation to her funeral came while I was out on tour. I was shocked by her death, and devastated that she didn't get more time to share her gifts. It felt unfair that I was missing her funeral while I was living the dream that she didn't get to fulfill. I promised then to honor Kenya by making the most of my time as a musician, and to keep her story alive by writing a song, a reminder of how lucky we are to still be here enjoying music, collaborating, and celebrating the lives of those we love.

EARLY VERSIONS OF THAT SONG were titled "Kenya's Song" but eventually it became "Tillery." For years, I would write a

draft, demo it, decide it wasn't good enough for her, and put it away for six months to a year, before repeating the whole process. I was on the fourth rotation of this when I had the urge to pull a poetry book off my shelf for lyrical inspiration. I had settled on a theme about seasons and written a melody and lyrics about spring, but was searching for lyrics that would paint a picture of winter, touching on metaphors of loss without feeling too cold and dreary.

Jane Tyson Clement's *No One Can Stem the Tide* had languished unopened on my bookshelf for nearly a year, a neglected stocking stuffer my father had given me as an aid to unlocking inspiration in songwriting. Why hadn't I opened it sooner? Stubbornness, most likely, being stuck on the ideal of finding the perfect words myself. But for some reason, in that moment, the book caught my eye. I picked it up, thought of Kenya, and then opened to a random page. I was stunned to see two poems about winter side by side, titled "Winter" and "February Thaw." Not only did they capture the season of loss so perfectly, but they did so with exactly the right rhythm and number of syllables to fit the melody I had already written.

I immediately reached out to Jane's publisher and her surviving family to ask for the rights to pull phrases from those two poems to write a song. When they were so generous and accommodating, letting me use Jane's poems in whatever way would spread them to more people, I thought to myself: I'm definitely going to set more of her poems to music!

Now I have five:

- ▶ “Tillery”
- ▶ “105”
- ▶ “For You the Night Is Still”
- ▶ “Response to Criticism”
- ▶ “I Am No Artist”

Meanwhile, thanks to the power of Jane’s words and Kenya’s inspiration, “Tillery” has taken on a life of its own: it has been recorded on four different albums in four completely different settings, and has even become a band name.



Becca, 2018

MY FIVE JANE TYSON CLEMENT SETTINGS were written in various Brooklyn apartments during my years living in New York. Wherever it is, my home is my creative haven—a safe, quiet space where I can write when I’m off the road, reunited with my instruments and in control of my time.

An important part of my music-writing process is recording my ideas. I make home demos, using a lo-fi, homespun, DIY approach to recording. I then use the recordings to teach the songs to my bandmates, and finally send the demos to a producer who helps me craft and capture them in a professional recording studio.

I treasure these original home demos as time capsules that capture the essence of my original instincts, the unadulterated

song at its core, before it was influenced by outside factors and opinions. I've often thought about making a whole record that way, foregoing the glossy perfectionist studio approach to embrace the more intimate and instinctive process, and to expose my deepest and truest sound.

When I learned that Jane, too, wrote from home, and that those who knew her thought of her as a teacher (and didn't even know she was a poet), I decided that this "Becca + Jane" collaboration was the perfect project to incorporate this homespun recording approach I have considered sharing for so long. The self-recorded audio of these five poetry settings led to five music videos filmed at my apartment in Brooklyn. (You can view these videos at plough.com/jtc-songs.)

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK, *The Heart's Necessities*, comes from Jane's poem "Winter" (the first Jane poem I ever read, and a lyric in "Tillery"). Here is its original stanza:

The heart's necessities
include the interlude
of frost-constricted peace
on which the sun can brood.

I've often found it strange and beautiful that the heart aches when emotional elements are out of balance. When someone "breaks your heart," or when you miss someone, the chest grows heavy, the heart tugs and pulls. But these painful

seasons are, to Jane, part of the necessity of being human, and without these periods of grief and “frost-constricted peace,” the sun has no place to brood, to heal us, and to bring us back to springtime with the fruits of winter mourning.

Like Kenya, Jane wrote from the heart. Not because she was being hounded by a publisher or a record label, and not by any means to pay the bills. She wrote because it was her “heart’s necessity.” I hope that this heart-driven approach comes through in my recordings of Jane’s poems, filmed and commissioned by the very people to whom Jane’s poetry led me in January of 2011, almost exactly three years after Kenya’s birthday bash.

