



WATCH HOW WE GROW

A Book of Poems

ERICKA CLAY

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:11-12)

If Only

What is the oil
the virgins
didn't put
in their lamps
as the other
ones did?
Your good Word,
friendship—
the light
that would have
flickered at their feet.
But
the "could
have been"
comes only
when you
remember
the things
that matter
most.
How horrid
to drown
in your own
"if only."

When I See Your Face

I see little scraps of me,
The one I used to hate,
but always go looking for,
like maybe I'll find her
in your photo, hidden
behind forehead
and cheeks,
crouching down
And scared of everyone
else, but mostly me.

And I get that.
I was scared of me, too
for a long, long time,
wondering when I'd
give in, give up, give over,
Give anything not to be
me anymore.

And if you want to know
Why I talk so much about
(and to) Jesus,
Biting my tongue hard
sometimes until I taste the
blood of everything I
did that He died for,
It's because I just couldn't
do it myself.

No amount of Plath
or Sexton or Camus
or Beckett taught me
to live, only to die,

But frankly, I was pretty
damn good doing that
on my own.

It's only Jesus, I want to tell
you and the world, and
that guy that rides that kid-sized
dirt bike down our street,
His face so serious, and making
me laugh because that's all of us,
isn't it? Pretending we haven't
turned our Garden into utter
absurdity,
like an overgrown man
struggling for the last few
strands of his pride,
lost in the weeds.

I'm sorry.

That's all I really want to say,
and that I love you.

And that, no, I've never
been good enough,
never will be,

But He is.

And really,
none of us
are as scary
as we think.

A Little Secret

I want it again
but smaller this time
burning little ball
of fire You set
long before
I was.
And in that heat,
A little secret,
my guarded heart
(for once)
not leaking
like a sieve
and set to
set me free.
How much
more powerful
Keeping in all
You've taught
me, offering
it only to
the unseeing
eyes meant
to open.
And piling
up the rest,
like paper,
balled up
and thrown
in to keep me
ablaze.

Hearts of Stone

Built up like skin,
an organic matrix
covering muscle
and bone, except
the muscle is gone
and the bone
is the metal
shifting gears,
making us walk
and talk and become
an acceptable form
for everyone we
hope to deceive.
But deep down
we can hear
grinding, surface
against surface,
dry and wearing
against the inner
frame of everything
we are.
And so what is this
life if not the final
test to see
if we can trust
You, not only
with our hearts,
but this false

self, the crushed
alloy, burned steel,
dust to the touch—
yearning for You
to heal and mend
and replace these
hearts of stone,
not always knowing
how detrimental
stone can be
in the first place?

Waves in My Hand

I want to gather
waves in my hand
to watch them wash
away,
and maybe
that's what
we all crave—
to hold on
to the fleeting
nature
of ourselves
even as Your
gravity gently
stirs us
to and fro.

Watch How We Grow

Green, my garden
and growing,
and You, the water,
They, the plants,
me the seeds—
or at least the words
I write for them
That you wire
within my soul
each evening,
the day now
broken
and scattered
within the dark
soil of my mind—
You, the water,
my thoughts,
the plants,
Your Word,
the seeds,
And watch
how we
grow.

The One Who Speaks

Did I ever tell you of the time I spoke
out loud and in quiet
And how He heard all of me
As if I were
the noise
itself?
And what I
heard back–
A compilation
of stark
observations,
strong scents,
and the beautiful
work of Him
working through
those around me,
Some for Him,
some not,
And does it
matter
When the One
who speaks
to you
Is the one
who handcrafted
speaking–
pipes and timbrels
curated and placed
inside everyone
He's ever

wanted to talk
to?

Dirt and Spit

How do you know me?

A stupid question
mouthing by fools.

How can the Creator
not know the dirt
and spit
and tears
and dust
it takes
to make
a human
soul?

Simple Tree

Cut off my right
hand
and stupid
mouth
and wrong
thinking
and then
here I am,
simple
tree,
budded,
ready to
bloom,
no longer
me,
But the
me
You've
always
loved
and
known.

A Lone Little Wisp

I'm depleted,
dehydrated,
de-lusional,
maybe,
but too
much rooted
in reality
for that
to be the
truth.

This whole
World
is the Garden
growing,
the forces
hacking,
the detritus
raining,
And who am
I to look
to You
but a lone
little wisp
of grass,
blade
thrust
and waving,
white flagging
all I can't
control?

Sharpened and Ready

When you're little
you dream
about the boy
you'll marry,
and the babies
you'll have,
and the world
you'll create,
never realizing
it's created for you,
His Hand molding
every little detail,
sharpened and ready
to cut out what's dead,
does not grow,
and what a surprise
it all is when you
were the type
to never even
dream about
the boy
or the babies
or the life
You might
have when
it was a task
just to breathe
through the
life you did.

Eemptied Root

How much
more dirt
and tears
must you
take and dry
until I'm
nothing
but a bent
rod,
a strapped
sapling,
a nothing
more
than
an emptied
root
cowering
away from
what
the world
desires
to feed me?

Like Water

What if weeping
and wailing
were like water,
mouth open
to let go
or let in.
And can
you tell
me what
I'm praying
for,
If it's much
like drowning
in the thoughts
I can't conquer,
or maybe
more like
Your love
despite
the lack
of my own?

Strip Me Bare

The "why"

Is the worst
part because
it's not meant
to be a part
of this at all.

It just "is,"
an okay
thing if I
Can trust
Your hand,
Your tools,
Your desire
to dig and cut
and strip
me bare
so that core
seed can
break me
through
and remind
me, there's
no "why"
for me.
Just "is."

Good Soil

Perseverance
for the little
plant that
smiles in the sun,
shrinks in the snow,
its duplicitous
little heart
bent on ripping
him away
from the Good
Soil that nourishes
his soul,
nourishes his roots,
and keeps him
deeply within
the only terrain
not made
to falter.

A Little Blemish

Cold,
Like a rose
in white
snow,
petals blankly
frank
against
what's smooth,
what's pure,
a little blemish
ruining
the face
of what should
have been,
and yet?
You let
me grow.

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