

The World Was Made For Love

Collected Poems



John Slade

She Would Like to Speak with You

What is it like to be a refugee?

Start with someone who is a librarian, a nurse, a teacher, a journalist,
 Someone who is also a mother, a wife, her mother's daughter,
 Someone who has brought life into the world, one, two, three times,
 Someone who never raised her hand against anyone,
 Certainly never with a knife, never with a gun. Never with a bomb.

Fire artillery shells at her apartment building,
 Shoot her brother with a sniper's bullet,
 Turn her daughter's school into a prison where her uncle was tortured in the gym.
 Take away her home, her job, her beloved cat, her family pictures, as you
 Toss her into the back of a neighbor's pick-up truck in the middle of the night,
 So that she can ride in the dust with her husband and children toward a border
 Which she knows already is closed.

Let her watch the last of her family's money flow into the hands of smugglers.
 Let her share the last of her family's food with strangers who have none.
 Let her wonder why the nations who have so much money for the endless war
 Are strangely absent while she sleeps on concrete, in mud, beside railroad tracks,
 In the rain.

Let her know the parched heat of a desert,
 Let her know the cold wet wind, the choppy black waves,
 The wail of her terrified child,
 As she crosses the sea at night from an endless hell to hopefully some lesser hell.

Let a stranger in a wetsuit carry her child to the rocky shore.
 Let her lose her woolen scarf as she takes from another stranger's hands
 A dry sweater, a dry coat.

Let her be taken with her family by bus to a nice safe camp where they can
 Eat and sleep and meet briefly with a doctor,
 Before another bus takes them across the island

To a “detention center” which is a prison
Without enough beds,
So they sleep on the concrete, inside a fence, under the same stars
That once shone over her home . . . her home.

What is it like to be a refugee?
She would like to speak with you, so that she could say,
“Once I too was a person.”



Woman's comb on the beach of Lesbos Island, Greece.



Saint Croix, Caribbean.

A Single Choice

It comes, finally, to a single choice:
Do we believe in our children,
Or do we believe in oil?
Do we bequeath to our young people
The greatest opportunity in all of human history,
Or do we poison the 21st century?
A single choice,
A global choice.



Loon mother with newborn chick.

Take Me Back

Take me back to another time,
When life was ripe upon the Earth.
I want to see the full abundance.
I want to hear the whooshing wings of a thousand geese.
I want to hear the thundering hooves of ten thousand buffalos.
I want to smell the fertile water of the sea,
Washing like laughter over a sheltering reef.
Take me back to another time,
When life fashioned itself into a million versions of perfection.



“School Strike for Climate”
Fridays For Future, Stockholm, Sweden, March 15, 2019.

Beautiful Child

Beautiful child, I'm sorry that we had to take your world away from you.
We had to drive to work, you see,
So that we could earn the money to feed you and clothe you,
And buy that red bicycle which you loved so much.

We were always in a hurry, you see,
Dashing through the weeks and the months and the years
While you grew into a person who watched us from a growing distance
With fear in your eyes.

Because, perhaps dim and distant in your mind, behind other cluttered thoughts,
You knew the world was warming,
You knew the ice was melting,
You knew the fires were burning,
And you knew that this was the world you were going to inherit,
While we, dashing, did so little to stop our adult insanity.

And so you were terrified.

My beautiful child, you were right.
And I was very, very wrong.



Precious life on a perfect planet.

Funeral Veil

Were Earth an increment closer to the sun,
No snow would there be, nor me.
Were Earth an increment further from the Golden One,
No rain would there be, nor me.

Wherefore then, in perfect and perpetual equilibrium,
Do we earthlings yearly conceal ourselves behind
A shroud ever darker,
Blocking with all manner of airborne muck
The gentle rays that would bless us, bless us, bless us unto eternity?

Shall we not allow the sun himself to bestow his spark
Unto our multitude of clamoring machines,
Before the Earth herself is forced to wear the veil
Of a mother mourning for her children?



A Mother's Gift

You drive the long and crowded road at dusk
That you drove today the other way at dawn.
The girl of hopes and dreams is now a husk,
The songs of love have dwindled to a yawn.

You have a sacred choice, good friend of mine,
Regarding those to whom you will bequeath
The air you breathe, and other gifts divine.
Four score and ten, a prayer, then underneath

The earth you'll be. Your legacy is what?
You give the kids the assets that remain.
Or turn the wheel and leave this asphalt rut,
And chart your course by nature's future gain.

Bless the children born for a century or more,
By nurturing the Earth; her health we must restore.



The team in Russia.

We the People

The Founding Fathers had each other;
Abraham Lincoln stood at the helm alone.
Now comes a time when We the Peoples of the World,
In harmony with Mother Nature,
Must reckon with the future together.
Together.
Or not at all.



Northern lights with Pleiades.