I’VE ALWAYS GOTTEN THE SENSE that Jane was a strong, brave woman because her poems have a sensitivity that I’ve only ever found in the strongest people. She has a deep yet honest approach to sharing her emotional journeys, writing in a way that is universal yet personal. Jane also has a gutsy style, speaking her mind with class and without shame, and standing her ground even when admitting imperfection. I admire her deeply, even though we’ll never meet outside the world of her poetry and stories.

No matter your beliefs or your struggle, you can find solace in Jane’s words because she’s woven them with a mastery that welcomes anyone. I often find myself returning to a poem I’ve read before and perceiving it in a completely new light due to

a change in my own mood. This is the mark of a great artist: that she can write something as if she's speaking directly to you at a particular moment, and yet, with the same line, speak just as clearly to you in a different moment.

Since I first reached out to Plough in 2011, I have had the great pleasure of connecting with Jane's family members around the world. I've sung songs and shared meals with her son Tim (who took all the nature photographs in this book) and her granddaughter Anita, and relished hearing stories about Jane from the people who knew her well. I can't help thinking Kenya would get a kick out of seeing all these new connections and collaborations unfold as a result of her song.

My sincere hope is that this book will make the wisdom and beauty of Jane's life and poetry available to more people. I hope that my musical contributions will draw poetry enthusiasts to the music, and music enthusiasts to the poetry. I hope the backstory and commentary in this book will bring depth to the words that have added so much beauty to my life. Most of all, I hope Jane Tyson Clement's poems will bring the reader many years of solace and inspiration, just as they have done for me since the moment I read the first word.

Becca Stevens
Brooklyn, New York
November 2018

REBA JANE TYSON
ELLEN EMERSON HOUSE
SMITH COLLEGE
NORTHAMPTON, MASS.
From the Sea

HORACE MANN AUDITORIUM
1935 Senior Class Play

FRIDAY EVENING
NOVEMBER 23, at 8:30 o'clock

Friday Evening
8:30 o'clock
Row L
Seat 21

Gift

The sea will follow me through all my years,
Will lift mt heart in song, will quench my tears,
Will lay benignant hands upon my head,
At discontented whispers, sorrow led.

Death will find my body
The ghastly shadows cr
Will choke my singing
To beauty which with
The proofs of god, wh
Restored by gentle f

Yes, Death will fir
Who cling with ear
But not forever-nd
The sea shall rai
My song again, re

Morning

I stood at the

With unbeliev
By an ocean
Men running

stood at

(st.

Forl
You who have watched the wind
and heard the mused w
shelter your heart with part
and keep it free.

Let not the varied dest
urge to a lesser prize
keep faith with beauty now, and
stare you ^{may} shall find.

R.J.T.

March 10th 1958

- wor coming



01

Shelter Your Heart with Patience

*You who have watched the wings of darkness lifting
and heard the misted whisper of the sea,
shelter your heart with patience now, with patience,
and keep it free.*

“Faith”

WHEN REBA JANE TYSON (known as Jane) won the poetry award on graduating from Horace Mann School in 1935, her father took the liberty of sending the prize poem, a lovelorn sonnet beginning “What trace of tears shall I now find . . .” to several of his colleagues at Columbia University. His pride is evident in the exclamation points that punctuate his observations, but is tempered with fatherly concern: “She’s a queer mixture,” he admits in one letter. “We’re sure we have something in her, but she puzzles us sometimes with her maturity and this queer introspective touch.”

His daughter was puzzled too. Who was Jane Tyson? The question occupied her throughout her early life. The outward details are simple enough to relate: two brothers, Jim older and David younger than herself, a middle-class upbringing near Columbia College, where her father held several administrative positions. The Tysons lived on Claremont Avenue, in the midst of New York’s great educational institutions: Columbia, Barnard College, Julliard School of Music, Union Theological Seminary, International

House, and Horace Mann, which Jane attended from first grade through high school. Jane considered the beautiful Columbia campus her backyard, and spent hours playing there with her brothers. Her education included a good dose of New York culture: the Bronx zoo, operas at the Met, and hearing the New York Philharmonic perform under Arturo Toscanini. The family spent summers at their grandparents' farm in Pennsylvania, and later at Bay Head on the New Jersey coast, where the ocean seized Jane's heart and imagination. "The sea will follow me through all my years," she writes in an early poem, and it did: she would still be writing about it in the 1990s.

