

CARRIE NEWCOMER

THE GEOGRAPHY OF LIGHT

There is a Tree

I dreamt that the spirit of God passed by close enough to fog the window. I've come to believe that mystery is as near as my front porch. There is a song at the center of all things.

Last night I dreamt you very near
Though the night was dark beyond the glass.
I knew you'd left before I woke
But you'd fogged the window when you passed.
The air was still and smelled like rain,
Though I'd never known so dry a spell.
And what I heard there in the dark,
Are the secrets I will never tell.

Chorus: There is a tree beyond the world.
In it's ancient roots a song is curled.
I'm the fool whose life's been spent.
Between what's said and what is meant.

I didn't mean what went so wrong.
Some things I wish I didn't know.
I've always lived inside my head,
And often utterly alone.

I'll be a pillow for your head.
You can make me promises you can't keep.
And I'll believe each word you've said.
And hum to you while you sleep.

Chorus

You took me by my shaking hand,
You Laughed at me and closed the door,
And you put your hands to my waist,
And waltzed me 'round the kitchen floor.

Chorus

So I will wander without fail,
In circles that grow ever wide.
The sky expands and then exhales,
With an ache that never subsides.

Chorus

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The Clean Edge of Change

This song began as a poem I wrote while traveling. I had been reading a book called "Let Your Life Speak" by Parker J. Palmer. Many of his ideas about change and finding wholeness on the other side of a difficult time were present in the poem and the song. Sometimes the only way out is through.

First there is the folding in,
To gather light and dark to you.
The journey down so far that it,
Has nowhere else to go but through.
I thought if I tried hard enough,
With endless motion like a bribe,
As if by this the will of God,
Could be bent to my version of right.

Chorus: What happens next is nearly weightless,
The opening where we stand breathless,
On the clean edge of change.

She cannot live beneath my wings,
No more with he see seventy.
How many mornings did I wake,
And wished that it'd be you I'd see.

Chorus

Bridge: And who am I, who makes this sound,
Who rode the shadow all the way down?
To the Clean Edge of Change

In the clear space of knowing that
There's as many names for dark as for light,
I am choosing mostly now to speak,
The ones that get me through the night.
But always, with humility,
With a worn now but a grateful heart.
Having sang so recently,
Full-throated In the dark.

Chorus

First there is the folding in,
To gather light and dark to you,
The journey down so far that it,
Has nowhere else to go but through.
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A Map of Shadows

I am fascinated by the liminal places. This song originated as an essay describing an experience of watching the night become morning.

It's four in the morning, the last dregs of the evening.
I sit and rock on the front porch swing,
'Til the morning sky starts bleeding.
It's cool and it's quiet, bats and owls lay down beside it.
Mourning doves breathe a sigh, as the shadow passes by.

Chorus: Well well well - it's so hard to tell .
There's a line between light and dark,
Between heaven and hell.
Well well well - it's not easy to see.
What's out there on my left or right,
Or what's right in front of me.

There is magic in the dawning, a black and white
Esher drawing.
Night pivots on its axis and turns into day.
Devils close down shop and move along,
With angels wink and slide familiar palms,
Say, "Good night good luck 'til the day comes
'round
And out on the other side."

Chorus:
It's beyond my understanding,
So much depends on where you're standing,
Yet I hold it up into the light, to take a better look.
I've been plenty wrong before,
Choose the tiger behind the door,
But it always seems to make more sense
In the pale morning air.

Chorus

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Two Toasts

This song was written from a poem by Parker J. Palmer. We had a wonderful time working on the song together and while creating an evening of poetry, essay and song. Because this song speaks to the mysterious and overlapping places between sound and silence, I seemed natural to include it on this collection.

Praise be that this thin mark, this sound
Can form the Word that takes on flesh
To enter where no flesh can go
To fill each other's emptiness.

To Words and How They Live Between Us...
To Us and How We Live Between the Worth...
And in between the sound of words
I hear your silent, sounding soul
Where One abides in solitude
Who keeps us one when speech shall go

To Words and How They Live Between Us...
To Us and How We Live Between the Words...