Star Dust

The slums of the world are one slum.
From the same dust of the same exploded star,
We spun, and slowly gathered into a small ball
Orbiting around a larger hot one.
The dust beneath our feet
Is the same as the feet themselves.
This bread we break or do not break with one another:
Star dust.
This wine in fellowship or sanctity or loneliness partaken,
Once reached in expanding waves of radiant dust across
The universe,
The heavens,
The dark.
Who are we not to share?



Sunlight glitters on the water.

The breeze sweeping across the lake plays with sparks of energy
that have just spent eight minutes and twenty seconds traveling from the sun.

Dip your cup and drink from the mystery
that gave you life.

Don't You See?

Don't you see? You are killing off all of your best people.

The little girl in the sinking rubber boat who was trampled by adults desperate to jump into the sea and then waded the last five meters to the rocky shore of a Greek island: this trampled child was one of your best.

She was still alive when a rescuer from Barcelona picked her up from the cold putrid water in the bottom of the boat . . . and handed her over the punctured gunnel to a rescuer from Greece, who waded with her in his arms to shore. But there was no ambulance. The child had been crushed inside her small chest by the trampling feet. Her mother, who had lost her in the panic, shrieked when she found her limp child lying on a blanket on the beach.

The mother held her daughter as the girl gasped for air . . . and turned slowly blue. Without ever opening her eyes, she died.

This girl, this child, had been taking piano lessons in Aleppo, Syria, until the war started.

No one on the rocky beach knew—except for her mother—that the girl's fingers, racing so gracefully over the keys, had been filled with a lifetime of magic.

The teenage girl from Palestine who was shot by a settler at a border crossing, because she protested too loudly at the daily abuse: she was one of your best. Her blood, seeping from a bullet wound in her throat, might have been stanching with a hand pressing a bandage, but no Palestinian hand was allowed to touch her.

The girl's blood, so red in the midday sun, trickled a short distance and then vanished into the ancient earth.

This teenage girl had already mended, with her clever hands, the broken wing of a sparrow. She had set the wing properly, applied a bandage, then soothed and calmed the bird with her gentle song. Her great reward was to watch the small brown bird, unbandaged after a month of healing, fly from her hand up into the hazy blue Palestinian sky.

Yes, this teenage girl would have become a gifted surgeon.

And the boy who lived in a mountain village where some warrior hid overnight in the hut of a goat farmer: yes, that boy was one of your best. He had a vision,

already at such a young age, of harnessing the energy from the sun to power his village, his village so dark every night. He wanted to bring light into his black village, so that he and his friends could study every evening. So that his mother could have a real stove, a real light, a real life.

Yes, he was one of your best, until a drone found the warrior hiding in the hut of a goat farmer, and someone on the other side of the world pushed a button, and the drone fired a missile which killed the warrior and a dozen other people in the village.

Including the boy with his vision of working with the sun.

Don't you see? The old fat ones get to live almost forever, while the young delicate ones—with gifts from the Creator in their hearts, in their minds, in their fingertips—are thrown away every day like rubbish.





Child's shoe lost on the beach,
Lesvos Island, Greece.

The Children of War

Syria, you shall be a Great Voice, guiding with your wisdom, as we make our way through the precarious 21st century.

Your refugee children, as they grow up, will speak in the many nations where they have found a home. They will never forget the war, the terror, the grief, as they speak. They will never forget their absolute demand for peace—a strong and lasting peace, built by the children of war, built by the Architects of Peace—as they speak to the people of many nations.

The children of Afghanistan, the children of Iraq, the children of Kurdistan, the Yazidi children, the children of Sudan, the children of Ethiopia, the children of Yemen: they bring a great gift.

The young refugees who are now camped in a squalid mud hole beside a closed border . . . will one day write powerful books, telling their story. They will one day become international human rights lawyers, defending the orphan children. They will one day become entrepreneurs, designing new uses for clean energy. They will one day make films about their epic journey, and about their dreams.

One of them shall write a symphony, which will thunder from the stages of Berlin and New York and Moscow and Beijing, and Aleppo, telling the irrepressible story of a people who have come to guide us all . . . on our epic human journey toward a far better world.



Fridays For Future
Stockholm, Sweden, March 15, 2019.

Education for the 21st Century

A little boy from Syria washes up on a beach.
The world stares at a picture of this young, well-dressed corpse,
Face-down on the wet sand.

An emaciated polar bear washes up on a beach.
It has starved to death because the ice where it used to live has melted.
A few people notice the picture on Facebook.

When things are so profoundly wrong,
When generation after generation goes to war,
When the world is so polluted that the planet itself is sickened,
Then we might spend a Sunday morning asking ourselves,
How much longer do we let all this devastation continue?

If we already know, as we do, about the causes of climate change,
And if we already know, as we do,
About the growing multitude of benefits from clean energy,
Then shouldn't we study those causes and those benefits in school,
Where young people are preparing themselves
To live on planet Earth for the next half-century?

