1981

From "Book of My Hunger, Book of the Earth"

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from Book of My Hunger,  
Book of the Earth · Sarah Appleton

Knock, listen  The harsh fly shines  The beetle rubs  
out of its casing  The brown butterfly with its fringe of  
blue eyes in a halo of purple probing fluttering over the  
fallen yellow maple leaves  The drip of dry leaves before  
my eyes  The trees grown tall remembering the words of  
the authors  The pine red hair falling like new catkins  
on the leafless twigs  The human hand touching everywhere—  
lifts and stirs like slow wings

***

It is this way the work builds  
as if someone had my hand, walked before me, gently drawing me  
the effort, silence  
these are the very lines of it  
almost as if fleshless  
blank  
simple, as if old or very young; I follow simply  
so caught, buoyed by fragility . . . so slight

I lie down in the sun, my back against the dry warm log bridging the stream  
the sun in the stream lights. Woodpecker, brittle like the paper leaves  
spiralling down, brushing against tree bark  
the late thrush fluffed round  
seen only by the life of his eye, then seen all  
The balance of these words  
falling again and again against and upon the sentence  
barely breathing
The thrust of life within into the world, gathering the world

Why have the creatures come to our door hungering for bread? Why does the amber light in the soul of the dog speak love, when he has no words? They come to us

They wait endlessly for us, following our motions, but our children run on ahead, or lag in their world, our voices are filled with warnings, urgings

Being born with the world

The tensions are here

Now I see myself making the stars. Within me I hold a vast sky stars streaming out as if brushed by the wind from a star and I see them more and more and I can count them by their names for as many names as I can name to my content, to my exhaustion of all my yearning. They do not fall and fall open like flowers from a tree—shadows floating, catching light, spinning out—or wings that carry seeds, or fluffs that whirl endlessly. These stars are the stars of all my desire From their desire, from their eyes looking forward to me. My face in theirs, my voice, I meet them, here here here

Where is my body falling, quick, catch it! Shadow like the others run, catch it flying on the wind, black smudges over snow There, the glints, sun motes against the blue No higher, the butterfly beating beating in a rare wind; no, there lights broken in the face of a stream here; no there, my small daughter running to me
***

The teachers of my child have forgotten memory
have already hidden from my child her story

They didn’t listen for it
she did not hear it leave her lips

Seeking, I asked her for it
She turned away, her mouth sealed

over her deepest desires
She seizes them with her hands, they work in her strong fingers

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Who has lifted the pen!
Who has made the mark of the human face upon the page!
Who has seen here the invisible dictation!
I, just having taken it up, finding my life . . .

***

I stand here. I have arisen—into the dazzling, the different
as if jumping, each time feeling the hands won’t be there

But I am so small. This . . . this calling, this searching, this
one come again and again to a place drawn here by this thread—

It is utterly difficult
utterly simple, like a new language

the wings of the old beating, beating
How can the journey be of words, sentences?

Is that how it is when the universe comes into us, accepting our smallness
using our eyes looking at the autumn blue, autumn branch, thickening
pond light

comes into our ears to our darkness

resists our fingers
is that how the universe is content, when we can no longer
think it
but return to our simple duties, of dishes, of picking up, of being the earth
as our children lean into us, of being worshipful to a dog who grows thin
from not running
of coming to you, my dearest, given silent understanding working in the
terrors to come
working in a love that had no words before this