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Music, BMI Bug Publishing & Parker J. Palmer



Geodes

My home in Southern Indiana is a rolling green land abundant in limestone and the mysterious rocks called geodes. Geodes are so copious in this part of the state that we pile them in our gardens and think of them as commonplace. I am fascinated with these unassuming brown and grey stones that contain inside them a sparkling center of quartz crystals. They are surprising beautiful and a wonderful metaphor. They remind me to look deeper, because often within what may appear quite ordinary is a core of beauty and mystery. Sometimes I will take visiting friends on muddy walks along the hills and hollows of my home pointing out the creek beds full of geodes. Often they confess that if I hadn't pointed out these unadorned stones their presence would have been missed entirely. But once familiar with the signature lumpy look of geodes these friends begin to see the stones everywhere. This is how paying attention works. At first I have to look quite deliberately to find the sparkling center of things, but eventually I begin to notice the patterns and come to expect the unexpected.

You can't always tell one from another.
And it's best not to judge a book by its tattered cover.
I have found when I tried or looked deeper inside.
What appears unadorned might be wondrously formed.
You can't always tell but sometimes you just know.

Around here we throw geodes in our gardens.
They're as common as the rain or corn silk in July.
Unpretentious browns and grays, the stain of Indiana clay,
They're what's left of shallow seas glacial rock and mystery,
And inside there shines a secret bright as promise,

All these things that we call familiar,
Are just miracles clothed in the common place.
You'll see it if you try in the next stranger's eyes,
God walks around in muddy boots,
Sometimes rags and that's the truth.
You can't always tell, but sometimes you just know.

Some say geodes were made from pockets of tears,
Trapped away in small places for years upon years.
Pressed down and transformed,
Until the true self was born,
And the whole world moved on
Like the last notes of a song,
A love letter sent without return address.

You can't always tell one from another.
And it's best not to judge a book by its tattered cover
Now I don't open them to see
Folks 'round here just like me,
We have come to believe
There's hidden good in common things.
You can't always tell but sometimes you just know.
You can't always tell but sometimes you just know.

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Where You Been

I come to expect holiness in unexpected places, and that it is best not to limit where and within whom we look for the Sacred. A trlye compassionate and radical love has always been counter culture. Hope has always been an audacious act of belief in the possibility for something better. As Jim Wallis and others have stated, "We are the prophets we've been waiting for."

He was driving in to Chicago in a borrowed El Camino,
On a hazeless day in springtime I think it was the Cinco De Mayo.
Maybe it was St Paddy's Or the Gay Pride parade,
But I've never seen nobody light up the street that way.

Chorus: Brother/ Sister where you been?
Hold on if you can.
Just do your best then
Say, "Amen."

Called in sick for the weekend, drinking St Paulies in Wisconsin.
I'd been fishing with my buddies most of Sunday afternoon.
There beneath the halo of the Old Milwaukee sign,
He said, There's big ones in the shallows I see them all the time.

Chorus

I stopped in the Seven-Eleven, I was buying an Aquafina.
He was wearing knock-off sneakers
I was nursing a hangover.
He said, "You're worth a lot more baby
Than you've ever dared to dream of."
Like he knew the secret sketchy places
I'd been looking for love

Chorus

A tall skinny guy with dread locks
Said they're giving' out free bagels & lox.
So I took the kids and all my plastic bags
Snd I walked the seven blocks.
There were joggers and commuters,
Skate board kids and Goths.
There were drunks and dogs and meter maids
In that downtown vacant lot.

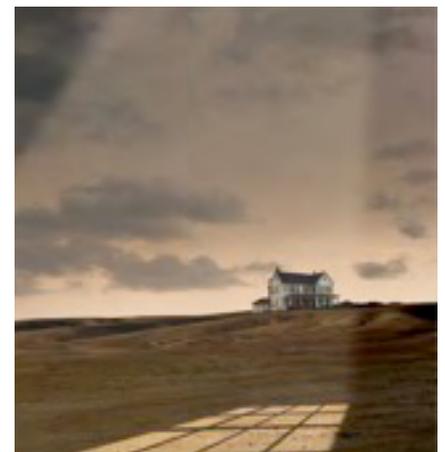
He said, "The universe is unfolding
And the center still is holding,
There's enough if we just share it,
Sow ya'll don't forget to pass the basket.
Blessed are all the good hearted,
The poets and the dreamers,
And all us crazy holy hungry ones,
Who still believe in something better."

