GOLD BRANCH

46 poems by Eric Miller
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DEDICATION TO RACHEL TSAI
The Way is without beginning without end. While all things live and die, still you cannot rely upon their fulfillment. One moment is empty, another moment full; mere form can't be depended on, and the years cannot be stayed. Decay, growth, fullness and emptiness all end, and then begin again. Thus, we describe the Great Meaning's Plan and muse on the merits of infinity. Oh, the life of things is a headlong gallop, one mad dash— with every movement they alter, with every moment they shift. What should you do? What should you not do? Oh, everything will change of itself, that much, at least, is certain.
Sometimes in the continuing cause of beauty
I stand amazed at every wakened scene
which nature gives unto man's gain.
Such blessings we cannot conceive:
here stands a sycamore,
there a season's braving robin
flashes its heart's red heraldry
to the dazzling image of the morning sun.
The plowed black fields and moss gilded rocks
enables all who have the eyes to see
the endless beauty of the world's nativity.
Thus, I, to this simple morning sight,
with consecrating care poem this praise,
to stand in celebration of these days.
Bright blue and red and green characters dance with a lyric sheen upon the rain fresh pavement. The playful air rustles through the lamp-lit trees, and high above the skies at least are clearing. Suddenly, all cares seem unimportant. For this blessed moment, for a moment, stands with sweet serenity and justifies the sorrow of the ages.
The sea-call rings in vaulted shells.
With moving tides the currents chart
treasures and foreign music tuned
to salted airs of the sea's broad seasons.
So shall we incline with inward motion
to journey the furtherest gale-swept regions,
and there to muse upon time's meaning.
There the denizens from the unsounded depths
fathom all fantasies and deepen the heart
with emerald, black, and diamond dimensions.
Life abounds and spawns and makes a river
deep in the realities of light and dark.
Yet, even there, where the unknown rules,
all life obeys the urges of the lover
and unimagined worlds shine like strange jewels.
When shall we awaken to the child's plea, 
let cruelties command no long memory 
of embittered tears, but live to bear 
the sun-crowned laurel of spring's lyric?
0, how difficult our passions seem 
set next ideals - the denying rage, 
the frantic perturbations of old age, 
wholly given to its wasted dream. 
Yes, experience, too, must have its say, 
 tho' the heart sometimes too darkly documents 
feuds steeped in fear - mostly self-argument. 
Let time make its mark deep in the bark, 
but let, too, the child's rightful measure 
bear each year the full heart's treasure.
Suddenly awakened from slumber,  
the pure palace of sleep's empty silence  
is charged with music of night-rain.  
Asleep, I might have been a granite boulder  
in the nameless tower of a stony peak.  
Now, joy revels in the wind's commotion,  
with bare arms I shall embrace this storm.
The days and nights pass by –  
how far away from home I am.  
Tonight, I’m silent, not knowing why  
This life is what it has become.

I dreamed of a new awakening,  
hopes were brilliantly bannered in my heart  
mind and spirit were alive, burning  
with visions of a famous art.

Tonight, hopes still survive, though cares  
weigh heavily and I miss my children,  
O, it’s true, he who dares a dream  
suffers sometimes for the vision.
Last night the brilliant yellow moon,
like a cork bobbing in teasing cloud-waves,
appeared and disappeared.
When, for some moments it was not seen,
I wondered what great star-fish
nibbled in the depths on the bait.
Were it not for singing crickets
and the small bracelets of blue lights
in the distant hill's dark thickets,
I would think myself alone tonight.
Long, moonless thoughts of you stir deep inside,
like a river breeze issuing from the valley.
If Tu Fu were here
I think he would seize this night
with some immediate dear image
to character this calm loneliness –
with four lines this night would live an age!
There are rivers and oceans
deep forests and lands of strange rock,
amazing eyes that flash and glow
and hungry hearts,
impoverished arts,
and those
who are
alone.
