

POEMS
ABOUT
HEALTH

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Published 2008

Printed by CafePress.com in the United States of America

ALLEN

Allen sees the future far too clearly:
Life in debt to those for whom he cares.
Living thus dependent hurts severely,
Even though he knows they love him dearly,
Needing his strength more than he needs theirs.

ANNE

Anne is a fairy who doesn't have wings.
No one can ride to the place where she sings.
No one can know all the wonderful things
Each moment of intimate harmony brings.

ARYANNA

Aryanna died when she was born,
Reminding us how briefly we are here.
Years, like minutes, cannot last for long;
A note is no less precious than a song,
Nor for her early death was she less dear.
Now what we can do for her is mourn,
As she is salient only to our tears.

AS MY DEBT GROWS, SO MY LOVE DOES, TOO

As my debt grows, so my love does, too.
What you give I cannot half repay.
Your love for me inflames my love for you.

I can't help being moody, often blue,
Irritable, anxious, sad, and yet you stay.
As my debt grows, so my love does, too.

I know I'm lucky to have someone who
Will love me through this, day by troubled day.
Your love for me inflames my love for you.

Gifts like yours to me do not accrue.
Still, it's hard when giving goes one way.
As my debt grows, so my love does, too.

Yet unlike money, love is never due.
Its return is free, in just the way
Your love for me inflames my love for you,

A natural grace, making one of two.
And so this darkness has its own bright ray:
As my debt grows, so my love does, too;
Your love for me inflames my love for you.

AS THOUGH I WERE JUST FLOWING, FLOWING

As though I were just flowing, flowing,
Leaving not a trace behind,
Zest for life not one whit less,
However blank the roving mind;
Emptiness the space for being
In the moving moment still,
Meaning nothing more than meaning,
Each ellipse elliptical;
Reminiscences like flowers
'Ere the garden was convened,
So sweet the disconnected hours . . .

AUNT LOUISE

Aunt Louise lived only half on Earth,
Unable quite to leave her prior home,
Nestled in a dream, perhaps by birth,
Though loved--ah, loved!--ultimately alone.
Let her be a lesson in delight:
Of cats and restaurants and small routines,
Undaunted by the nearness of the night,
Improvising much with meager means.
She was for us an enigmatic face,
Eloquent of innocence and grace.

BREANNA

Breanna is a cookie tough and tender.
RETT Syndrome is the gift that makes her, her.
Even though we would all were born well,
As she is, we do not think her ill,
Nor would we life bereft of her prefer.
None could teach us more of love and will,
As sweet Breanna sings of pain and wonder.

CAITLIN

Caitlin lived a long and happy life,
All within the palace of my womb.
If she could not joy to be a wife,
There was love abundant in her doom.
Let those who mourn remember that she died
In sweet communion with the soul inside,
Nor more nor less serene within her tomb.

CHERRIE

Cherrie is now using Debbie's kidney,*
Having lost the service of her own.
Each moment of existence is a gift
Replacing just the one one just has left,
Renewing momentarily the moment gone.
In such a melody each note exactly
Embodies the full grace of what was done.

*For the donor of Cherrie's kidney, see Debbie.

DEBBIE

Debbie has donated her right kidney,*
Ever generous, even with her life.
Being is a gift to be passed on
Before one's private miracle is done,
Image of a grace not grace enough
Except when given to another gladly.

*For the recipient of Debbie's kidney, see Cherrie.

DIABETES TELLS US WE'RE MACHINES

Diabetes tells us we're machines,
Intended to exist but for a time.
All that brought us pleasure in our prime
Breaks down to prove the metal of our means.
Eventually, all of us must die,
Though, perhaps, not quite so bit-by-bit.
Each soul must see of life the whole of it,
So as to know of death the reason why.

EIGHTY-EIGHT

Eighty-eight spends much of life in bed,
Interred beyond her time in drugs and pain.
Grateful only for the gift of sleep,
Having lost the will to laugh or weep,
The shrunken doll repeats just one refrain,
Yearning for the comforts of the dead.

Even so, the trail of pills has led
Into a world she grapples with in vain,
Grasping for a grace she cannot keep,
Harsh and vivid hauntings of the brain
That make of life a stew of joy and dread.

HALLELUJA! I'M PREGNANT! PRAISE THE LORD!