Chorus

I saw Jesus on talking shop, with Buddha at the Starbucks,
I saw Gia and Ganesh, doin' double Dutch in the park,
And Mohammad was throwing popcorn
To the pigeons and the sparrows.
And all us crazy holy hungry ones
Still believe in something better,

Chorus

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Biscuits and Butter

Inspired by a short story in the book Wilderness Plots by Scott Russell Sanders. This song and story is about grief and how often women and children bear the price for unchecked ambition and acquisition.

Daniel said, "The traveling's risky
But the money is awful good.
When I get back we can finally,
Get ahead sure we could."

He left the fifth of December
Took our oldest boy Ben.
I packed them biscuits and butter,
And never saw them again.

Chorus How can I keep on walking,
God Almighty tells me this.
One foot in front of the other,
One foot in front of the next.

I sent my second oldest baby
Out to find his next of kin.
They found the wagon in the springtime
Up on Killbuck River edge.

He was quieter than his brother,
And his brother's his closest friend.
I packed him biscuits and butter,
And never saw him again.

Chorus

They found the bones of our team of oxen,
The shirt I'd sewn with my own hands.
They found the basket I'd pack the biscuits,
But not a trace of my men.

I think I'll go down to the river.
I think I'll take up throwing stones.
I think I'll cry until I'm finished.
And I learn to sleep alone.

Chorus

I think I'll go down to the river.
I think I'll take up throwing stones.
I'll never make another biscuit.

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A Mean Kind of Justice

"An eye for an eye and we all go blind." –Gandhi

There's a ring around the moon,
There's a chill in the air.
There's a mean kind of justice,
Coming down, coming down.
Angels wring their hands
They put ashes on their heads.
There's a mean kind of justice coming down.

It don't ever stop a thing,
An eye for eye, tic for tat.
And I've never seen nobody
Truly satisfied like that.
It just rolls around the head
Eating holes in your heart.
There's a mean kind of justice coming down.

There is a goodness on this earth
That will not die, will not die.
It bears all, it's seen it all,
And still it survives.
I know that we have failed,
But I've seen that we can fly.
There's goodness on this earth
That will not die.

Oh no, forgiveness never sleeps.
But the devil wants its due
and says "Human life is cheap."
When we give up any hope
We could ever change the past,
Then at last. . .

There's a ring around the moon,
There's a chill on the breeze.
There's somebody with their hands clasped,
Down on their knees.
Angels hold their breath
For what might set them free.
There's a mean kind of justice coming down.

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Leaves Don't Drop, They Just Let Go

*I wrote this song with my friend Michael Mains.
All of life is letting go.*

The truth I knew when I was eight.
My dad swam the length of Spirit Lake.
It must have been a million miles.
This I knew was true.
My mother sang while hangin' clothes.
Her notes weren't perfect heaven knows.
But heaven opened anyway.
This I knew was true.

Chorus Leaves don't drop they just let go,
And make a place for seeds to grow.
Every season brings a change,
A seed is what a tree contains,
To die and live is life's refrain.

I left her with some groceries,
Said, "Check the oil and call me please."
She said " Hey, ma I'll be just fine."
This I knew was true.

Chorus

I've traveled through my history,
From certainty to mystery.
God speaks in rhyme in paradox.
This I know is true.
And finally when life is through,
I'm what I am not just what I do.
It comes down to you and your next breath,
And this I know is true.

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You'd Think By Now

*There is a crack in everything, That's how the light
gets in. ~Leonard Cohen*

It isn't fair, it isn't right.
I've gone over and over the scenes in my head,
Lay here awake half of the night.
It isn't good, and I can't let go.
I've been something or someone I hurt,
In some other life, somewhere long ago.

Chorus I don't know how
I started down this tailspin.
Why one more time
I just did not see it coming.
And you'd think by now
I'd have figured out the pattern.

I shook my fists
I left too soon.
The soft wounded animal inside of me
Stood up on it's hind legs and howled at the moon.
Anger rises in a violet storm,
And when I am wisest
I lay down beside it
And hum in it's ear
Until it gets quiet.

Chorus

It isn't fair, it isn't right.
I've wished on a million or billion bright stars,
Prayed like the devil with all of my might.
And somebody said, "What's really true.
All of this stuff is different I know,
But what is in common
Has always been you."