Home
is where one sees
the world in one
deep in native dream
where life comes and goes:
turning off the kitchen stove,
at ease in pillow'd rest,
flushed with love's awakening desire.
Sometimes I think I've had enough
of love poems and romantic stuff.
One moment is eternal, another dust,
and I wonder why I must
continue praising swaying hips,
moonlight trembling on my lover's lips,
strange soulful eyes whose glances enter me
and invade my heart's sincerity.
I am a man mid-thirty old,
I've known tropical heat and polar cold;
I've read a thousand erudite editions,
been cheated out of fair commissions;
I've failed to honor some true intentions,
seen and heard things terrible to mention.
So, why should I, possessed of some learning,
a million dreams and countless yearnings,
exult the excellence of a new love's face -
give all my heart to a warm embrace,
as though experience had no privilege from new pain,
O, must it happen ever and ever again?
Knowing this yet still I can't deny,
life blooms most beautifully
in the dark-bright reflections of your eye.
Days are mute, half delirious,
as May casts chill shadows over spring.
My heart, too, darkens,
grows curiously silent and removed.
All about beauty stands mournfully unique,
and desires steep me in confusions.
No lovely eyes are turned to me,
nor can I, from this dull retarding season advance
beyond the dark day's edge.
Alone I count the hours,
collecting vague impressions in my mind.
I wander through gloomy dreams of half-lit halls,
and wonder like a child what it means.
High in the mountains
the jade green landscape descends
deep into the silence of distant vistas.
A thousand people populated the winding paths.
Wide-eyed children were everywhere,
curio and souvenir shops abounded.
We paused for "aiyu" refreshments
before ascending the steep stairway.
Bright sunlight glittered on white rock steps.
Framed by an imperial blue sky
the arched eaves of the temple
shimmered in vermillion, green, and gold.
On the facade of the towering temple,
stone-cut dragons came clearly into view.
Entering the cool shades of the open pavilion,
smoking incense waved in a hundred hands.
Before the alter, on a square of polished black stone, worshipers
cast their fateful fortunes.
Deeper in the recesses of the temple,
red and black lacquered boxes, bronze urns,
golden tassels and jade implements
danced in candlelight.
Into the open air again,
we took a path away from the festive throngs
to the highest hills.
Losing our way many times, we laughed.
You honored me with a "gold dog-hair" memento;
were such a thing available,
I would have gifted you a picture of the path
which we descended traveling home,
where the purity of the bright blue air
converged on cascading hills and billowed grasses.
Sometimes in dead winter
lips turned blue with cold.
As far as the eye could see,
nothing but the jeweled glitter of snow.
At the slightest advance of spring,
while the lakes were still solid,
we'd see who first could break the ice
with our bare bodies.
Summers we caught catfish with our hands,
with tied ropes swung from tree to tree.
Even now, in later life, I dare not summon
the dizzying refulgence of spring—
as a man accustomed to a meager diet
shuns the opulence of a feast.
Mandarin ducks nestle neck to neck, 
phoenix prize only the Wu-Tung tree, 
bluebirds and geese are famous messengers
live then, my friend, in this imagery.
Evening darkens her solitary forms, 
and what in day is green, gay, and general, 
becomes at night noble, solemn, and unique. 
The busy birds at song-fest in the fields 
yield now to cricket's earthen violins. 
The sky-hours, formally blue-bold and beautiful, 
now circulate in graying wisps of cloud, 
ribboning the full but far 'way moon 
in mists of distant dream's farewell. 
Yet how ample is this blue-grey archangel hour, 
with its mood deep solitudes of moonlit shade. 
Occasionally, dogs bark their tribal call, 
and with sharp sounds their deep notes break 
the vital cool confines of the night-bound air.
Foolish as it may seem
I decorate with poems
these long days without you,
like Emperor Yang-Ti, who,
unable to bear the bareness of winter
ordered leaves and flowers of silk
fashioned to the court yard trees.
