

One sun rose on us today, kindled over our shores,
peeking over the Smokies, greeting the faces
of the Great Lakes, spreading a simple truth
across the Great Plains, then charging across the Rockies.
One light, waking up rooftops, under each one, a story
told by our silent gestures moving behind windows.
My face, your face, millions of faces in morning's mirrors,
each one yawning to life, crescendoing into our day:
pencil-yellow school buses, the rhythm of traffic lights,
fruit stands: apples, limes, and oranges arrayed like rainbows
begging our praise. Silver trucks heavy with oil or paper—
bricks or milk, teeming over highways alongside us,
on our way to clean tables, read ledgers, or save lives—
to teach geometry, or ring-up groceries as my mother did
for twenty years, so I could write this poem.
All of us as vital as the one light we move through,
the same light on blackboards with lessons for the day:
equations to solve, history to question, or atoms imagined,
the "I have a dream" we keep dreaming,
or the impossible vocabulary of sorrow that won't explain
the empty desks of twenty children marked absent
today, and forever. Many prayers, but one light
breathing color into stained glass windows,
life into the faces of bronze statues, warmth
onto the steps of our museums and park benches
as mothers watch children slide into the day.
One ground. Our ground, rooting us to every stalk
of corn, every head of wheat sown by sweat
and hands, hands gleaned coal or planting windmills
in deserts and hilltops that keep us warm, hands
digging trenches, routing pipes and cables, hands
as worn as my father's cutting sugarcane
so my brother and I could have books and shoes.
The dust of farms and deserts, cities and plains
mingled by one wind—our breath. Breathe. Hear it
through the day's gorgeous din of honking cabs,
buses launching down avenues, the symphony
of footsteps, guitars, and screeching subways,
the unexpected song bird on your clothes line.
Hear: squeaky playground swings, trains whistling,
or whispers across café tables, Hear: the doors we open
for each other all day, saying: hello / shalom,
buon giorno / howdy / namaste / or buenos días
in the language my mother taught me—in every language
spoken into one wind carrying our lives
without prejudice, as these words break from my lips.
One sky: since the Appalachians and Sierras claimed
their majesty, and the Mississippi and Colorado worked
their way to the sea. Thank the work of our hands:
weaving steel into bridges, finishing one more report
for the boss on time, stitching another wound
or uniform, the first brush stroke on a portrait,
or the last floor on the Freedom Tower
jutting into a sky that yields to our resilience.
One sky, toward which we sometimes lift our eyes
tired from work: some days guessing at the weather
of our lives, some days giving thanks for a love
that loves you back, sometimes praising a mother
who knew how to give, or forgiving a father
who couldn't give what you wanted.
We head home: through the gloss of rain or weight
of snow, or the plum blush of dusk, but always—home,
always under one sky, our sky. And always one moon
like a silent drum tapping on every rooftop
and every window, of one country—all of us—
facing the stars
hope—a new constellation
waiting for us to map it,
waiting for us to name it—together

CLOUD ANTHEM

Until we're like clouds that tear like bread but mend like bones. Until we weave each other like silk sheets shrouding mountains, or bear gales that shear us. Until we soften our hard edges, free to become any shape imaginable: a rose or an angle crafted like paper-mâché by breezes, or a lion or dragon like marble chiseled by gusts. Until we scatter ourselves—pebbles of grey puffs, but then band together like a string of pearls. Until we learn to listen to each other, whether thunderous as opera or a showered lullaby. Until we truly treasure the sunset, lavish it in mauve, rust, and rose. Until we have the courage to vanish like sails into the horizon, or be at peace anchored still. Until we respect one another, whether vast as countries or as petite as islands floating in the abyss of virtual blue we belong to. Until we dance tango with the moon and comfort the jealous stars, falling. Until we care enough for the earth to bless it as morning fog. Until we realize we are muddy as puddles, pristine as lakes not yet clouds. Until we remember we're born from rivers and dew drops. Until we're at ease to rendezvous wispy showers, not always needing to clash as godly yells of thunder. Until we know lightning roots are not our right to the ground. Though we collude into storms that ravage, we can also sprinkle ourselves like memories. Until we tame the riot of our tornadoes, settle down soft into a cozy drizzle to kindle day-dreams. Though we curse with hail, we can absolve with snowflakes. We can fight, kill, we can die valiant as rainbows, and hold light like blood in our lucid bodies. We can decide to move boundlessly, without a creed, no desire, until we're clouds meshed in clouds sharing a kingdom with no king, a city with no walls, a country with no name, a nation without borders or claim, until we thrive as one, together in one single, undivided sky.