It was a sheltered childhood, but not completely. Jane was born in 1917, and the shadow of World War I hung over her early years: her father's closest friend had died in the trenches, and Jane, a sensitive child, observed the pain that war had caused her family and others. This seems to have been the foundation for her lifelong pacifism. Social causes were also close to her heart. Jane's father was a staunch Democrat – unusual in his milieu – and his father had been a lawyer who never made much because of his habit of representing coal miners and others who couldn't pay him in full. After the Wall Street Crash of 1929, when Jane was just eleven, she became accustomed to the sight of unemployed men on street corners, selling apples to passersby. Her mother never passed them without buying fruit, which Jane noticed and remembered.





As a teen, Jane became increasingly uncomfortable with the conventional Christianity she observed in the church her family attended. Churchgoers tolerated war, nationalism, racial inequality, and injustice, which Jane could not square with Jesus' teachings about love and peace, or with her own instincts about the preciousness of life. At seventeen, she announced to her father that she was an agnostic, and quietly stopped attending church.

But agnosticism was never a place to stay. It was a way of journeying, of admitting to herself and others that she was on a quest for truth. Jane never doubted that there was something out there far greater than herself. A juvenile poem begins:

I believe in some great god,
Some strange god of the sea,
A laughing god, a mocking god,
A god with peace in his arms,
A gift yet unbestowed.
A god of small moods,
A giver of insights too deep to be touched by words . . .

Her quest eventually brought her to Riverside Church, led by the famous pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick. Knowing that Fosdick was both a pacifist and deeply concerned about injustice, Jane worked up the courage to ask to meet with him. She remembered later: "I poured out my questions and doubts; he quietly listened and encouraged me to continue my search, to hold on to my belief in peace, and I would find what I was looking for, he was sure of that."

In the midst of all this, Jane's talent began to emerge in little poems about nature, her beliefs, creativity, and love. ("But don't worry," she noted in the margin of a lovesick poem sent to a friend, "I haven't depended on anyone so greatly as yet.") "Have I within myself found restless springs?" she asks in an early poem, and in another, "Why not lay down the power-less pen at last / admit defeat?" She was beginning to think of herself as a poet, but, despite the graduation prize, was also already doubting her creative abilities. "Take back my poet's soul. I cannot give / Its rich designs a worthy utterance. / Take back my soul, or give me poet's strength . . ." The restless springs of creativity and discontent were the source of new questions about the world, about God, and about herself.

High school graduation was soon followed by enrollment in Smith College, in the autumn of 1935. There Jane studied literature and poetry, taking classes with scholars like Charles Jarvis Hill and Howard Patch, and with the poet Grace Hazard Conkling. In 1936, she met the poet Archibald MacLeish, whose famous poem "Ars Poetica," (the art of poetry) she had probably read and taken to heart: "A poem should be equal to / Not true. . . . A poem should not mean / But be." Jane described their encounter in a poem of her own, "To Archibald MacLeish." While the actual meeting seems to have been a disappointment—"I touched his hand, but he will not remember"—it reveals Jane's new sense of self and purpose: "I aim to be a poet. That I have over him. / I aim at what he is. The fight is mine."

At times, her new self-confidence bordered on arrogance. In a letter home to her mother a few months later, Jane wrote: “You ought to get used to different styles of writing. For that reason I am sending home two books I think you would find helpful. . . . The Hemingway is rather warm and you probably won’t like it but it is a good style to get used to, and a good kind of subject matter to get used to. If you shy away from that sort of thing you lose a lot.” Smith College was transforming an introverted girl into a confident young woman.

Jane’s heart was receiving an education as well. In a comparative religion class she encountered the writings of George Fox, the seventeenth-century reformer and founder of the Quakers (also known as the Society of Friends). No doubt Fox’s vivid, almost poetic prose—“I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God”—attracted her, but it was his honest, uncompromising search for “the faith which purifies and gives victory” that rang true to Jane, and she soon discovered, to her joy, that Quakers still existed—even on the Smith campus.

