

Rainer Maria Rilke Poetry
from *Book of Hours* by Rainer Maria Rilke
Riverhead Books 1997

Book of Hours, II, 16

How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the strongest thing
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.
Each thing—
each stone, blossom, child—
is held in place.
Only we, in our arrogance,
push out beyond what we belong to
for some empty freedom.
If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.
Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.
So, like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart;
they have never left him.
This is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.

Early Spring

Harshness vanished. A sudden softness
has replaced the meadows' wintry grey.
Little rivulets of water changed
their singing accents. Tendernesses,

hesitantly, reach toward the earth
from space, and country lanes are showing
these unexpected subtle risings
that find expression in the empty trees.

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The Apple Orchard

Come let us watch the sun go down
and walk in twilight through the orchard's green.
Does it not seem as if we had for long
collected, saved and harbored within us
old memories? To find releases and seek
new hopes, remembering half-forgotten joys,
mingled with darkness coming from within,
as we randomly voice our thoughts aloud
wandering beneath these harvest-laden trees
reminiscent of Durer woodcuts, branches
which, bent under the fully ripened fruit,
wait patiently, trying to outlast, to
serve another season's hundred days of toil,
straining, uncomplaining, by not breaking
but succeeding, even though the burden
should at times seem almost past endurance.
Not to falter! Not to be found wanting!

Thus must it be, when willingly you strive
throughout a long and uncomplaining life,
committed to one goal: to give yourself!
And silently to grow and to bear fruit.