

A Few Words

from Jan Carroll

Spring 2021: Holding On

["Anything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." —Viktor Frankl]

A Year Since COVID Came Here

I have an idea now
how people live through wars.

Amidst the troubles
life fights to go on.

Someone vows he will learn to juggle
three tangerines if it kills him.

Someone sits at a raging fire in a hollow
of the back yard, leans closer.

Someone nurses a wild bird with a broken wing
until it's safe to release it.

Someone concocts a hearty stew to leave
on the porch of an adopted grandfather.

Someone ties the knot.

Someone buries treasure.

Someone says *Goodbye, I love you*
through the screen of a propped-up computer.

Someone makes up a new song to belt out
from the top of the parking structure.

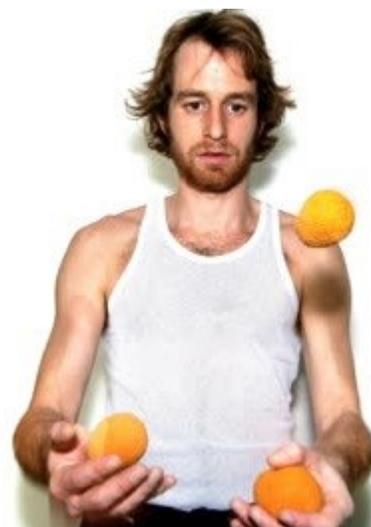
Someone walks, masked, at a distance with a friend
who lost her job but wants to start her own business.

Someone screams in the car
to let the tension out, then laughs.

Someone hears a new-to-them bird call
now that it's so quiet.

Someone scrapes together her wits
and weaves them into a lightweight basket.

Someone says, "There, there, it's ok,
it's ok, we're going to make it."



After the Disaster

Let loose your canonical urgings.
Play on the swings.

Grow some variety you'd never heard of.
Break the ice.

Rewrite the character sketches of the seasons.
Pencil in new rites.

Break with the wasteland motif.
Raise gardens, bridges.





Life is always challenging, yet seemingly now even more so. Weather patterns can differ wildly from the familiar we remember. There's a dearth of fruitful discussion and a plethora of political polarization. Maybe it's to some degree that I'm getting older, but I'm not the only one who senses a sometimes overt, sometimes subtle unsettling, along with signs of decay, and what feels like intrusions into and assaults on one's way of thinking, on how one sees the world and navigates it. And then there's the virus and all the associated fallout. Maybe that's just life. Or maybe it's not. In this poem I'm trying to express this feeling of being confronted with change at such a rate it can almost make you dizzy, or it can make you feel like the rug keeps getting pulled out from under you. Yet we keep on, parts of life still making sense, others not, leaving us a little on edge, or at times, a lot.

What's Underfoot Is Spinning, Hold On

Training the eye not to get dizzy is harder than you'd think. There's always at least one gear tooth missing in the mix.

There's always a beehive where you want to build a tree house, promises of honey aside, yet the livery gutted can become an eatery. My aunt the nun couldn't get away from people confessing to her those rare times she traveled the distance to visit us, but they carried her small bag to the boarding gate, bought her a sandwich without even asking if hunger gnawed at her. The trumpeter picks up the horn, channels hurricane-breath through it, a flurry of fingers letting out notes, riffing, a fleur-de-lis sticker on the edge of the instrument case open at his feet, hoping for spare change tossed into it. The neglected rot on the windowsill will take a lot of fixing. Once you rip out the casing, you might find the insulation soggy with rainwater that took the wrong way or infiltrated. You might find a hole in your roof, birds using it as a thoroughfare into the attic, the attic in dreams a symbol of the mind, the highest state except for the sky above, denoting the spiritual, the intangible, yet grackles and wrens, whose domain that is, as icons of winged things, squeezing themselves into your upper storage space, planning to nest in it, the windows at either end of the room enough to remember their religion by, I guess, as I, paying rent, am always putting on my shoes and jacket, going outside to walk around in the world where the sky touches down to the ground knowing what could happen, what might not. Was that a car backfiring or rifleshot? Any sirens? Any birdsong? Anyone running, scared?



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