On the Pulse of Morning

Maya Angelou

A Rock, A River, A Tree
Hosts to species long since departed,
Marked the mastodon.
The dinosaur, who left dry tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor.
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow
I will give you no hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness,
Have lain too long
Face down in ignorance
Your mouths spilling words

Armed for slaughter.
The Rock cries out to us today, you stand on me,
But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,
A River sings a beautiful song,
It says, come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually undersiege
Your armed struggles for profit
Have left collars of waste upon
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.
Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more. Come,
Clad in peace and I will sing the songs
The Creator gave to me when I and the
Tree and the Rock were one.
Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your
Brow and when you yet knew you still
Knew nothing.
The River sings and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing River and the wise Rock.
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.
They all hear
The speaking of the Tree.

They hear the first and last of every Tree
Speak to humankind today. Come to me, here beside the River.
Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed
On traveller, has been paid for.
You, who gave me my first name, you
Pawnee, Apache, Seneca, you
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of
Other seekers--desperate for gain,
Starving for gold.
You, the Turk, the Arab, the Swede, the German, the Eskimo, the
Scot,
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare
Praying for a dream.
Here, root yourselves beside me.
I am that Tree planted by the River,
Which will not be moved
I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree
I am yours--your Passages have been paid
Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.
History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream.

Women, children, men,
Take it into the palms of your hands.
Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.
Lift up your hearts
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.
Do not be wedded forever
To fear, yoked eternally
To brutality.

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out and upon me, the
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.
No less to Midas than the mendicant.
No less to you now than the mastodon then.

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, and into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.
Caged Bird

*Maya Angelou*

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Still I Rise

*Maya Angelou*

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.
Touched by an Angel

*Maya Angelou*

We, unaccustomed to courage  
exiles from delight  
live coiled in shells of loneliness  
until love leaves its high holy temple  
and comes into our sight  
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives  
and in its train come ecstasies  
old memories of pleasure  
ancient histories of pain.  
Yet if we are bold,  
love strikes away the chains of fear  
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity  
In the flush of love's light  
we dare be brave  
And suddenly we see  
that love costs all we are  
and will ever be.  
Yet it is only love  
which sets us free.

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Alone

*Maya Angelou*

Lying, thinking  
Last night  
How to find my soul a home  
Where water is not thirsty  
And bread loaf is not stone  
I came up with one thing  
And I don't believe I'm wrong  
That nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires  
With money they can't use  
Their wives run round like banshees  
Their children sing the blues  
They've got expensive doctors  
To cure their hearts of stone.  
But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.
**Woman Work**  
MAYA ANGELOU

I've got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
The baby to fry  
The chicken to fry  
I got company to feed  
The garden to weed  
I've got the shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The cane to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick.

Shine on me, sunshine  
Rain on me, rain  
Fall softly, dewdrops  
And cool my brow again.

Storm, blow me from here  
With your fiercest wind  
Let me float across the sky  
Till I can rest again.

Fall gently, snowflakes  
Cover me with white  
Cold icy kisses and  
Let me rest tonight.

Sun, rain, curving sky  
Mountain, ocean, leaf and stone  
Star shine, moon glow  
You're all that I can call my own.

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**Women**  
ALICE WALKER

They were women then  
My mama's generation  
Husky of voice--Stout of  
Step  
With fists as well as  
Hands  
How they battered down  
Doors  
And ironed  
Starched white  
Shirts  
How they led  
Armies  
Headragged Generals  
Across mines  
Fields  
Booby-trapped  
Ditches  
To discover books  
Desks  
A place for us  
How they knew that we  
**Must** know  
Without knowing a page  
Of it  
Themselves.

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**The Courage That My Mother Had**  
EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

The courage that my mother had  
Went with her, and is with her still:  
Rock from New England quarried;  
Now granite in a granite hill.  
The golden brooch my mother wore  
She left behind for me to wear;  
I have no thing I treasure more:  
Yet, it is something I could spare.  
Oh, if instead she'd left to me  
The thing she took into the grave!—  
That courage like a rock, which she  
Has no more need of, and I have.