The Smith College chaplain, Burns Chalmers, was a Quaker, and he and his wife, Elizabeth, hosted open evenings for students. It was at their house that Jane met other students who were part of the peace movement, a loosely defined association that began as a reaction to the atrocities of World War I and continued to be active as a

second world war threatened. Jane also began attending Quaker services in a small chapel in the college library.

During Jane's sophomore year, her father accepted the presidency of Muhlenberg College, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the family moved there, away from the Manhattan home of Jane's childhood. During her senior year, Jane decided to pursue teaching and applied for several positions. Through her new Quaker connections, she was accepted for a teaching internship at Germantown Friends School, at the edge of Philadelphia.

College graduation, like high school commencement four years before, brought with it a literary prize. For her long narrative poem, *Strange Dominion*, Jane won the Mary Augusta Jordan Prize, awarded for the "best original literary work" of the graduating class. The final six poems in this chapter are taken from *Strange Dominion*—where they are like interludes that break up the blank verse of the narrative. A friend with connections in the publishing world sent the manuscript off to Macmillan while Jane, after a summer at Bay Head, was off to teach school.



GIFT

The sea will follow me through all my years,
will lift my heart in song,
will quench my tears,
will lay benignant hands upon my head
at discontented whispers, sorrow led.
Death will find my body, hide it where
the ghastly shadows creep, all brown and sere;
will choke my singing voice,
will blind my eyes
to beauty which within the seasons lies,
the proofs of God, which fade and rise again,
restored by gentle fingers of His rain.
Yes, Death will find me.
Not immortal, I
who cling with earth-stained fingers
also die –
but not forever – no.
The sea will raise my song again,
remembering all my praise.

1935

Bay Head, New Jersey

Becca: When I was growing up, my family spent summer vacations at a beach house in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Melodies and lyrics would come to mind seamlessly there while I walked the length of the beach, searching for pretty shells and sharks' teeth, and gazing out at the changing colors on the ocean. Several of my songs are a direct result of these solo walks, churning struggles into song, lulled and comforted by the waves, the seagulls, the feeling of the sand, and the ocean's vast peace. The beach house is gone now but my relationship to the ocean remains.

Jane used to spend time with her family in Bay Head, New Jersey. She knew the sea as an earthly mother, lifting her heart in song and easing her sorrows. But for Jane, the ocean also represents an eternal place where her creations live on after she is gone, raising her song and remembering her praise.

This is one of those poems that seems to miraculously apply to whatever struggle I'm going through as I'm reading it. The death she mentions could be the end of her life, or perhaps the death of creativity, love, or faith. This death could also be Jane's doubt, or the dark cloud of depression that comes with such doubt, "blinding our eyes to the beauty."

But in this poem, the sea is stronger than death, doubt, depression, and all the things that go hand in hand with our mortality. The sea represents art in its truest form.



THE ALIEN LAND

Never before saw I trees leaning on the sky,
Green-sharpness cutting through the endless blue.
I am a seachild, used to wind that makes
Music of its own, not of the leaves.
Never before saw I the hermit birds that fly
Low in the quiet shade where tall trees made
The forest floor grow bare and needle-brown
Always the birds I love hang in the wind above,
crying their pain over the ruffled sea.
Never the sweet lament, never the soft content
the robin whistles from the swaying elm.
I am the sea's lone child, loving the sky's sea-wild
And windy limits where the gull's flight ends.

1937
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts

TO ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

I touched his hand, but he will not remember.

I looked into his eyes, tea-colored,
and he smiled at me,
not knowing who I was or caring
other than that I was young and just beginning.
He did not know that I stood then
where he once stood,
or that I wanted what he now had found;
will and power of words.
He lays his thoughts
clearly like jewels flashing in the light,
simple, unset except with what the mind
must have to shape itself.

I touched his hand, but he will not remember.

I aim to be a poet. That I have over him.
I aim at what he is. The fight is mine.
He looked as though he knew once what it meant
and had not quite forgotten.

I touched his hand, but he will not remember.

October 15, 1936
Smith College

Becca: I relate to this poem from the perspective of both characters: the fan – idealizing the hero, hoping to be recognized for her adoration, and the artist – maybe tired from having just finished performing, failing to satisfy the admirer’s wish to connect in a meaningful way.

