

## **1. Warning**

**By Jenny Joseph**

When I am an old woman I shall wear purple  
With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me.  
And I shall spend my pension on brandy and summer gloves  
And satin sandals, and say we've no money for butter.  
I shall sit down on the pavement when I'm tired  
And gobble up samples in shops and press alarm bells  
And run my stick along the public railings  
And make up for the sobriety of my youth.  
I shall go out in my slippers in the rain  
And pick flowers in other people's gardens  
And learn to spit.

You can wear terrible shirts and grow more fat  
And eat three pounds of sausages at a go  
Or only bread and pickle for a week  
And hoard pens and pencils and beer mats and things in boxes.

But now we must have clothes that keep us dry  
And pay our rent and not swear in the street  
And set a good example for the children.  
We must have friends to dinner and read the papers.

But maybe I ought to practice a little now?  
So people who know me are not too shocked and surprised  
When suddenly I am old, and start to wear purple.

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/warning/>

# 1. The Old Fools

By Philip Larkin

What do they think has happened, the old fools,  
To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose  
It's more grown-up when your mouth hangs open and drools,  
And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't remember  
Who called this morning? Or that, if they only chose,  
They could alter things back to when they danced all night,  
Or went to their wedding, or sloped arms some September?  
Or do they fancy there's really been no change,  
And they've always behaved as if they were crippled or tight,  
Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming  
Watching light move? If they don't (and they can't), it's strange:  
Why aren't they screaming?

At death, you break up: the bits that were you  
Start speeding away from each other for ever  
With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:  
We had it before, but then it was going to end,  
And was all the time merging with a unique endeavor  
To bring to bloom the million-petaled flower  
Of being here. Next time you can't pretend  
There'll be anything else. And these are the first signs:  
Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power  
Of choosing gone. Their looks show that they're for it:  
Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines -  
How can they ignore it?

Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms  
Inside your head, and people in them, acting.  
People you know, yet can't quite name; each looms  
Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,  
Setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair, extracting  
A known book from the shelves; or sometimes only  
The rooms themselves, chairs and a fire burning,  
The blown bush at the window, or the sun's  
Faint friendliness on the wall some lonely  
Rain-ceased midsummer evening. That is where they live:  
Not here and now, but where all happened once.

This is why they give

An air of baffled absence, trying to be there  
Yet being here. For the rooms grow farther, leaving  
Incompetent cold, the constant wear and tear  
Of taken breath, and them crouching below  
Extinction's alp, the old fools, never perceiving  
How near it is. This must be what keeps them quiet:  
The peak that stays in view wherever we go  
For them is rising ground. Can they never tell  
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?  
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout  
The whole hideous, inverted childhood? Well,  
We shall find out.

<https://allpoetry.com/The-Old-Fools>

## **2. Nature, That Washed Her Hands in Milk**

### **By Sir Walter Raleigh**

Nature, that washed her hands in milk,  
And had forgot to dry them,  
Instead of earth took snow and silk,  
At love's request to try them,  
If she a mistress could compose  
To please love's fancy out of those.

Her eyes he would should be of light,  
A violet breath, and lips of jelly;  
Her hair not black, nor overbright,  
And of the softest down her belly;  
As for her inside he'd have it  
Only of wantonness and wit.

At love's entreaty such a one  
Nature made, but with her beauty  
She hath framed a heart of stone;  
So as love, by ill destiny,  
Must die for her whom nature gave him,  
Because her darling would not save him.

But time (which nature doth despise,  
And rudely gives her love the lie,  
Makes hope a fool, and sorrow wise)  
His hands do neither wash nor dry;  
But being made of steel and rust,  
Turns snow and silk and milk to dust.

The light, the belly, lips, and breath,  
He dims, discolors, and destroys;  
With those he feeds but fills not death,  
Which sometimes were the food of joys.  
Yea, time doth dull each lively wit,  
And dries all wantonness with it.

Oh, cruel time! which takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,

And pays us but with age and dust;  
Who in the dark and silent grave  
When we have wandered all our ways  
Shuts up the story of our days.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50020/nature-that-washed-her-hands-in-milk>

### **3. The Two Streams**

**By Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.**

Behold the rocky wall  
That down its sloping sides  
Pours the swift rain-drops, blending, as they fall,  
In rushing river-tides!

Yon stream, whose sources run  
Turned by a pebble's edge,  
Is Athabasca, rolling toward the sun  
Through the cleft mountain-ledge.

The slender rill had strayed,  
But for the slanting stone,  
To evening's ocean, with the tangled braid  
Of foam-flecked Oregon.

So from the heights of Will  
Life's parting stream descends,  
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,  
Each widening torrent bends,—

From the same cradle's side,  
From the same mother's knee,—  
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,  
One to the Peaceful Sea!

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44385/the-two-streams>

#### **4. The Moment**

**By Margaret Atwood**

The moment when, after many years  
of hard work and a long voyage  
you stand in the center of your room,  
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,  
knowing at last how you got there,  
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose  
their soft arms from around you,  
the birds take back their language,  
the cliffs fissure and collapse,  
the air moves back from you like a wave  
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.  
You were a visitor, time after time  
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.  
We never belonged to you.  
You never found us.  
It was always the other way round.

<https://allpoetry.com/poem/15757263-The-Moment-by-Margaret-Atwood>

## 5. As I Walked Out One Evening

By W. H. Auden

As I walked out one evening,  
Walking down Bristol Street,  
The crowds upon the pavement  
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river  
I heard a lover sing  
Under an arch of the railway:  
'Love has no ending.

'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you  
Till China and Africa meet,  
And the river jumps over the mountain  
And the salmon sing in the street,

'I'll love you till the ocean  
Is folded and hung up to dry  
And the seven stars go squawking  
Like geese about the sky.

'The years shall run like rabbits,  
For in my arms I hold  
The Flower of the Ages,  
And the first love of the world.'

But all the clocks in the city  
Began to whirr and chime:  
'O let not Time deceive you,  
You cannot conquer Time.

'In the burrows of the Nightmare  
Where Justice naked is,  
Time watches from the shadow  
And coughs when you would kiss.

'In headaches and in worry  
Vaguely life leaks away,



And Time will have his fancy  
To-morrow or to-day.

‘Into many a green valley  
Drifts the appalling snow;  
Time breaks the threaded dances  
And the diver’s brilliant bow.

‘O plunge your hands in water,  
Plunge them in up to the wrist;  
Stare, stare in the basin  
And wonder what you’ve missed.

‘The glacier knocks in the cupboard,  
The desert sighs in the bed,  
And the crack in the tea-cup opens  
A lane to the land of the dead.

‘Where the beggars raffle the banknotes  
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,  
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,  
And Jill goes down on her back.

‘O look, look in the mirror,  
O look in your distress:  
Life remains a blessing  
Although you cannot bless.

‘O stand, stand at the window  
As the tears scald and start;  
You shall love your crooked neighbor  
With your crooked heart.’

It was late, late in the evening,  
The lovers they were gone;  
The clocks had ceased their chiming,  
And the deep river ran on.