

All Beauty Is A Gift

The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting

SHAKESPEARE, Sonnet 87

MANY OF THE MOST LUMINOUS GIFTS OF OUR LIVES ARRIVE AS COMPLETE SURPRISES. A gift is the most beautiful of intrusions. It arrives undeserved and unexpected. It comes ashore in our hearts carefully formed to fit exactly the shape of a hunger we might not even know we had. The gift comes with no price tag, no demand that puts us under an obligation. Every gift has an inner lamp that casts a new brightness over an undiscovered field of the heart. In this light we discover and bring to birth something new within us. Regardless of how carefully we examine the path of its arrival, the eyes of our mind can never unveil the true source of the gift. The gift keeps its reason secret. Some unexpected path opened in the interim world and the gift was already on its way towards us.

Sometimes it is difficult to know when you are getting a gift. Its arrival is often a shock; at the beginning it might seem to be the furthest thing from a gift that you could imagine. Looking from now, we cannot glimpse the shape of our destiny; its subtle weave only comes to light in retrospect. There is so much about ourselves that we do not know. After Freud's descriptions of the subconscious, we tend to imagine that the subconscious holds all kinds of misshapen forms. We forget that the darkness of the unknown within us is also a fecund soil urgent with seeds of new possibility. The beauty of the gift is the secret way it awakens us to growth. Without alerting our anxiety or forcing confrontation, the gift has placed us on the path of change almost before we realize it. And much of the change in our lives happens through struggle and pain. We are confronted with an unattractive direction that we have to take. For weeks or months, we have to travel through limbo; the comfort and security of our familiar belongings lies far behind us. Where we will belong next has not yet become clear. The days become a struggle of endurance. Yet when the light and the ease return, we recognize the change that has been achieved. The gift bequeaths change in a completely different way. Quietly it undoes the knots of false netting that had us entangled and before we have time to realize what has happened, we find ourselves released into a new fluency. Like a parent to the soul, the gift carries us carefully over torn ground until our feet stand free in a serene place where we can recognize that we have been blessed.

Every life is blessed with a different sequence of gifts. Often the gift arrives secretly, and you only find it later. Or perhaps you are looking back over time as you would look through an old drawer and you come upon something that you had put away ages ago. You rediscover the gift and enter again into its wonder. This is one of the lovely capacities of memory: the reawakening of new blessing through the rediscovery of old gifts in forgotten corners. It is this prospect that animates faith.

[Source of the above is unknown]

Sonnet 87

Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate.
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;

My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting,
And for that riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing,
Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgment making.
 Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter:
 In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

Modern meaning

Goodbye; you're too valuable for me to hold onto, and you probably know exactly what you're worth. Your high value gives you the right to leave me; you have severed the ties that bind me to you. For what hold do I have over you except the hold that you choose to give me, and how do I deserve such a treasure? There's nothing in me to justify such a beautiful gift, so my right to possess you is reverting back to you. When you gave yourself to me, you didn't know your own worth, or else you were mistaken about me, the person you gave yourself to. So the great gift you gave me, being based on a false estimate, goes back to you now that you're able to make a better judgment. Thus, the time in which I had you was like a flattering dream; while I was asleep, I thought I was a king, but when I woke up, I found that was not the case.

Ode to a Grecian Urn – Keats

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When old age shall this generation waste,

 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe

Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,

 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all

 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Keats