

A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day

Being the shortest day of the year

John Donne

'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's,
Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmask;
 The sun is spent, and now his flasks
 Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
 The world's whole sap is sunk;
The general balm th' hydroptic earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk,
Dead and interr'd; yet all these seem to laugh,
Compar'd with me, who am their epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers be
At the next world, that is, at the next spring;
 For I am every dead thing,
 In whom Love wrought new alchemy.
 For his art did express
A quintessence even from nothingness,
From dull privations, and lean emptiness;
He ruin'd me, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have;
 I, by Love's limbec, am the grave
 Of all that's nothing. Oft a flood
 Have we two wept, and so
Drown'd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two chaoses, when we did show
Care to aught else; and often absences
Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing the elixir grown;
 Were I a man, that I were one
 I needs must know; I should prefer,

If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love; all, all some properties invest;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light and body must be here.

But I am none; nor will my sun renew.
You lovers, for whose sake the lesser sun
 At this time to the Goat is run
 To fetch new lust, and give it you,
 Enjoy your summer all;
Since she enjoys her long night's festival,
Let me prepare towards her, and let me call
This hour her vigil, and her eve, since this
Both the year's, and the day's deep midnight is.

Things Which Are

A nocturne on St Lucy's Day, after John Donne
Jo Bell

Give thanks to any god that's listening
for this; the shortest day, the longest night of *yes*,
 the sixteen hours of dark we torched with kisses;
 with all our fire-ship fucking, fingering.
 Now, a glass half-full of moon;
two Christmas candles, tongues of heat; and you,
near-stranger, here. The clean throat of you,
the muscled body pulsing at my hand:
the unsprung power of a sleeping man.

An hour ago I watched that nameless bar
of flesh becoming full and sweet.
 The glory and the helplessness of it;
 the glove of poppy-tender skin. This year
 has opened up its hinge
to us; we tilt it back for meat, pilfering
its juice and spasm. Oh, this giddy thing,
its flip-flop tumble. Alchemy has fuck-all
to do with it; we're making ordinary miracles

in spite of winter; in a blaze of sweat and bone,
of slick and tangled bodies. What we are is this:
 a man with faults in him, of course
 but also love, as true and ragged as a stone;
 a woman, ready – *yes* – for
all the subtle give of tongue and muscle, or
for intimacy with its firework scatter
of consequence and chaos. Bring it on.
Put up a finger for the year to swivel on;

we don't accept defeat. We're here to start again;
we brace like acrobats across the day
 who now support, now push; who catch and lunge,
 who tighten round each other with a salty plunge
 and fall; or, like the sparks that lift away
to start the fire again
across the gap. Your hair, messed by my hands;
those toothsome cheeks; my sex, so sore and stained;
it all adds up. We are twice everything.
We'll blitz the darkest night with our small lightnings.

No sun required. We are illuminated
by our gasp and giggle; every laugh's
 a beacon. We have energy enough
 to sting like Scorpio and wake the dead.
 Don't think of kettles, might-bes;
don't you dare get up. Fill up that glass,
declare to any god that's listening our *yes!*
Just leave the lace and satin on the floor.
Come back to bed, love; help me praise the things that are.