COMPLAINT OF THE RIO GRANDE

I was meant for all things to meet:
to make the clouds pause in the mirror
of my waters, to be home to fallen rain
that finds its way to me, to turn eons
of loveless rock into lovesick pebbles
and carry them as humble gifts back
to the sea that brings life back to me.

I felt the sun flare, praised each star
flocked about the moon long before
you did. I've breathed air you'll never
breathe, listened to songbirds before
you could speak their names, before
you dug your oars in me, before you
created the gods that created you.

Then countries, your invention, maps
jigsawing the world into colored shapes
caged in bold lines to say: you're here,
not there, you're this, not that, to say
yellow isn't red, red isn't black, black is
not white, to say *mine*, not *ours*, to say
war, and believe life's worth is relative.

You named me big river, drew me blue,
thick to divide, to say: *spic* and *Yankee*,
to say: *wetback* and *gringo*. You split me
in two—half of me *us*, the rest *them*, but
I wasn't meant to drown children, hear
mothers' cries, never meant to be your
geography: a line, a border, or murderer.

I was meant for all things to meet:
the mirrored clouds and sun's tingle,
birdsongs and the quiet moon, the wind
and its dust, the rush of mountain rain—
and us. Blood that runs in you is water
flowing in me, both life, the truth we
know we know: be one in one another.

DECLARATION OF INTER-DEPENDENCE

Such has been the patient sufferance...

We're a mother's bread, instant potatoes, milk at a checkout line. We're her three children pleading for bubble gum and their father. We're the three minutes she steals to page a tabloid, needing to believe even stars' lives are as joyful and bruised.

Our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury...

We're her second job serving an executive absorbed in his *Wall Street Journal* at a sidewalk café shadowed by skyscrapers. We're the shadows of the fortune he won and the family he lost. We're his loss and the lost. We're a father in coal town who can't mine a life anymore because too much, too little has happened, for too long.

A history of repeated injuries and usurpations...

We're the grit of his main street's blacked-out windows and graffitied truths. We're a street in another town lined with Royal palms, at home with a Peace Corps couple who collect African Art. We're their dinner-party-talk of wines, wielded picket signs, and burned draft cards. We're what they know: it's time to do more than read the *New York Times*, buy fair-trade coffee and organic corn.

In every stage of oppressions we have petitioned for redress...

We're the farmer who grew the corn, who plows into his couch as worn as his back by the end of the day. We're his TV set blaring news having everything and nothing to do with the field dust in his eyes or his son nested in the ache of his arms. We're his son. We're a black teenager who drove too fast or too slow, talked too much or too little, moved too quickly, but not quick enough. We're the blast of the bullet leaving the gun. We're the guilt and the grief of the cop who wished he hadn't shot.

We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor...

We're the dead, we're the living amid the flicker of vigil candlelight. We're in a dim cell with an inmate reading Dostoevsky. We're his crime, his sentence, his amends, we're the mending of ourselves and others. We're a Buddhist alongside a stock broker serving soup at a shelter. We're each other's shelter and hope: a widow's fifty cents in a collection plate and a golfer's ten-thousand-dollar pledge for a cure.

We hold these truths to be self-evident...

We're the cure for hatred caused by despair. We're the good morning of a bus driver who remembers our name, the tattooed man who gives up his seat on the subway. We're every door held open with a smile when we look into each other's eyes the way we behold the moon. We're the moon. We're the promise of one people, one breath declaring to one another: *I see you. I need you. I am you.*