

**DAY JOB POEMS/
FOR MARIE**

OLIVER SULLIVAN



**Day-Job Poems/
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Oliver Sullivan

Part 1:

Day-Job Poems

COME DOWN

Come down to this world

put on a face and learn human
expressions,

stay in all night with me
give me that look,

smile and lay grace
on normal life like there's
nothing you would rather do,

than be seen in human guise on the street
on a human night,

always a human night,

you descend
and bring me the night,

you laid it all out so blue
and picked every star yourself.

ON A SUNDAY

I'd like to see you this Sunday

although I don't know you
I think you're worth a Sunday

It's all so simple on a Sunday

a no-sock Sunday
a balcony filled with friends Sunday

you
have a Sunday smile on

I would leave my phone
at home
for you on a Sunday

stay out past the dark
in the park
with you
on a Sunday

Can I trust you with this Sunday?

I have saved this Sunday for you.

(ENGLISH) POEM FOR A (SWEDISH) GIRL

You are on a plane
back to your country of forests
not unlike mine.
We are so similar,
our homelands echo.

You are a blonde revelation
who shows up unannounced
at my house while
I'm on the phone with family.

You ring the door
but come in anyways,
I get up to answer,
and your slim form
greet me in the dark hallway
made so bright this Monday night.

You're marked in the book.
The spine is creased at your chapter.
If left alone, the pages fall
to where you come into the story.

THIS MAN

He's a man who knows things
that people
usually
ask about.

He
knows where to get
the right deal
on shoes,
vegan sandwiches
and maybe
he could find you a ticket
to see that band
although
you think it's sold out.

I,
on the other hand
could not find my keys
before leaving the house today,
and might be locked out
if my roommate
is not home.

SHADOW-FRIEND

An almost blue dreaming
with my kind
shadow friend.

Imagine which of him
life (here) had in mind:

Well and good?
Up and like new?

O green shadow,
I hear you
loud and clear you.

Say one word
and I will
sing
the next.

A VOICE IN GREEN

it's back again.

That feeling.

the heart-pull of it all
that rising sound
sunday thinning out to night
and the sleepy pull of the streets
as the sun sets
and I drift along home
back through the Plateau
and the sky is still blue
but a deep dark one

I find it strange that this feeling wants me to call it
the Green Voice
though it shimmers

Blue.

JOBBER

avoiding work
i tried to shirk
picking a bushel of apples

but as i sunk my hat
and dozed her,
the wind knocked my bushel over.

now i must pick another.

WEEK

on mondays
i don't notice you're around.

on tuesdays
i pretend i don't know you.

on wednesdays
won't you just leave me alone?

thursdays
i keep thinking about something you said.

fridays
there's something about you.

saturdays
i can stay a bit longer.

sundays
i want to know your secret.

ONE TO WATCH

You are truly
going to be one to watch
when your cold
indecent days
are safely in the rearview
mirror.

When that weight
lifts,
you will expand in all directions at once.

Your life
will sigh with relief
and herald your return.

Once you finally
become fearless
my dear,

you shall be
peerless.

ATTENTION

Attention Human Resources,

It has come to our attention that a poet had made it through our stringent hiring processes. Please don't panic or assign blame but let's all be on the same page: they must be identified.

Some signs to look out for include: staring out windows. Staring at nothing. Staring into space. Staring in general. Wrinkled clothes and uncombed hair. Loud sighing at inopportune times.

When they are found and a meeting is set up, please advise them to keep their inspiration for their leisure time. Be firm and clear in your tone. A performance plan is a great way to agree on expectations moving forward. Make sure that they understand that when the work-week starts on Monday morning, we must all be unified in purpose.

And remember: all employees can be given a second chance to improve their attitude and be a great boon to the company.

Thank you for your cooperation!

OH MY HEART

Oh my heart,
I don't know how to start again.

How do I forgive?

To let it all go
and begin anew?

Can we step out from our shelter
and swallow the fear?

Can I be there for people
though I feel abandoned?

Give love though I feel windswept
and long-gone?

Do we shut down
by deflecting blows
or open further—
let all in?

I'm afraid I won't like the answer.
I'm afraid I won't rise to the challenge.