Shouldn't we study—with full, serious courses
In every grade school, every high school, every trade school,
Every college and university around the world—
The Big Questions?
What is the melting of the Arctic ice cap going to mean to our grandchildren?
Can the sun and the wind really power the peoples of planet Earth?
How might the development of clean energy create more jobs, more careers,
And thus growing prosperity on a global level?
How might that sturdy prosperity create greater equality,
And thus stronger democracies, in countries around the world?
How might that shared clean energy, and the new schools and new medical clinics,
And the international networks of clean transportation,

Create a growing foundation for peace?
For peace.

If wars have a cause, or a number of causes, as they probably do,
Then shouldn't we study those causes in school,
Where young people are preparing themselves
To live as adults for the next half-century?

Shouldn't we study—with full, serious courses
In every grade school, every high school, every trade school,
Every college and university around the world—
The role of Profit as a cause of war?
The role of Religion as a cause of war.
The role of Overpopulation, of Drought, of Ancient Grievances,
As causes of war.
Because once we understand the causes,
Then we can begin to design the solutions to these eternal problems.

Shouldn't we study subjects that give us a sense of *purpose*?
Before civilization itself washes up on a beach.





Climate March
New York City, September 21, 2014.

It's Your Turn Now

Luke 2:19

“But Mary treasured up all these things
And pondered them in her heart.”

All right, Mary, you've pondered long enough.
For two thousand years, the boys have had every possible opportunity,
And they're *still* fighting their wars.
It's your turn now.
The men are still tossing pennies to the poor.
It's your turn now.
The men have cut down most of the olive trees,
And have poisoned most of the wells.
Now it's your turn.

We do not need another sacrificial victim.
We need mother teaching daughter.
For centuries, mothers have sent their sons off to war.
Now it's time for mothers to send their daughters off
To build a lasting peace.
I'm sorry, Mary, but
It's your turn . . . now.



**“Mr. President, I’m calling to let you know
that a billion kids are about to change the course of human history.”**

Where is the Music Today?

While the most hideous war raged in Viet Nam during the 1960s,
Music rose up to confront that war.
When people who marched for their civil rights were locked in jail cells,
Their freedom songs banished their fear and gave them strength.
Music poured out of the angry heart and the hopeful soul of the 1960s.

Where is the music today?
Where are the symphonies that celebrate our endangered Earth?
Where are the choirs that sing a requiem for the creatures of Genesis?
Where are the rock bands that rage against our daily crimes?
Where is the soprano who holds her microphone, not in Hollywood,
But in Bangladesh?



Once There Was an Egg

Once there was an egg. It could not fly.

Then there was a fledgling. It could not fly. It could eat food from its mother and father.

Then there was an adolescent. It could not fly. But it was starting to grow real feathers.

Then there were a few hops. Some awkward flapping. An instinctive urge to . . .

And then the beating wings caught the air beneath them
And lifted up this ever-changing creature,
So that finally, *finally*, it became what it truly could be.

* * * * *

Where are we now, O Peoples of the Earth?



Your Soul Remembers

So you awoke this morning with a soul full of sadness.
Your soul is sad because it hungers for the flowers of Eden.
Your soul is sad because it hungers for the pure cool gentle rain
That fell on the meadows of Eden.
Your soul is sad because it hungers for the songs of a thousand birds
Filling a sun-dappled forest,
Whereas today you might hear a bird or two singing
In the lone tree on the lawn.

Your soul aches for the exuberant love that once blossomed
With every dawn.
Your soul remembers the time when the footsteps of the Creator
Were still printed on the earth.



The Snuffing of Candles

The generation which never knew the blinking of fireflies on a summer night
Does not miss them.

Campers who hear the occasional “Garrunk!” of a solitary bullfrog
Proclaiming its existence,
Do not know that once, not so long ago,
Bullfrogs sat along the entire shore of their wilderness lake
And rumbled into the night by the hundreds.

Peepers are tiny frogs which emerge from the mud at the bottom of a frozen pond
As soon as the sheet of ice has melted.
They sit along the shore, silent, invisible,
Breathing the air for the first time in half a year.
As dusk darkens into night, they begin to sing,
Not one by one, but as a fervent chorus of piccolos trilling in the upper registers.
People who have never heard the peepers on a springtime evening
Do not know their collective prayer of gratitude and jubilation
For the munificent blessing of the return of spring.

How many of us have never heard the yodeling call of a loon,
Reaching across the black expanse of a sleeping lake,
And then, moments later, from a nearby bay,
The mournful wail of the mate’s reply?

Most people never miss the richness of what the world once was.
We do not know how lonely we are,
Nor why we are so mysteriously sad.



