

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

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