

## POEMS & QUOTES HONORING DARKNESS



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### **To Know the Dark by Wendell Berry**

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.

To know the dark, go dark.

Go without sight, and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,  
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

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### **Let Mystery Have its Place In You Henri-Frédéric Amiel, Amiel's Journal**

Let mystery have its place in you; do not be always turning up your whole soil with the plowshare of self-examination, but leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for the unknown God. Then if a bird sings among your branches, do not be too eager to tame it. If you are conscious of something new - thought or feeling, wakening in the depths of your being - do not be in a hurry to let in light upon it, to look at it; let the springing germ have the protection of being forgotten, hedge it round with quiet, and do not break in upon its darkness.

**Sweet Darkness**  
**David Whyte**



When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone,  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your home  
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn

anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive  
is too small for you.

**You, Darkness**  
**Rainer Maria Rilke**

*"You, darkness, that I come from*

*I love you more than all the fires  
that fence in the world,*

*for the fire makes a circle of light for everyone  
and then no one outside learns of you.*

*But the darkness pulls in everything-  
shapes and fires, animals and myself,  
how easily it gathers them! -  
powers and people-  
and it is possible a great presence is moving near me.*

*I have faith in nights."*

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**Let the Season Season You**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**

Don't jump over the season  
like an escapee.

You may dream of spring  
on the solstice

try for eternal vernal  
at the first frost  
but you can't leap beyond the now.

Slow down  
and let the season season you.

There is much that is not true  
until darkness gets its due

yet, there is hope in truth  
and dark's your better ally  
than unseasonal false friends.

So don't jump over the season  
like an escapee.

From what are you fleeing?

Can you flee from the season within you?

Don't be tempted by the empty calories  
of bittersweet fruit too easily procured—  
an early ripening causing indigestion.

Let the season season you.

Let the cold crack that hard bark  
of yours—open your meadow  
to feel it all.

Open your earthbody and feel  
even the best of it  
as well as the worst of it—  
where it hurts the most.

Oh how much life there is  
in death!

Be still and let the season season you.

Let darkness fall in you  
like a sword of truth  
and you will find a deeper root  
than you ever knew.

Then—at the ripening hour  
your branches will know  
how to celebrate the sky

your sun will be a true sun  
the world is needing most.

Do you understand  
these are the kindest words  
you've yet heard?

**Let This Darkness Be a Bell Tower**  
**Rainer Marie Rilke, Sonnets to Orpheus II, 29**



Quiet friend who has come so far,  
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.

Let this darkness be a bell tower  
and you the bell. As you ring,  
what batters you becomes your strength.

Move back and forth into the change.

What is it like, such intensity of pain?  
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.

In this uncontainable night,  
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,  
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,

say to the silent earth: I flow.

To the rushing water, speak: I am.

**The Big Rhythm Holds It All  
A Solstice Poem  
by Ryan Van Lenning**



**I. Sip the Season Darkly**

Darkness has arrived  
wrapping its inky cloak  
across the season of our lives

long shadows and owls stand tall and salute  
the arc of autumn's slow song  
becoming winter's long march

asking us not skip too quickly  
over the hour

with an eager eye grasping  
towards cherry blossoms  
awaiting on the other side

Drink deeply from the season,  
they say

Drink from the cup overflowing  
with the sweet & fruitful darkness

Sip the season darkly  
in its slow embrace

Wisdom hidden from summer's glare  
may yet pass our lips  
should we have the thirst for it

The bright and busy world goes under  
and we are invited to the cave—

the secret one  
in the mountain of ourselves

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seeking stillness

and listen for the true voices amidst

The Silence.

Can you hear them?

## **II. Within the Cave Something Pulses**

We've been here before.

Many times.

As far back as it will be forever forth.

The Big Rhythm holds it all.

Within the cave something pulses.

We hear it, feel it even now

that which deepest dark cannot smother  
and even winter's hands cannot touch

tender tendrils of a luscious vine  
bearing the wine of our heart

Some secret vial  
distilled for this very hour  
to sip the season brightly

A Remembering—Aha!

The sun too misses its lover earth  
and cannot too long stay away.

The sun was meant for this: to shine.

To not share that big love is a wounding.

So in this darkest hour  
the sun knocks on the nearest horizon  
and announces The Return with a steady beat:

“Dear Love, I'm Here.”

Which is exactly what we find

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**The Uses of Sorrow**  
**Mary Oliver, in Thirst**



(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me  
a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand  
that this, too, was a gift.