I picture Jane here, barely nineteen years old, a college student pondering an anticlimactic interaction with her poetry hero. Sometimes I read this poem and project my own memories of disappointing interactions with musicians whose art has inspired mine, but on closer inspection I notice that Jane never mentions disappointment or resentment. Even in her teens, she had the insight to recognize the interaction for what it was, and the confidence to claim her inexperience and her “fight” to be a poet as strengths.

MacLeish would have been forty-five years old at that time, a politically active anti-fascist working as a writer and editor for *Fortune* magazine, having already won his first of three Pulitzers. In his early twenties, MacLeish’s studies at Harvard Law School had been interrupted by World War I, in which he drove an ambulance and served as an artillery officer. His brother was killed in action during the war. (It’s possible that his anti-war poems, like *Memorial Rain*, also influenced Jane’s pacifism.)

I imagine MacLeish, a worn down, world-renowned poet finishing up a college seminar, the students politely lined up to shake his hand, and Jane standing proudly at the front of the

line. MacLeish offers a handshake and quick smile to a sweet young girl whose eyes are full of familiar admiration. Maybe he sees something of himself as a young poet for a flash, and then he is on to the next handshake.

This poem serves as a reminder to always maintain presence and humility when meeting someone who approaches in admiration, because in the end, we are all students together. The greatest artists and teachers consider themselves students until the end. Succumbing to the idea that you've "made it" and that you have nothing left to learn is death to your art. David Crosby is one such artistic "reacher" and hero of mine: at seventy-seven he is touring with new projects, writing with new people, and pushing himself. As a result he is happier and more humble than he has ever been.

"The fight is mine" is my favorite line in this poem. The "fight" – reaching beyond your comfort zone, searching for new terrain and stumbling into the unknown – is one of the most important parts of being an artist and a human being.

FIRST SNOW

I felt it coming in the thin, blue air.
I saw it in the sky, delaying there,
divinely punctual, for the secret nod
and signal for descent from some snow-god.

I should have known the clouds would waver down
slowly, until they lay upon the ground
and we could walk, feet kicking up the sky
beneath, that once was hanging white and high.

I should have been prepared for this new sight
of something moving downward in the night,
of snow-flame creeping outward on the trees,
and gathering on the roofs, along the eaves,

ticking against the window, flickering by,
or landing on the ledge to melt and die,
holding its pattern for one little space
of time against the wood like fragile lace.

I covered up the flower beds to prepare
for what I knew was near, yet unaware
I let the white drift downward in the still
cold air, to find defeat upon my sill.

1938
Smith College

FOREBODING

Across the shallows tawny shadows run
and one grey osprey circles in the sun
over the still, green sea. The moment rests
hot on the sands and on the sunwhite dunes;
the moment is perfection, with the slow
draw of the waves, the gliding of the bird
lonely and silent in the empty air.

It will not last: the osprey will wing off
into the West, the tide will turn, the sky
pile up the clouds, the great grey shadows run
across the sands and shut away the sun.

April 15, 1937
Bay Head



SUMMER NIGHT STORM

The ranting of the gods, this tumbling sky,
this wind-strong rain which pelts against my cheek,
the world re-lit by lightning, and the lie
of tall sea grass low bent against the sand.

I stand here, strangely still, with all the world
tumultuous at my feet, and yet my heart
is stronger than the roaring wind that swirls
about my body, taut against its force;
that blows my eyelids shut, that locks my lips,
lest all my spirit end its restlessness
in one wild song.

c. 1938

Bay Head

THE BRASS LOCUST

So now again the tide wanes and the air
is rich with what would rather be forgotten;
and hard on the moving, on the changing wind
the eternal locust sounds its sharp despair:

the rasp of autumn and the rasp of heat,
metal of prophecy but not of peace,
awl in the ear to make us bondsmen here,
brand in the flesh of mind; under the beat

of sun, of light rain, of the dazzling earth
we lose the visioned, the encompassing eye;
the brass of locust boring in the noon
speaks for the alien and the coming dearth:

the unwise lift their heads, remembering cold,
regathering wisdom, as the sun grows old.

July 31, 1938

Sherman, Connecticut

HOW CAN WE HEAR

How can we hear
the sound of wind
within the rain,
though wind is still?

How can we see
the look of dusk
upon the hill,
though it be day?

Rain is not rain
alone; nor day
completely day;
nor is the earth
solely of earth—
and in the mind
one finds the heart—
and in the seed
death holds a part.