Mother humpback whale and calf,
Mo'orea Island, South Pacific.
Photograph by Jason Belport.

Where Infinite Mysteries
Are Woven With Infinite Love

And God said, “Let there be life.”

On the seventh day, the Creator did more than rest.

Behold, as He passed over the churning seas did He laugh
 When a great whale spouted,
 For whereas other creatures quietly breathed,
 The whales sent up to the sun a plume of silver mist,
 And thus proclaimed their joy that they were alive.

Lo, when He passed over the rolling prairies did He laugh
 To see herds of buffalo flowing like a river from horizon to horizon.
 The great joy of His laughter mixed with the thunder of their hooves.

And lo, when He walked through a forest at dawn
 And heard the twittering joy of the awakening birds,
 He laughed from deep in His heart
 At the beauty and abundance of all that He had created,
 Where before between the stars only emptiness and silence had dwelled.

* * *

Verily I say unto you, that all of creation was not yet accomplished.

With the dust of stars did He fashion red blood
 To flow through a beating heart,
 But with something more than dust did He fashion love to flow
 With unrelenting abundance from every human heart.

With the dust of stars did He fashion eyes blue and brown
 To see the beauty of this world,
 Eyes to read the books that poets wrote,
 Eyes to offer compassion or friendship or love.
 But with something more than dust did He fashion wisdom
 From all the eyes had seen,

From all the ears had heard,
From all the trails the feet had followed,
So that wisdom might serve as a guide to life.
This gift unto us He gave,
As years passed,
As generations passed,
As centuries passed,
So that we, His favored creatures, might flourish.

In those early days did the Creator clap His hands and laugh
As He watched the first unsteady steps of a child.
In those early days was His laughter rich with enormous hope
For this growing child, whose music, and poems, and epic tales
Would evolve to show the richness of the human soul,
Where before between the stars only emptiness and silence had dwelled.

Lo, in those early days, the Creator had expected our laughter in return.
He had expected our joy at being alive.
He had expected our wonder at the beauty in the luminous heavens,
In a springtime garden, in a rainbow, in a smile.
Yea, as He had created with stardust,
So He had created with love,
For such was His covenant with life.

Wherefore then do we now no longer hear the Creator's laughter?
Wherefore then do we now hear, in the emptiness and the silence
Between the stars,
The distant sound of the Creator weeping?



When God Sings the Blues

When God sings the Blues, the stars are his audience,
For most of them were never granted an Earth as a precious companion.
When God sings the Blues for His tiny round planet, His masterpiece,
Where beauty and mystery and life once flourished
Amidst the vast reaches of eternity,
The stars bestow their gentle light upon His anguished face,
Letting Him know, that they would gladly accept their own tiny planet,
That they would shine their light upon it,
That they would embrace it with their unrelenting warmth,
So that life might once again flourish,
Sailing on wings in the crystalline air,
Gallop on hooves across the fertile plains,
Swimming in abundance in the clean churning seas.

Thus the Old Master could once again sing with joy
And wonder and delight as He surveys His Garden of Life.



Architects of the Global Green Grid.

I Want a Purpose

I'm tired of exercising my thumbs on the keypad of my little cadaver machine.
 I want to harness the wind; I want to harness the sun.
 I want to launch a Renaissance.

I want to look up all day, not down.
 I want my face to be a bit sunburned when the five-o'clock whistle blows.

I want a job that requires that I spend my life learning,
 Though I was bored to death in high school.
 I want to think in terms of jet streams, as their meanderings bring us our weather.
 I want to think in terms of ocean currents, snaking like giant rivers around our planet.
 Yes, I want to go back to school, to sit at a desk, to raise my hand with a question.

Somebody told me there's a Renaissance coming.
 Somebody told me about a Weaving of Schools around the world,
 So that students can share their research and their pictures,
 Their music and their poems and their dreams.
 Yes, so that a global generation could grow up together, working together
 To solve planetary problems with planetary solutions.

Someone told me about jobs,
 Designing and building a Global Green Grid.
 Somebody told me about jobs,
 As we harness the sun, as we harness the wind,
 As we harness the ocean currents and the ocean waves.
 Yes, I could use a job,
 A job with a *purpose*.
 That would be like getting paid twice.

I'm tired of exercising my thumbs.
 I'm tired of being afraid of what's coming, and doing nothing about it.
 I'm tired of being bored, even though boredom is pretty much all I know.
 I'm tired of waking up in the morning already lonely, already sad.

I want to wrestle with the wind.
I want to cup a mirror to the sun.
And when I go to bed at night, I want to lay my head not only on the pillow,
But on the planet as well, for whom I worked all day, on whom I shall rest all night.

When I awake to greet the sun at dawn,
And step out the door to a breeze on my face,
I shall savor a powerful purpose . . . a *purpose* that beckons me.



Architects of Peace.



Honor the Creator by honoring the creation.