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**Sacred Anchor**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**

**I. Ripe For Descent**

All the world long has descent  
on its mind

and you with it:

the freckled hands of deep autumn  
the fickle lure of a underground love  
pull you down  
with the Western star.

Who are you to argue  
when the trajectory has gravity on its side?

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## **II. Without The Journeyed Dark**

There never was a sunrise  
without the journeyed dark.

There never was a spring  
without the starried night.

There never was a buried treasure  
without the sunken ship.

There never was a deepest love  
without the sink or swim.

## **III. Pace of the World**

You are of a pace with the world now.

Who are you not to follow Sun,  
or the season's decadent fragrance  
into the dark?

It's a different kind of allure  
at the bottom of things  
inside out and beautiful.

Decay is a gift from the soul  
of the world

You find yourself  
making the vow: you will not be caught  
being a full-time harvester,  
no ever-ascender.

The soil needs rest  
like the dark halls of your heart,  
washed with riotous rains.

## **IV. Her Depths Now**

These are her depths now!

There was a time when light  
—any light—

was a buoy, a wondrous distraction.

Now: a thieving beast  
robbing you of Elder Darkness.

These are her depths now,  
you bark at the sun.

Have you no thought to buried treasures?

Are you one of the light-brigade,  
ever casting gold through your fingers?

Today, with the wind's decree  
and consent of the moon  
you hook yourself willingly, even eagerly  
to the Sacred Anchor.

To the Sun-Addicts, you say:

I now follow Moon,  
stalking the territory of forbidden night-songs

meeting all the beasts born  
of the soil.

#### **IV. Dark Mirrors**

Yes, the bottom of the sea is cruel.

But it is not the first labyrinth,  
nor the last.

A song echoes "I know my powers"  
from the cavernous sky below.

Just the right amount of forgetfulness  
and remembering fills the chambers.

Then, from the coldest corner,  
the darkest thing whispers to you.

#### **V: The End of the Descent**

The end of the descent is a self-embrace.

The bottom of the well  
is the face of love  
looking back.

It catapults you to the inside  
of a cherry blossom  
just this side of spring.

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**Threshold of a Season**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**



So you've come to the threshold of a season

Take a cue from Sister Aspen  
and lay all your old answers down

You've received an invitation from darkness  
to winter well—  
the cave comes calling

Enter the cave with a child's heart  
and a warrior's wound

Asking all the impossible questions  
impervious to troublesome answers

Fatten yourself up with them  
and curl up for a mountain's rest

You will find that winter  
was waiting for you as well  
and needs your warmth

The fire around which the season turns  
dances in your belly

The company you keep  
will become the soil of spring

The dreams you cook together  
will become the tulip's tip

For now, it is enough to know  
that the cave is equally your home  
within which so much lives

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**Cold and Holy Unknowing**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**

Sometimes when light takes a turn  
you want it even brighter  
But when dark wraps itself  
around you like a cocoon

you want it deeper  
than the Mariana Trench

For to hear any true thing  
requires a rare and robust silence  
one that flees  
from sun's boisterous embrace

In the temple of darkness  
your stone vessel cracks

as some heartbody grows round  
and smooth with sacred slugs, whispers

The hibernaculum is the school  
of the unseen and undone

without which nothing  
is really seen or done

For light is far too loud  
for a bear on the perimeter to bare  
and even deepest of autumn eyes  
see all-too-boldly

when things are settling in  
for the cold and holy unknowing

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**The Stars Used to Fall**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**



The stars used to fall  
into the eyes of the villagers

Back when the birds sang the morning up  
like a welcome flood of a new day  
and the town rejoiced

The stars used to fall  
into the hearts of the villagers

Until The Machine came  
and its son Power and daughter Speed  
chased the stars away

and with them the hushed radiance  
fled the town

You tell people about that time  
and a flicker in the corner  
of their jet brown eye utters  
“I think I remember that”

But like a shooting star  
it flares and burns out

and the stars in their quiet glowburn mystery  
await the flame in the eyes and hearts  
that will bring them back

Because they too miss being seen  
and their silent star songs  
miss being heard  
across the lonely miles.

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**Carve Your Beautiful, Dark Cave**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**



The path to the dark cave  
starts innocently enough  
with a sign full of useful information  
in broad daylight, blue skies.

A fulfilling breakfast—  
potatoes & eggs perhaps,  
wild berries plump with promise.

Before you know it  
you can hardly remember  
the color of berries or eyes  
or the sound of the river flowing.

Bats reign here  
and the dominant thoughts  
are of your bed and that last meal.