I sit on my porch
overlooking the city of Taipei.
It is evening and rain sweeps across my pages,
making it difficult write.
The rain rattles window shutters,
knocks against nameless things in the dark,
stirs everything with excitement.
The mountain range before me
is totally obscured in a haze of milky-white,
yet, directly above, some stars still shine
amid the windows of the deeper night.
Typhoon will come tomorrow
and regardless what everyone does,
tomorrow waits like a secret in our hearts.
Now, the movement is wonderful,
it's in the trees, runs through the hair,
and moves the moonlighted clouds.
And 10,000 miles away
you are just rising
to great a brilliant, calm, October day.
High away into the careless night
where not so much as songs
could sing me in my hour of death,
comes things that nothing teaches,
comes things that nothing matters,
comes on the wings of the priested cries
the darling myths of angels
dying in an their ancient night.
And I, no more the age-drift maiden,
nor the dumb-fell man,
wing away all things that skies and dreams create.
Blue mists conceal the tops of mountains,  
the raucous soundings of wild cocks  
send echoes through green hills.  
Below my balcony, high above,  
butterflies flirt in the luxury of flowered trees.  
Down a steep path, falling fast to the valley,  
a lone figure moves among the bowing grasses,  
stooped with a burden on his back.  
I imagine he, too, dreams of his love  
far away in a city full of traffic.
When the willow trees girdling the river
are bending full and skirted proud,
and fish are leaping .in the light—
slippery, grey-backed, and secret-darting—
and golden huge cliff-rocks reveal their veins,
and day's sun is almost brilliant black;
when roses and lilies in abundant bloom
festoon the fields and trim the lawns;
when everything is bud-sweet and sticky,
and puddled rainbows mirror billowed heavens;
when trees and bumble-bees and the evening breeze
conspire with angleworms and a found dime,
then my youth recalls its poetry.
Last night a blanket of darkness
totally obscured the hills. No stars
cut rivers of light through empty heaven.
Neither heaven nor earth provided a path
for my long journey of dreams.
This morning a cock splits all silence.
Gazing out the balcony window,
the huge shoulders of green hills
assume again their burden of clouds.
A flight of wild geese,
like the shaft of a dark arrow,
streaks across the grey-pearl horizon,
disappearing as it penetrates
the cloudy folds of the morning's bosom.
Of beautiful women there are many, 
of desires the world has more; 
countless are the creatures of the ocean 
and the treasure of spring's green store. 
To set one's heart on a single Jove 
is a foolishness the wise agree; 
yet, though heaven's net holds a billion stars, 
without you the night seems empty.
I have had enough of spring,
I need some autumn depth to date
this promise of love's fullness.
Giddy sensations pass,
the thrilling energies which circulate
in the spine of spring's response
leaves little to be remembered.
All is so easily consumed
in the vanities of first flower.
The blossom comes and goes,
spelled with decay and ended with utter loss.
Leaf and branch must bear renewing hours
through barren winter's beseeching prayer.
So, not alone to the lovely, hectic, hurry
of insistent sensation
do I pledge my love and its creation.
So, too, time's harvest shall include us all,
sealing with joy and sorrow a season's end.
And, in no human way can we forestall
heaven's course to which the earth itself must bend.
Mortality outweighs all ways of men
and yet the love we simply bear
forever partakes an immortal share
and living once is ever lived again.
To you most grieved in death's insistent hour,
life's simple truths must bear the weight
of all so common to our common to our fate.
This then recall and hasten sorrow's end:
we live and die through time's eternal flower,
death serves but to deepen life's living power.
Tonight I'm all alone.
What to write about? 'bout moon,
'bout night's deep sea?
Currents course by—the ring
of eternity sounds in my ear.
And, though 10,000 miles away,
I hear traffic in Taipei.
Ah, even this incredible star above
cannot undo my misery!
Many nights my mind has pondered
mighty volumes of forgotten lore,
and written, too, in night's desperation
I've seen the negative aspects of creation
and the brute causes of war.
