

Jane Hirshfield

The Tongue Says Loneliness

The tongue says loneliness, anger, grief,
but does not feel them.

As Monday cannot feel Tuesday,
nor Thursday
reach back to Wednesday
as a mother reaches out for her found child.

As this life is not a gate, but the horse plunging through it.

Not a bell,
but the sound of the bell in the bell-shape,
lashing full strength at the first blow from inside the iron.

The Present

I wanted to give you something—
no stone, clay, bracelet,
no edible leaf could pass through.
Even a molecule's fragrance by then too large.
Giving had been taken, as you soon would be.
Still, I offered the puffs of air shaped to meaning.
They remained air.
I offered memory on memory,
but what is memory that dies with the fallible inks?
I offered apology, sorrow, longing. I offered anger.
How fine is the mesh of death. You can almost see through it.
I stood on one side of the present; you stood on the other.