

# A Brave and Startling Truth

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We, this people, on a small and lonely planet  
Traveling through casual space  
Past aloof stars, across the way of indifferent suns  
To a destination where all signs tell us  
It is possible and imperative that we learn  
A brave and startling truth

And when we come to it  
To the day of peacemaking  
When we release our fingers  
From fists of hostility  
And allow the pure air to cool our palms

When we come to it  
When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate  
And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed clean  
When battlefields and coliseum  
No longer rake our unique and particular sons and daughters  
Up with the bruised and bloody grass  
To lie in identical plots in foreign soil

When the rapacious storming of the churches  
The screaming racket in the temples have ceased  
When the pennants are waving gaily  
When the banners of the world tremble  
Stoutly in the good, clean breeze

When we come to it  
When we let the rifles fall from our shoulders  
And children dress their dolls in flags of truce  
When land mines of death have been removed  
And the aged can walk into evenings of peace  
When religious ritual is not perfumed  
By the incense of burning flesh  
And childhood dreams are not kicked awake  
By nightmares of abuse

When we come to it  
Then we will confess that not the Pyramids  
With their stones set in mysterious perfection  
Nor the Gardens of Babylon  
Hanging as eternal beauty  
In our collective memory  
Not the Grand Canyon  
Kindled into delicious color  
By Western sunsets

Nor the Danube, flowing its blue soul into Europe  
Not the sacred peak of Mount Fuji  
Stretching to the Rising Sun  
Neither Father Amazon nor Mother Mississippi who, without favor,  
Nurture all creatures in the depths and on the shores  
These are not the only wonders of the world

When we come to it  
We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe  
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger  
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace  
We, this people on this mote of matter  
In whose mouths abide cankerous words  
Which challenge our very existence  
Yet out of those same mouths  
Come songs of such exquisite sweetness  
That the heart falters in its labor  
And the body is quieted into awe

We, this people, on this small and drifting planet  
Whose hands can strike with such abandon  
That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living  
Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible  
tenderness  
That the haughty neck is happy to bow  
And the proud back is glad to bend  
Out of such chaos, of such contradiction  
We learn that we are neither devils nor divines

When we come to it  
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body  
Created on this earth, of this earth  
Have the power to fashion for this earth  
A climate where every man and every woman  
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety  
Without crippling fear

When we come to it  
We must confess that we are the possible  
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world  
That is when, and only when  
We come to it.

This poem was written and delivered in honor of the 50th anniversary of  
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