I've heard suffering people and lonely sorrows
soulfully pray for a fairer tomorrow,
and I've heard the people wail and dance and sing,
beautifully rising above everything.
Mounting the stone steps late at night,
high in the hills above Taipei,
I pause before ascending the star's heights.
Gazing below into a lake of jeweled lights,
my heart is suddenly at peace
in the gentle stream of a thousand
flower-scented breezes
I cannot quit this night.
The breeze is cool, exciting, and gentle. Bright moonlight tops the trees and all about some sacred rapture embraces the very air I breathe. Now, even dear friends seem distant—how like nature they are melted into this silence lit by shining stars! Here on the balcony where I write moonlight glistens for a moment in the wet ink which dries so quickly upon the scribbled page, and I wonder how like life this moving miracle of night is but reflection of dark and light.
I love to walk the busy streets
entranced by every face I greet.
I love the darkness and neon lights,
the darting glances and the sights
of people from every walk of life --
the air of privilege and of strife,
the destined look and wandering way;
all the things I love I cannot say.
And yet, if words could tell my feeling,
if in one poem I could give the meaning
of these simple excitements, so manifest
and moving in my quickened breast,
I would compact so many dreams and visions,
the varied actions and indecisions
that lead a man in this direction or that,
moved by strains of fancy or of fact.
Tonight the breeze is cool,  
gentle, deep, and quiet is the dark.  
Above the stars seem almost still,  
so heavenly fixed and final.  
But, love, within my heart I mark  
the changing forms of night's geometry  
which shapes the living legends of our dreams  
0, what stories these stars still tell,  
what human legends of heaven and hell.
How difficult it is to tell
the feelings which invade my heart
the sudden love and disappointment,
the dream of freedom and the cell,
the mixture of yes and no,
the depression and joyous glow—I
and yet never can I know
why all these things must be so.
I spend my life going here and there,
absorbed in desired hopes and happenings,
trying to be honest, always to care--
sometimes fearing that vain imaginings
are all I really dare.
He who loves too much is fated
to receive in turn only hatred.
The sweetest dream is quickly fled
before we waken from the bed.
How like lightening carne this love to me, steering the power which moves all things through this night-summer's soulful season. A sudden shimmering sensation reigns in this night's spectacle as warm sweet grass exudes its earthen odors, mingled with awakening perfume. O, love, how distant yet how soon the flaming wonder of a harvest moon reaches over the oak tree branch, and in my heart love's moving dance dreams beyond all time of you.
How long the night in night was bound
before the raying light was found
and star-routes in celestial line
merged into a single sign
of beauty rounded to a simple sight:
the sun, rising from the depths of night.
Ever-love,
if I could lay bare my soul
before the waking powers of this world,
and simply sing how beautiful you are,
arms of aggression would relax,
wars would suddenly cease,
and to every listening ear
a sweet balm of peace would pray
love's sacred silence to us all.
Dragons and Phoenix have no need of shelter, fish in the deep are unperturbed by storms, the creatures of T'ai Shan are not bothered by famine and the dawn-colored garments of His Wang Mu are ever clean. Yet, sometimes the sweetest looking fruit is bitter to the taste and a lovely mountain pass proves treacherous to overcome; a beautiful face may mask a demon, and hoped for happiness by sorrow is undone. Thus, the mortal and immortal in life combine, as yin and yang to shape our destined time.
The bay is surrounded with night,  
and the glittering liquid lights of Hong Kong's hills.  
All is silent, the casino boat in the distance  
glides along the jewel-mirrored surface.  
A sampan, its canvass secured, gently  
rises and falls with the water's breath.  
The city hums across the bay.  
Above, only a small drifting white cloud,  
and in night's deepest depths,  
a sole radiant star hangs overhead.
Ah, I have had my taste of powers mystical.
I have known fullness and waste, things tragic and comical.