Hallelujah! I'm pregnant! Praise the Lord!
For the Lord has quickened my womb! With my
 husband,
Of course, and Dr. Heller, who quickened the sperm.
Which makes it no less a miracle.

For the Lord has quickened my womb! With my
 husband
I thank Him and science both, and bless them.
Which makes it no less a miracle
Of the Lord, Who works through the works of our
 hands.

I thank Him and science both, and bless them.
With science I have but a passing acquaintance.
Of the Lord Who works through the works of our
 hands,
Of the Lord I sing all the words in my heart!

With science I have but a passing acquaintance,
Of course, and Dr. Heller, who quickened the sperm.
Of the Lord I sing all the words in my heart:
Hallelujah! I'm pregnant! Praise the Lord!

I PRAY FOR YOU AND WISH I COULD DO MORE

I pray for you and wish I could do more,
But more I cannot do from far away.
Like leaves before the wind we cannot stay,
Ripped dancing, dancing to the forest floor.
I wish I could your ailing health restore
And bring you to the strength of yesterday,
But all we mortal souls can do is pray
That God might alter what we have in store.
The beauty in our fragile life is love,
The only thing that makes the moment matter,
The golden thread that binds us all in light.
I wish, I wish I could your pain remove,
But like a wall the truth my will must shatter,
And so I send my prayers into the night.

I'M SORRY I CAN'T TELL YOU WHAT

I'm sorry I can't tell you what
I'm sure you'd rather hear,
But there's a burden in my heart
I can no longer bear.

There's an anger I must cross
Before I come to you
And make my peace with who you are,
And try your soul anew.

I know I wasn't what you wanted
When you wanted me,
A healthy, happy baby girl
You could raise easily.

I was born impaired, and you
Have never understood
That what I am is whole and fair
And beautiful and good.

You were sorry, first for me
And then for you, and wept,
But I would not be me without
The fact that I am deaf.

I am a gift to celebrate
And not a cause to grieve.
As a child this was what
I needed to believe.

I needed but a different road
To reach the common goal,
But you decided there were things
I couldn't do at all.

And rather than accept what life
Had given in its grace,
You looked at what life had withheld
And turned from its embrace.

Ah, Mother! How you injured me
By what you would not own!
To love myself I had to leave
And make my way alone,

And have my children in the course
Of what I would become,
But always, always looking back
To where I had no home.

JEREMY

Jeremy's a light unto the jaded.
Even though he's deaf, he still can sing.
Reading each day's poetry unaided,
Eventually he learns that life can bring
More ecstasy than keeps a satyr sated,
Yet with a twist that heightens suffering.

JOANIE

Joanie was innocent all of her days,
Only thirteen in her heart and her mind.
All that she wanted was all that she had,
Nor did she ever discover how bad
Is the world in the wake of its ill-favored wind,
Even as we turned pure touched by her gaze.

JODIE

Jodie's not the burden that she thinks.
Of all my gifts, she's the dearest treasure.
Destiny may handicap the minx:
In love there's neither policy nor measure,
Embracing what must bring both pain and pleasure.

LINDA

Linda is content within her room.
In outer order she sees inner space.
None knows so well the well-known love of place ,
Dependent as she is upon its grace,
As she must here alone find ways to bloom.

LOOK NOT ON MY BODY BUT MY SOUL

Look not on my body but my soul,
Only on the face behind the veil,
Only with the touch of inner Braille,
Knowing through yourself my being whole.
Nor ought you touch my skin but with your heart,
Only in the tenderness of love.
Though my outer self repulsive prove,
Of me the mask is but a minor part.
Nor should you know me out of charity:
Misfortune can become a kind of grace,
Yielding special wisdom to a few.
Bring mainly for yourself your empathy,
Opening a richer, wider view,
Doorway to a person much like you
Yet fired by the fate he must embrace.

MENTAL ILLNESS DOESN'T TOUCH THE SOUL

Mental illness doesn't touch the soul
Even as it punishes the mind.
None can will the wanderings of the wind,
Though winter come, and tempests take their toll.
All who suffer innocent shall find
Love waiting by the window, well and whole,
Inside the heart, where it has full control,
Longing ever, ever unresigned.
Let go your fear, and follow, then, your path,
Neither more nor less constrained than those
Embraced by gods less ruthless in their wrath.
Sing bravely down the windrows of your woes,
Savoring a grace that comes and goes.