Feel the shape of those walls  
textured by the smooth slink of years  
moist with mysterious things  
you'd rather not know.

To either side, tunnels to treasures  
or traps.

There's no way to know  
and no sure way out

other than following the scent  
of your deepest voice.

"The deeper you spelunk  
the brighter the darkness"

Hard pains, sweet pains  
nectars maybe, but first the cuts  
both slow and quick deaths.

"Sometimes monsters  
and the secret password  
are the same thing."

Of course, you can avoid the path altogether  
by staying "at home"

But don't think the darkness is avoidable.

Or are you one who believes in light  
without darkness?

Trailheads without wounded trail feet?

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mountain views without valleys?

Oh, what an imagination!

Come now!

Carve your beautiful, dark cave  
and then come home, my friend  
with well-earned feet  
and a heart that knows.

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**We Grow Accustomed to the Dark**  
**Emile Dickinson**

We grow accustomed to the Dark -  
When light is put away -  
As when the Neighbor holds the Lamp  
To witness her Goodbye -

A Moment - We uncertain step  
For newness of the night -  
Then - fit our Vision to the Dark -  
And meet the Road - erect -

And so of larger - Darknesses -  
Those Evenings of the Brain -  
When not a Moon disclose a sign -  
Or Star - come out - within -

The Bravest - grope a little -  
And sometimes hit a Tree  
Directly in the Forehead -  
But as they learn to see -

Either the Darkness alters -  
Or something in the sight  
Adjusts itself to Midnight -  
And Life steps almost straight.

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**The Moon Has a Long Memory**  
**Ryan Van Lenning**

The moon has a long memory  
& hasn't forgotten your true name

It is mere habit to shrink  
when the sun sinks

Have you tried standing up  
& meeting the gaze of the Swordsman  
when he asks you:

what luster's tucked under  
your supernova skin?

Have you considered lifting the lid  
off your day-time self  
stitched tight oh too tight and oh—

Or are you only a lover of butterflies  
despiser of bats?

One of the half-time lovers of the world?

Then by all means, bless your mangled life  
half-bitten & hungry

If not, pour pitch black down  
your poor back  
and feel your ancient arch grow

The moon has a long memory  
& hasn't forgotten your name—

the one you uttered so assuredly  
back in the season of jumping

before the great gremlins of approval  
stole it from you with foggy breath

Be big with midnight  
and tempt the stars out  
with Cheshire desire

Behold, some belly bold  
cries your full name from the old  
deplier than ever told—

Perhaps it is your own

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### **The Lamp and the Key Nasreddin**

Sufi teacher, Nasreddin, illustrates a common experience for those along the Way.

A man is walking home late one night when he sees an anxious Mulla Nasreddin down on all fours, crawling on his hands and knees on the road, searching frantically under a streetlight for something on the ground.

“Mulla, what have you lost?” the passer-by asks.

“I am searching for my key,” Nasreddin says sounding very anxious.

“I’ll help you look,” the man says and joins Mulla Nasreddin in the search.  
Soon both men are down on their knees under the streetlight, looking for the lost key.

After some time, the man asks Nasreddin,  
“Tell me Mulla, do you remember where exactly did you drop the key?”

Nasreddin waves his arm back toward the darkness and says,  
“Over there, in my house. I lost the key inside my house...”

Shocked and exasperated, the passer-by jumps up and shouts at Mulla Nasreddin,  
“Then why are you searching for the key out here in the street?”

“Because there is more light here than inside my house,”  
Mulla Nasrudin answers in a casual manner.

**In a Dark Time, the Eye Begins to See,  
Theodore Roethke**

In a dark time, the eye begins to see,  
I meet my shadow in the deepening shade;  
I hear my echo in the echoing wood—  
A lord of nature weeping to a tree.  
I live between the heron and the wren,  
Beasts of the hill and serpents of the den.

What's madness but nobility of soul  
At odds with circumstance? The day's on fire!  
I know the purity of pure despair,  
My shadow pinned against a sweating wall.  
That place among the rocks—is it a cave,  
Or winding path? The edge is what I have.

A steady storm of correspondences!  
A night flowing with birds, a ragged moon,  
And in broad day the midnight come again!  
A man goes far to find out what he is—  
Death of the self in a long, tearless night,  
All natural shapes blazing unnatural light.

Dark, dark my light, and darker my desire.  
My soul, like some heat-maddened summer fly,  
Keeps buzzing at the sill. Which I is I?  
A fallen man, I climb out of my fear.  
The mind enters itself, and God the mind,  
And one is One, free in the tearing wind.