I know we've been here before
but how do we do it again?

Hope, hold on to me
because I feel you
slipping.

HOLDING THE SHAPE

On my way to work,
the way is clear of cars
but I wait for the light.

You are leaving the city soon
and I have
no choice but to let you go.

I let it loose for a while,
neglect swelled the joints,
they got soft and popped
out of place
but today I brace
and set here,
knock a corner there
until it yields,
back
into the shape
it was meant to hold all along.

Hope is leaving an echo
when you have no other action,
a last touch that bruises time with the mark of memory...

Once it sets,
it can never change
and you will know that shape as me
forever.

There will be a moment
in the quiet corners of your life
when an unexpected silence
settles you
when you're rushing somewhere or
waiting in line,
you will know how I feel
now on this early winter corner,
at mid-afternoon
because the shape will fit.

You will know
although the corners creaked
and splinters stuck in my skin,
through all the tearing muscle-ache
I let it slip
once
but I never
let go.

IN THE ALLEY

out the back of the restaurant
i heft the sagging bag of trash to get it over
the dumpster wall
and sometimes it rips and i have a mess

sometimes i can throw it from a few
feet away into the dumpster
and sometimes it's too heavy

a few nights ago
it was misty out and the parking lot
was empty
save me
the highrises were still
and offices had their lights on overnight
it looked like a tower
from the future,
and hopefully mine

i put the trash in the dumpster
then watched for a while

the breeze was not yet winter
and the future felt close

ROSEHIP WEDNESDAY

Rosehip Wednesday,
you said
you were moving to my day.

We stroke, held-apart,
yawn,
see faster,
pull away from each other.

Continent: divide
and be sharp,
let nothing guide us.

Second to the other,
the space in-between of heart.

We will never be
that absence for just anyone
or any longer.

IN THE ALLEY (II)

shoes falling apart
and i'm late for work
sweating down the street and there are a hundred things
i can't afford at the moment

but i work a shit job with good people
and it's a nice day
i do some work
then take a break out the back in the alley,
sit on a cracked chair near the garbage stench
and i'm under an almost cloudless sky

and i'm thinking of a girl
i've only met a few times

I look up at perfect blue

i won't see her this week
but i might next week

the buildings around me are gone
a space opens up and a breath goes through me
And i shiver with the possibility
That everything might just work out this time
For real and for good.

For now though,
I'm still a man sitting in an alley behind a restaurant
wishing time would speed up
so he could see a girl again

Part 2:

For Marie

I.

I thought of you a few days ago
when you were still in the world
and Today you are not.

You will never have another day
that you can call Today.

But I have Today,
and I chose to write this
even though you will never read it.

A few years ago,
I wrote a poem about a Today
we shared when you were
unapologetically alive.

I always thought I would
have another Today with you
but you are gone

Now, I'm the caretaker for
a Today that has fallen into neglect.

This is me dusting and polishing
a Today
that I have loved.

And I rub a scar under my eyebrow
when I want to go back there
from time to time.

II.

Marie,

when we walked
your tiny dog
down Ossington,
I had a piece of glass
in my foot.

I hoped
to make love to you later that night,
but you called an ambulance
instead.

That was the strangest feeling:
to hear that piercing wail and to know
the ambulance was pushing through traffic
and running red lights on its way to me.

I heard it come closer
as I lay on
your bathroom floor.

I was home for a week,
playing hit and run
in the city of my birth.

The plan
was to fit in as many old friends
as possible;
go over old stories,
and well-worn jokes.

On my first night back,
I took my shoes off
to walk
down my childhood street.

I expected some homecoming,
a princely welcome, maybe
but the trees simply swayed
and hushed me.

At the next step,
something sharp was inside me
and made itself at home.

I met you, Marie
when you were slinging
flat pitchers of beer at my local.

For my graduating class,
the bar was a place of reunion and
alleyway groping,
aggressive flirting and limp tipping.

But I think for you it was just noisy
and getting old.

I'm heading back to Montreal tomorrow
and I haven't seen you
in at least a year
but I saved this last day
for you,
Marie.

If you want it,
Marie.

If you're free,
Marie.

At the pub near your apartment,
you asked for a cloth
to wipe the table
and two glasses of water.

