

Becoming Undone: Unpacking Life's Weight Week Five: New Venture

I choose this pantoum to give you an example of how one is written and because this particular one presents the image of traveling (one of our subthemes) – the perceived dangers; and what we leave unsaid.

A Ride in the Rain

The driver has no knife. He has no knife, no,
you think, and lower your head into his car.
A ride in the rain? The dark clouds bellow.
You saw him drinking at the local bar,

you think, and lower your head into his car.
Rain taps on the roof, falls on this familiar man:
You saw him drinking at the local bar.
He shrugs and offers up his empty hands.

Rain taps on the roof, falls on this familiar man,
and sugarcane stalks bend in the breeze.
He shrugs and offers up his empty hands.
As sewer pipes burst, flooding the street,

and sugarcane stalks bend in the breeze,
machetes swing into the green stems, low.
As sewer pipes burst, flooding the street,
bile is a blade at the back of your throat.

Machetes swing into the green stems, low.
A ride in the rain? The dark clouds bellow.
Bile is blade at the back of your throat.
The driver has no knife. He has no knife, no.

By Blas Falconer

The Journey

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice —
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”
each voice cried,
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do —
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver *New and Selected Poems* (Beacon Press, 1992)

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Writing Prompt:

If you've been to one of my workshops you've probably worked with this poem. It's one of my favorites and I believe it is one we can go back to repeatedly. As we conclude and look at our journey, take a deep look at this poem. What resonates with you? Circle the words or lines that speak to you. As you read it, what makes you smile or nod? What makes you tense or uncomfortable?

Now, write a poem thinking about what your new voice is saying to you. Write the poem as a pantoum. This will take a few drafts. I suggest writing the poem or free write in your journal without giving thought to form. Then, for your second draft, craft it as pantoum. Don't try to figure the pantoum out all at once. Let it come to you. Play around with the lines. Move them in and out. Sleep on it and come back to it. Let it grow.