

This Is What Things Can Teach Us...

I've been reading through Rilke's *Book of Hours* and came across the following, which moved me deeply. In a course I'm teaching on the Powers of the Universe and the Path of the Christ, we are contemplating the power of allurement. Its cosmological expression is gravity. In the human realm it is the gravity that love exerts on our hearts. The line "to patiently trust our heaviness" slayed me.

The Book of Pilgrimage, Book 2, Section 11-16, (From Rilke's Book of Hours)

No one lives his life.



Disguised since childhood,
haphazardly assembled
from voices and fears and little pleasures,
we come of age as masks.

Our true face never speaks.

Somewhere, there must be storehouses
where all these lives are laid away
like suits of armor or old carriages
or clothes hanging limply on the walls.

Maybe all paths lead there,
to the repository of unlived things.

And yet, though we strain
against the deadening grip
of daily necessity,
I sense there is this mystery:

All life is being lived.
Who is living it, then?
Is it the things themselves,
or something waiting inside them,
like an unplayed melody in a flute?

Is it the winds blowing over the wa



Is it the branches that signal to each other?

Is it flowers

interweaving their fragrances,

or streets, as the wind through time?

Is it animals, warmly moving,

or birds, that suddenly rise up?

Who lives it then? God, are you the one

who is living life?

All who seek you

test you.

And those who find you

bind you to image and gesture.



I would rather sense you

as Earth senses you.

In my ripening

ripens

what you are.

I need from you no tricks

to prove you exist.

Time, I know,

is other than you.

No miracles, please.

Just let your laws

become clearer

from generation to generation.

How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the smallest thing
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.

Each thing—
each stone, blossom, child—
is held in place.

Only we, in our arrogance
push out beyond what we each belong to
for some empty freedom.

If we surrendered

to Earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.



Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.

So like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart;
they have never left him.

This is what things can teach us:



to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
For even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.