We talked about Phil Collins,
drank caesars,
and shared fried things
in a greasy basket.

We established once and for all
that the part in 'The Neverending Story'
where the horse drowns in the swamp
is like,
the saddest ever.

I told you
I would stay by your side
until you said
you were getting sick of me.

You said you probably wouldn't
and took my arm.

We held the pole in the middle of the subway car,
our fingers tangled
and we smiled at each other's shy summaries
of the last year of our lives.

The other passengers watched
you punch my arm
and throw your head back
into your musical laugh
and my grin was proud
because I was the one making
you laugh.

We swayed with the subway
all the long ride north
to York Mills,
our box of wine
braced between your shapely legs
in purple tights.

You charmed my old friends at the barbeque
into thinking we had been lovers for years
and hurried me up
when my stories took too long.

And the agony!

On the subway ride back home,
I am waiting for you to turn ever so slightly
so I can kiss you
after years of merely wanting to.

And I did.

Afterwards, you blushed
and hid your face in your hands.

Next station, Bloor... Bloor station.

'Are you sick of me yet, Marie?'

'No, but I'll tell you when I am.'

'Can we go back to your place, Marie?'

'Yes, but I'm not sleeping with you tonight, Oliver.'

'That's alright... but wouldn't it be lovely?'

'I'm sorry... I get shy sometimes.'

'Did you know I was going to kiss you?'

'About 10 minutes ago, yeah.'

We headed back downtown,
the whole city was buzzing for Pride
and we went to a bar
to meet friends.

You leaned over
to kiss me and surprised me
and almost knocked me
out of my chair.

Our friends showed me the same look
as the passengers on the subway.
Clearly, they saw
the same music happening.

Later, that night:
we're in your kitchen
doing drugs.

I do more than I should
because I want to impress you.

It's hitting me all at once,
but at five in the morning
with a cinnamon girl's undivided attention,
I don't want to admit it.

And that's when the Dark shows up.

Dark is the doctor with the medicine.

And the Dark tells me:

*"Ten thoughts left... and then
you come with me."*

I have never heard this voice before
and do not understand.

'Nine thoughts left...'

Where's that coming from?

'Eight thoughts left...'

I don't understand.

'Seven thoughts left...'

I feel

'Six thoughts left...'

that

'Five thoughts left...'

I have been

'Four thoughts left...'

selling

'Three thoughts left...'

water

'Two thoughts left...'

by the river.

'One thought left.'

The Dark slides along your kitchen ceiling
and comes down over my mind like a curtain
of oblivion
but you do not see it.

It only came for me.

(breadcrumbs)

The path has forked.

The person I once was
is no longer.

It's too late to save anything.

Oh, I wish I could go back to before all of this.

(breadcrumbs)

Though I'm sure
this is the way I came,
I can't recognize the scenery.

I am now and finally,

(no breadcrumbs)

lost.

Marie,

I come to on your bathroom floor
and my head is in your hands
and it hurts bad.

You're slapping me
and asking me my name
and my address.

It's clear that you're scared
I hate it.

I don't want to go to the hospital,
Marie.
I'm not mad you called an ambulance,
Marie,
but I want to stay here on your bathroom floor,
Marie.

(Sirens sirens sirens)

Before the dark closed in on me,
Marie.
I saw every face of love in you,
Marie.
I saw your face change,
Marie.
A thousand women in a moment,
Marie.
They were all beautiful like you,
Marie.

(SIRENS SIRENS SIRENS)

When the paramedics arrived,
I told them we were smoking a joint
and it got on top of me.

They said my vital signs were normal
and I laughed.

They asked me once, then twice
if I wanted to go to the hospital
and I said no.

*'You gotta take it easy, bud...
You really scared your girlfriend!'*

Marie,

I woke in your bed, alone and alive
while you slept on your futon.

It all hit me when my head hit your sink.
and the Dark asked:

'What have you learned from this?'

That I learn the hard way
but I do learn.

I've got a thick skull,
lessons take their time to sink in
and it bounces off bathroom sinks.

I awoke to birdsong
at your window, Marie.

I had dreamed the night before
that I was cruel
but that morning,
I knew that I was not cruel.

I was grateful.

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