I have performed such feats with natural law
that mundane science never saw.
I have known the wisdoms of the past,
understood the powers of Christ,
I have read Lao Tzu,
studied the I Ching through and through.
With secret archives and oracles
I, too, have performed some miracles.
I could tell great secrets,
things about the Way of Life, and circles—
how the Great Spirit repeats
itself in unending multiplicity.
I have equations for the mystery of time,
the relativity of space. Ah, it is beautiful to face
the ancient meaning of Chien-Chien,
and how with Kun-Kun it begins again.
What rare and reverential beauty
this common morning walk has brought
leaves of oak and elm and sycamore,
noble backed rocks dressed in lichen green,
black earth, new-plowed and rich with rain,
the golden sun to bright to say ...
How can I praise this blue sky,
this ground beneath my feet,
this inexplicable sweet air,
which lightens the heart's true consciousness
and stimulates the mind to dare
its rational delight?
To what purpose do we poets praise
what every common eye can see,
and every open heart can feel,
if not to sound unto time's reaching
the miracle of the simple and the real.
Depicted in the paintings of a Ching master one sees a field full of exquisite horses--some stretching voluptuously in the brilliant sun, others playfully nipping at the necks of companions, who rear, arch, and turn to some new advantage. It seems if my finger touched the river where scores of them slake their thirst, like the legs and nuzzles of these creatures it, too, would penetrate and disappear. How these scenes send pangs of longing to the heart as though one's own original nature is somehow relived within the magic of this art.
The colored clouds of the fiery sunset ringed the horizon with brilliant flags. I gazed out for a long moment, though a sudden chill was rising. Bags of darkness heaped up over the city. Not one star was visible within the hour.
The artists were singing in Nathan Park, 
people gathered all around. 
It was a wonderful Oriental art, 
and I still hear that Chinese sound.

The musicians sold gifts to make a living, 
pieces of dried fruit and chewing gum, 
and all the while their heart's were giving, 
as they sang and danced and beat the drum. 
The music was excited, lovely, and quick, 
but rain started pouring down, 
and above dark clouds were growing thick; 
0, how I love this Hong Kong town.

The streets were lit with brilliant characters, 
a million people scurried by - 
gold and jade and rich jewelry 
gleamed amid their dark, deep, eyes. 
In Nathan Park the music sounds, 
the dancers turn around and around 
as the people stand and stare. 
Their hearts are full of love and pain 
remembering a homeland's magic air, 
the heavenly greenness of their native ground

0, dance you artists for us all, 
for China and the human call. 
Let your voices rise and sing 
of love and sorrow and everything—
0, dance you artists for us all.

Let the intonations of your tongue 
quicken the heart's of everyone, 
as the music races to the heart 
with this excited Oriental art--
0, dance you artists for us all.
Life's almost never smooth,
hardly a family doesn't suffer crisis.
The best children experience problems,
and trouble's a knock on the door away.
Now life turns this way, now that,
rarely do we know where it's at.
Some error here, others there--
a terrible deed, an indifferent stare-
small offenses are imagined great crimes,
while evil actions are publically rewarded.
Where's the balance, where the balancer?
Though tight order was ever pre-established
and native knowing is the inheritance of man,
yet societies and individuals often go wrong.
0, when was the poise perfect?
Who could decide?
Yet, the moral order forever abides.
In the ancient days
I would have traveled to Li-Mo river
and yielded a poem to the depths,
tied knots of colored silk
on a gold branch for you to discover.
For you, I would have found
the finest kingfisher feathers
to adorn the sheen of your black hair,
searched throughout the kingdom
for an consummate artist
to feature the famous silence of your stare.
Lets you and I be friends,
thoughtful of each other’s needs,
understanding of our different creeds,
caring not for beginnings nor ends
of this or that, but for the middle
human-ground we stand upon.
Let us with loving kindness come
to honor honest hearts and not belittle
what life and destiny have done.