O LORD, HELP ME BE A BURDEN

O Lord, help me be a burden!
My mother and my sister do their duty,
But I can see impatience in their eyes.
Help me, please, endure until my time.

My mother and my sister do their duty,
Loving me as righteousness demands.
Help me, please, endure until my time,
And midst my pain to live with ample grace.

Loving me as righteousness demands,
They teach me how to lean upon your love,
And midst my pain to live with ample grace.
O lift me up upon your unspent shoulders!

They teach me how to lean upon your love,
But I can see impatience in their eyes.
O lift me up upon your unspent shoulders!
O Lord, help me be a burden!

SEBASTIAN

Sebastian may be blind, but he can see
Everything extant to you and me.
Because his sight is safely tucked away,
All his other senses come to play,
Singing in the sunlight of their song,
Taking bits of paradise along.
In life there is no limit to our joy,
A gift whatever senses we employ.
Nor if our hearts can see, will we go wrong.

STEPHEN

Stephen lived his life within my womb.
Though brief, it was a rich, full life and good.
Each day I told him of my love in ways
Perhaps most intimate, my silent phrase
Heard in the heart directly, blood to blood.
Each life must be redeemed within its doom,
Needing only love to make it bloom.

SOME FIND IT QUITE
SUFFICIENT TO ENDURE

Some find it quite sufficient to endure
In permanent and unremitting pain,
X-ing out all else but getting through
The day with neither loss nor hope of gain,
Yearning more for closure than for cure.

Such find faith in difficult terrain,
Immersed in grace both vivid and unsure,
Xerophytes that do as they must do.

SORROW MAY THE HEART SOMETIMES DEFACE

Sorrow may the heart sometimes deface
In ways that will in time its seal emboss.
Do remember, then, love's gentle grace
So that the gift be ransom for the loss.

THANK YOU FOR
HAVING FAITH IN ME

Thank you for having faith in me,
However hard it was.
An illness is compounded by
No one coming near.
Kindness can take courage when
You see what mania does.
Opening your arms to me
Unravels my own fear.

THANK YOU FOR THE HEART YOUR LOVED ONE GAVE ME

Thank you for the heart your loved one gave me.
How strange that it should beat within my chest!
All are one, and that is what has saved me,
Nor does one truly die till all find rest.
Know that in your loved one's heart a purpose
Yet drives the ancient inborn urge to be.
Our union is not merely on the surface,
Unraveling the words that make me, me.

THE GIFT OF LIFE IS NEVER MORE OR LESS

The gift of life is never more or less.
Either days or years are merely moments.
Reverence remains the source of bliss.
More memories do not increase remembrance.
If death must early come, then let it be
Nor more nor less than if it had come late:
A part of a much larger mystery,
Leaving wind and wisdom in its wake.
Longing is the music of our sphere,
Yearning for a time past time and space
In which all that we love is ever here,
Love everlasting, which is now our grace,
Living with us more than we can bear.

WHEN LIFE BECOMES A SEA OF PAIN

When life becomes a sea of pain
And every moment agony
I must endure again, again,
It is a curse to have to be.

And every moment agony,
And every longing fixed on death;
It is a curse to have to be
And fight by instinct for each breath.

And every longing fixed on death
Even as I must go on
And fight by instinct for each breath,
Sailing thus, though loved, alone.

Even as I must go on,
You watch me helpless from the shore;
Sailing thus, though loved, alone,
I need you with me all the more.

You watch me helpless from the shore
As I endure again, again;
I need you with me all the more
When life becomes a sea of pain.

YOUR LEGACY MUST BE BOTH HOPE AND FEAR

Your legacy must be both love and fear.
I know that when you died, you feared for me.
The family curse you carried in your breast
Was not a gift you wanted to pass on.

But fear of it, just like my love for you,
Must linger in my heart, unwelcome guest!
And as I weep for your too early death,
I also can hear rumblings of my own.

Ah, Mother! We are linked like paper dolls,
A line of little cutouts in a row.
I see my clearest memories in my mirror
And feel your anguish bloom beneath my breast.

For this, my love for you is more, not less.
In our misfortune there's a common grace:
For me, in that you must have grieved my burden;
For you, in that you must have mine foreseen.