July 1938
Sherman

FAITH

You who have watched the wings of darkness lifting
and heard the misted whisper of the sea,
shelter your heart with patience now, with patience,
and keep it free.

Let not the voiced destruction and the tumult
urge to a lesser prize your turning mind;
keep faith with beauty now, and in the ending
stars you may find.

March 10, 1938
Smith College
“war coming”

I WAIT NO DESTINY

I wait no destiny, I am convinced;
I stir no hands, I light no eyes from mine,
nor will my music ever shake the stars,
my words turn years to leaves before the wind.

I am the listener always, and no more;
I take my light from others, and my hands
move at another's bidding, and my voice
echoes the words I cannot claim my own.

Oh, but I share the consciousness of breath;
I have my purpose—I fulfill my days.
Somewhere within me is the invulnerable flame
which hissed and flared the day man first took fire
and stirred and woke, and knew his first desire.

c. 1938
Smith College

IT IS TOO LATE

It is too late; you made me wait too long,
held my heart ringed with fire until the spell
broke and the flames were quieted to dust,
and I need wait no longer for your horn
sounding among the hills. I would be wise
to walk forgetting in this new release,
to give my free hands to this world's demand,
God's will—or the will of righteousness on earth—
too long was I apart from the needs of men,
single-starred and waiting, deep in sleep.

But lo, I rise and blow upon the ashes,
brush them aside, and seek the farthest hill,
calling your name and asking of your passage.
I am not free—I wait upon you still.

January 24, 1939
Smith College

THE SEA IS DUSK NOW

The sea is dusk now, and the wind is dying;
landward the last night-driven gull is flying.
Give up your mind now to the destined dark
and under the wide sky arched and high with stars
seek not the daylight and the touch of sun.
Accept the strong design – unlimited
by light, by dark, by wind and slow stars creeping:
there is a deep heart which is never sleeping!

February 25, 1939

Smith College

“in the infirmary recovering from pneumonia”

Becca: Jane wrote this poem when she was twenty-two, recovering from pneumonia in the infirmary at Smith College. Pneumonia was a big deal at the time, still the leading infectious cause of death in the United States throughout the 1930s.

I imagine Jane's return to writing after a period of fevers, painful coughs, and fatigue. The opening lines of the poem, "The sea is dusk now, and the wind is dying: / landward the last night-driven gull is flying," suggest the calm just after a heavy storm has passed. In this moment of gathering darkness Jane is surrendering to the night, and trusting that she will greet the morning. The poem's ending is deeply spiritual, accepting and embracing the faith that the "strong design" – destiny, or God's will – is greater than the coming night, and ultimately "unlimited by light, by dark, by wind and slow stars creeping."

"The destined dark": that phrase reminds me of the "necessary evil" from Jane's poem that begins "There are things to be remembered" (which I set to music in my song "105"). Both of these lines represent things we fear that, once accepted, bring us strength and meaning.

Within that "destined dark" is the heart that never sleeps. Maybe that "deep heart" is the sea of creative energies beneath the "wide sky arched and high with stars." Maybe the "deep heart which is never sleeping" is God, or the spirit deep within the artist.

INTO THE DARK WHICH IS NOT DARK

Into the dark which is not dark
but only the light we cannot see,
reluctantly I let you go.

What was your source – children of years?
Surely I cannot claim your birth;
for when I found you, even then
you were not strangers to the earth.

I was the privileged, to disclose
briefly, a portion of your days.
Now you are free – but not complete;
for none of us is this the end.
Somewhere the valley holds the mist,
the four fields shimmer in the haze,
the man of patience and the child
and the sea-eyed girl draw deep their breath
and live, and have no fear of death.

April 1939
Smith College

Becca: When I first read this poem, I thought Jane was mourning the loss of a child, but after reading more about Jane's life, I discovered that Jane is addressing characters from her narrative poem *Strange Dominion*.

