

# DAY JOB POEMS/ FOR MARIE

OLIVER SULLIVAN



# **Day-Job Poems/ For Marie**

**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  
greets 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 barbecue  
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.



# **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my family.

I would like to thank my friends.

I would like to thank Marie M.

