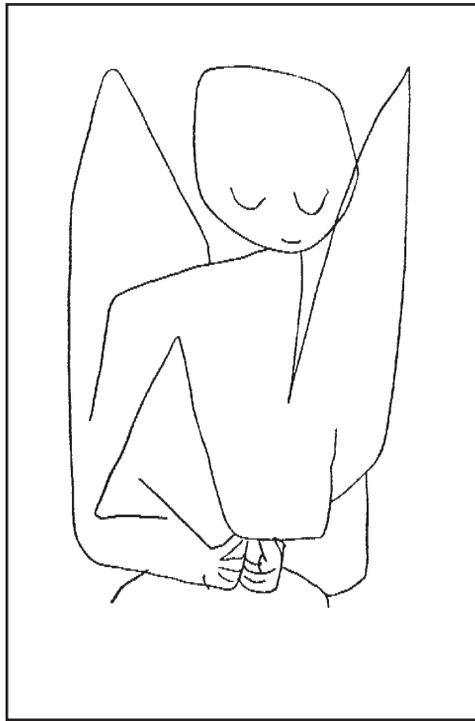


# A Small Book on Time



*Selected from the Pages of  
Poetry East  
Edited by Richard Jones*

# T I M E

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“Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,  
so do our minutes hasten to their end.”

-William Shakespeare

## I Stand Here Shredding Documents

I stand here shredding documents.  
I think of my mother and her basket  
of ironing, the baskets of clothes,  
both clean and dirty, the constants  
of laundry and housekeeping.

I yearned for a different set of baskets,  
an inbox and an outbox,  
clothes that need professional attention  
from dry cleaners and a house  
so uninhabited  
that it didn't get dirty.

Now I have become my father,  
a woman of file cabinets  
and endless meetings of infinite boredom.  
I stand at the shredder,  
my daily friend, and think of work  
that is never finished.

## I Want to Go Where Time Is Kept

I want to go where time is kept—  
That room lacking a door but locked,  
Its walls ice-bright with starfields mapped.  
Here, lives re-constellate to watch  
Escapements spring and catch, and gears  
Which grind out notch by jeweled notch  
Our wrecked seconds, minutes, and years.  
If I could ever find this box  
I would recalibrate its stars  
That burn; they smelt the wands that sweep  
The readouts and dials in lightful arcs.  
I'd charm those secondhands to sleep—  
I'd take and cool them in my mouth  
And chew—so slow!—with silver teeth.

## Finding It

One day I picked up a book I'd been reading  
to find that it had changed. The cover  
was the same, the words were the same—  
but the book I had loved yesterday  
wasn't in there anymore. Somehow  
it had escaped, made a break for it,  
and run off somewhere. Like a fool  
I kept reading, but it was no use.  
Whatever had inspired me was gone.

But a few days later  
I found the book I was looking for—  
found it beside the lake, in the sound  
of a few leaves blown by the wind.  
Though now by *book* I meant something else:  
a branch, a stone, a wind-scattered cloud.  
Even a crushed beer can beneath a bridge,  
even an abandoned factory on a hill.  
The flames in my head leapt higher and higher.

## Something Good

Lost in cirrus clouds, and the sun dying  
behind the spruce and birch in the backyard

of my parent's house. Half a world away,  
there is a girl across the Atlantic who knows

my name, who knows what I look like naked,  
and still believes she can love me, and that's

something small, or a testament to her  
bad eyesight, but still, it's something.

It's best to learn young that the love  
you can't get over, you must dig a tunnel

and burrow your way under. Life isn't worth  
living without longing, or something to

die for. Not heaven, but something you  
can touch. Make your body immovable—

a mountain, a tiger, and if you get to where  
you wanted, look back and squint at what

you were leaving, and try and tell me  
there's not something familiar moving

in you that knows its way around your heart,  
something good, a flower in the sun after rain.

## After Sixty

*And let us hear no sound of human strife*

—Edna St. Vincent Millay

If there be a wife to hum the morning light  
that dazzles the drapes as she lifts window shade  
and smiles at you still awash in crumpled sheets  
and asks not about the job lost, the final  
paycheck, but sings her dreams alive, colors  
and clouds swirling in voice, mountain smell  
and sea breezes sweet as mint, as sex  
gentled after sixty—touch as vital  
as lips, the breath heaving as the bodies heave,  
then rest, quieting themselves in tangled arms,  
so sleep unweaves taut sinews and twisted hours,  
until you hear morning singing a nymph-like  
melody it would be foolish to decline. Foolish.

## Moral Compass

My father found  
his moral compass  
at 65,  
handed it over to me  
one Saturday at breakfast,  
my sons sitting on booster seats  
eating their pancakes.

I dangled the compass  
before their small sticky faces  
teasing them as my father teased me,  
camaraderie spreading over our gathering  
like syrup, a funny kid's joke.

*Hey, let them hold the compass,  
my father instructed.  
Don't make me wait  
30 years to watch them  
see how it works.*

## Talking Over My Bog Problem with the Nurseryman

*This'un, you see, and he leads me  
to the hothouse of impatiens  
and fuchsia. A cloud of blue jasmine  
cushions the door, fibrous roots spiraling  
through a pile of humus. See,  
this 'un wants dry feet, but the ground here's  
swampy. So you set it 'bove ground in one of them  
peat pots, and the roots reach through  
to what they can take.*

*You let the plant be, see,  
and it finds its way.*

## Contributors

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“I Stand Here Shredding Documents”

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“I Want to Go Where Time Is Kept”

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“Finding It”

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“Something Good”

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“After Sixty”

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“Moral Compass”

Karen Holmberg  
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with the Nurseryman”

*At Poetry East,  
we believe in words. We  
believe poetry is the highest  
art. A poem clarifies our deep  
humanity, though its grace remains  
a mystery. Poems illuminate the world  
we live in—a slow dance in the kitchen,  
birds in flight, a loved one's death, silence  
in an empty room. As you read these  
seven poems, we hope you will read  
with fresh eyes and full hearts. Poetry  
opens a door, inviting you into its  
home. Here, come a little closer,  
these are for you.*

*Artistic Director: A.M. Prentice*