I often liken the relationship of an artist to her creations to that of a mother to her child. This dynamic rings true for me especially when making a record:

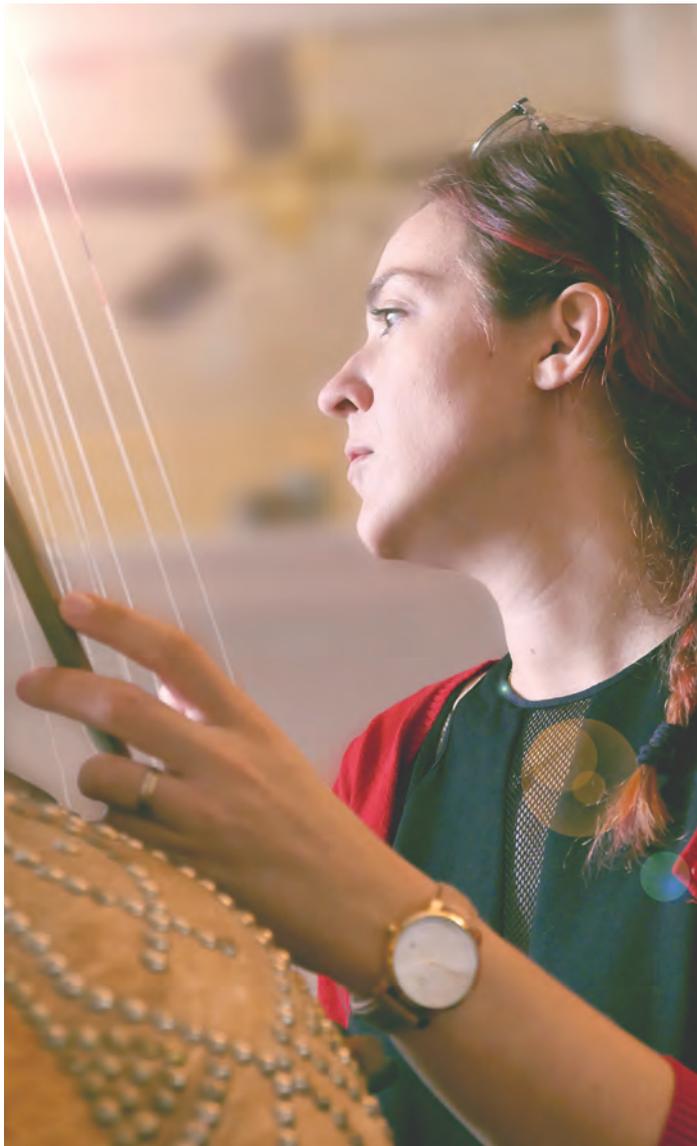
1. The writing period: deeply personal and internal, a long introspective phase like a pregnancy, intimately considering every word and every note to build each song perfectly.
2. The recording period: exhausting, terrifying, exciting, and surprising (not unlike raising a tiny human). Hearing sounds that only ever lived inside the mind finally spring to life! Hearing melodies rise up to their potential and interact with other sounds you never imagined. Even with a clear plan, the recording process never goes as expected. This phase is often collaborative, and that transition to sharing – with a producer, engineers, and other musicians – can be scary. What if the collaborators take the songs too far away from your original vision? Even if they do miss the mark, the process of loosening your grip allows for growth and strengthens the vision.
3. The post-production period: this phase is a lot of organizing and planning. I like to be very involved in the editing and mixing process because I want to know everything

that goes into the soup, and also because it helps me say goodbye. I often drag my feet a little at this point, fixating on tiny last-minute changes rather than realizing it's time to set it free.

4. The album release: The record is finished, all the arrangements have been made, and there's this surreal moment when you have to let go of the thing that has been so close to you for so long, consuming all your time and energy, like sending your kindergartener off for the first day of school.

In this poem, I think Jane is moving through this vulnerable moment of setting her creation free. Deciding that your creation is complete means it's no longer in your control. That can be unsettling, but if you want your hard work to live on beyond yourself, you have to share it. Only then is it free to move through others, to grow, inspire, and live a life of its own.

I'm touched by the gratefulness with which Jane bids farewell to her muses, implying that she was a mere vessel fortunate enough to "disclose briefly, a portion of [their] days." Jane asks about their "source," a question many great artists have pondered, implying that her art doesn't come from her, it comes from beyond. "Surely I cannot claim your birth; / for when I found you, even then / you were not strangers to the earth." This reminds me again of the vast sea of creativity artists draw from. Our creations exist there eternally, "and have no fear of death." At our best, we are out of the way, making room for the "light we cannot see" to pour in, paving the way for the muse, ancient and eternal, to stop in for a moment and move through us.



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