Chorus

I'm starting to see
And the heavens are starry.
And if I'm not too proud
I'll learn to say I'm sorry.
And you'd think by now
I'd have figured out the pattern.

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Lazarus

The character of Lazarus has always intrigued me. We are born out of the mystery and return into the mystery. While we walk this world, we live in the overlapping space between.

Now that he's gone
Now the world has moved on
Since he called my name,
Nothing's the same.
As my sister cried
He said, "Lazarus rise."
To love and anoint
Or just prove a point.

Chorus I'm the one that he saved
I'm the one that he raised,
From the dark quiet sleep
From the peace of the grave.
I'm the one who owes much
But that no one will touch.
Mothers see me and cry
Dogs bare teeth as I walk by.

I don't see a veil between heaven and hell.
The truth is there's nothing
But a warm light and singing.
But here in-between
A voice haunts my dreams.
Martha does what she can
But won't look at my hands.

Chorus

I love the cool mornings
I love a hot meal,
The pulse of the street,
Night jasmine and clean sheets.
I can't sleep or rest
I feel lost and hard pressed.
I wander these rooms,
Still looking for you.

Chorus

I ought to be grateful
To drink from the grail
But I don't belong
Either side of this veil.
I look down at my hands
That are clasped in my lap.
When he left this world
I thought he'd take me back.
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Throw me a Line

I was reading a book by James Hollis, a Jungian author. I was taken by his characterization of our journey into adulthood and beyond not as a "crisis" but rather as a "passage."

Why do I worry so much?
It can't add a day or year.
It usually comes down
To a matter of love or fear.
I really don't know,
And I can't tell you why.
One sparrow falls to the ground,
And another one flies.

Chorus Could you throw me a line?
Could you take me in?
The world's turning faster
Than it ever has been.
And what used to be sure,
Up and walked out the door.
And the old ways I knew,
Just don't work anymore.

Some days I'm a bird.
Some days I'm a song.
Some days I'm a storm.
Sometimes I'm just plain wrong.
But there is a still quiet voice
And it sounds a little like mine,
Saying, "You're right where you should be
It's just going to take time."

Chorus

Bridge When's it all breaks down,
When they're nothing to lose.
When there's no more to say,
And there is nothing to prove.

Oh yes bring it on,
All things living in you.
You're not just what happened,
You can be something new.
But what you leave to the shadows,
What stays in the dark,
Will grieve you and seize you
And cripple your heart.

Chorus

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Don't Push Send

This is a story a very sad tale,
Of intrigue and romance and electronic mail
A dangerous form of information,
And the perils of instant gratification.
How many times did I hit my Mac
Want to crawl inside and take the whole thing
back?
But its no use say it again and again
Don't push send.

Carol wrote about her job's frustrations
What drove her crazy with aggravation.
A list of every person's faults,
Precise and pithy, wry insults.
She sent it off to her best friend,
But saw with horror as she pushed send.
She hit the keys and began to roar,
She'd copied the entire office floor.

Chorus: Don't push send
Don't push send
There are things that you can never quite amend.
I tell myself again and again,
Don't push send.

Katherine wrote a note to her husband Ben,
Using their pet names and vowing devotion.
She said "Meet me at home in a little while,
I'll be there waiting, wearing nothing but a smile."
But then she got her answer from his great
granddad Lee.
Saying, "I don't think that this was meant for me.
It was nice, but I'll forward it to my great
grandson,
It's been years since anybody called me sugar
buns."

Chorus

The day was tough
The week had really been something.
Jane got a message that pushed her buttons.
She shot back as if her words were guns,
Capitalizing every single one.
She should have waited, she should know
E-mail doesn't mix with merlot.
She had to write back as you could guess,
Plead e-mail recklessness and PMS.

Bridge Just stop and think
When I'm on the brink
Walk away from my computer

'Cause you can guess, I will regret
And feel like such a loser.

Chorus

After opposing counsel had acted like jerks,
Joe got a letter from his partner at work.
He meant to make a changes, cut and paste,
But sent it off in his efficient haste.
He tried to delete, he tried to get back the note.
But the letter had flown and that was all she wrote.
The message was polite with professional class.
But the subject line still said "what a ass."

Chorus

