

Donald H. Richardson, Jr.

one

big

poem



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one **big** poem

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This one is for Clarinda,

who has since 1977 helped me in so many ways to keep going,
pointed me to my first teaching job,
published my first two poetry collections »
which made it possible for me to work
with the Maryland State Arts Council
as a Poet in the Schools,
and made this new book possible.

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1982 *Knocking Them Dead*

1987 *Ghosts of Love*

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- › “The Year JFK Died (Windream)”
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- › “Tropical Storm Danielle”
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- › “Borrowing Sight”
- › “Survive”

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night
waters

The Great Love Affair (Maiden Voyage)

The street lunatic we passed
on the way to the dock
was yelling quietly to himself
then to someone in the dark
that it was too cold for swimming
winter was still there
and she smiled coldly at him
from deep in the night.

Later we heard
the sound of the ship
slapping the black water back
with us up above
the big name and the waterline
that crazy voice gone
deep behind us
our wake trailing back and back
to England.

Out on the ocean
the moon makes the water white
and the night
we are driving hard into
is broken now
by ghost-white islands
of floating ice
like the pieces
of a puzzle
with no picture at all.

Listen to the sea
as it hisses by
as it wishes us good-by
when we have passed
it will say this same thing
and we will be all

we ever dreamed of
and all they ever found.

But I wish to see you again
and this great love
that has gone but will not end
tonight will not end
this ship will not sink
and it cannot move fast enough
none of them can
tonight you know
it is much too cold for swimming
we would be crazy to try.

O Dear, and you so perfect and all
your smile so cold
last night and the great shining ship
the huge hole ripped in the heart of it
we can jump
but we can't survive.

But if you must swim on a night like this
wait for another moon-white island of ice
to float by
kiss her good-by
and swim for it.

If it's not too far
you might be all right
there will be other ships
and street lunatics
women and bright nights you might remember.

Greater pieces of ice when this one melts
and somewhere deeper down south
much warmer women
with great big hearts
that melt all night.

The Sea of Death

We will die now you and I
with the sea spread out
below the grey sky
caught ragged as a winter day
begging to be led away
there was blood on the trail today
thicker than the water they used
to wash it away.

The Sea of Life

Jump in to forget
who you are
who you ever were
pout your heart out
in the corner of some sad café
go west to forget
how you are always hornier
in California.

The Sea of Hate

Sometimes you can hate
everything you love
the sky below the sea above
when the waves turn you around
and around
then hold you down
till you cry
and wish your uncle would die.

The Sea of Love

I think it was the sea of love
we saw
that June day in Newport
after Tatsie died
the sea had come
her small waves barely breaking
out on the rocks
so blue so soft, so soft
to tell someone...

Night Waters

Summer nights fall
slowly into the water.
In the dark,
she kneels near the end of the dock
reaches into the night water
and touches the dark shape
of the fish in the moonlight.

Caught in the air
in her open hand
it flies out into the sky
filled with black water.
She sees a flash of white
and looks after it.

Hands caught together
she reaches deeper water
her dark shape turns
and flashes white once
meeting moonlight
out past the dock
the water ripples
in one small place.

Walking back to the house alone
she knows she can be caught
and go back.
Out there she touches carefully
all the shapes
that come so quickly in the dark.

Near Death

“No one suspects the days to be gods.”

Emerson))

Leaning over from her knees
tending the grave of her young husband
an old woman with flowers finds death
has no companions.
She is both old and young at once
in his soft arms
she turns to bones and leaves the flowers
near death she suspects
the days are going somewhere
not too far from here
there are more flowers, more days
she leaves the flowers
and goes away with him
his heart so full with her once
an empty place for flowers now.

Tropical Storm Danielle

The storm is spreading now
Across Kent Island
Only 10 miles from here.

Bobby called from Tennessee to say
That Kenny died today,
Our childhood friend.

The summer of '62 is over
It's fall and 30 years are gone.
That night the storm turned northwest.

Please take care of us
So we aren't afraid,

There's just not much time
And the wind blows hard
We know about that.

But if there is some deep
Lack of love for us
Maybe we find what is enough.

I didn't go to Kenny's funeral
I thought of Bobby there
But what could I say?

Our old friend dead
And too young
I guess.

The storm did little damage here
But the wind kept me awake last night
Knowing it could have been much worse.