

William Stafford Poetry
from An Oregon Message: Poems by William Stafford
Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987

Looking for Gold

A flavor like wild honey begins
when you cross the river. On a sandbar
sunlight stretches out its limbs, or is it
a sycamore, so brazen, so clean and bold?
You forget about gold. You stare—and a flavor
is rising all the time from the trees.
Back from the river, over by a thick
forest, you feel the tide of wild honey
flooding your plans, flooding the hours
till they waver forward looking back. They can't
return: that river divides more than
two sides of your life. The only way
is farther, breathing that country, becoming
wise in its flavor, a native of the sun.

Chicory

Till the great darkness gathers them in
some time in the quiet after us
they have a secret life of their own
down there near the ground, and they will go on
like those things you don't say
when someone interrupts and you
told them once, so you stop. In that long
interval those blue flowers begin to report.

Every night under my pillow the earth ticks
while somewhere in the distant country tomorrow
wanders looking for me, and every morning
I go out and pat the ground again. Already
that comet with destiny in it has come by
a few times, but the years are still friendly.

Certain blue flowers hold on, hold on.

Over the North Jetty

Geese and brant, their wingbeat
steady—it's a long flight, Alaska—
bank their approach and then curve
upwind for landing. They live where storms
are so usual they are almost fair weather.

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And we lean in that permanent gale,
watching those cold flocks depend on their wings
as they veer out of the north. In the last flight
one laggard pulls farther downwind
and peels off to disappear alone in the storm.

If you follow an individual away like that
a part of your life is lost forever,
beating somewhere in the darkness, and belonging
only to storms that haunt around the world
on that risky path just over the wave.

Starting with Little Things

Love the earth like a mole,
fur-near. Nearsighted,
hold close the clods,
their fine-print headlines.
Pat them with soft hands—
But spades, but pink and loving: they
break rock, nudge giants aside,
affable plow.
Fields are to touch:
each day nuzzle your way.

Tomorrow the world.

Seasons in the Country

1.

When we unfasten the cabin door in
the spring, an echo of our hammering
scares the blue jays, and all our section
of the country turns relevant for a while.

2.

Summer days have been falling thousands
of years; they land quietly in the woods
at dawn and come forward with an embrace
like light on old faces in the family album.

3.

Writing their history in the sky, the last
of the summer birds go away. We hear

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empty woods bravely surround our house
in open ranks, for autumn census, unafraid.

4.

The storm that closes all the passes
just is—it doesn't come. It is as quiet
as in the story when the hunted world
wrestled with death in the hidden cave
and nobody ever found out who won.

Walking with Your Eyes Shut

Your ears receive a platter of sound
heaped where you are, in the center, verging
off at far edges that move as you pass,
like a great hoopskirt of listening through the world.
A brick wall compresses your right ear's horizon
on that side, but the whole sound sky balloons
again all around. A cardinal's whistle
soars up and arcs down behind you. A blue jay
unrolls its part of the day, a long streamer over you,
and then little discs receding smaller and
smaller into the infinity that lives
in the middle of the woods beyond. You carry
this dome all the time. Today you know it,
a great rich room, a musical sky.