Basiliké Pappa

In the Long Slow Stroke of the Midnight Bell

Darkness—and then unwelcome ivy. You bury a white bird in white handkerchiefs. All waters quiver, trees tremble, completely listening. In the still air that floats around, is it a wolf?

Mud and a vagueness. A tiny grain of earth between your teeth. Sudden pang of homesickness. Fear none of these things. All dark days are necessary. And then the glad times widely open their eyes and gaze into your own.

The craving in your soul. Say it and it becomes a fresh season, perfectly trimmed. Light shines a hole into the big day—warmth between old strings where music breathed no more.

Say it with the Hunter's shout, the craving in your soul. To live in forests and in the open air, like a swarm of fire-flies lives each hour of every day, disheveled, unadorned. All is everything—seize all, hold all.

I know a path of velvet green. Winter is reverse there. Hurry and gather cherries with the determination of an orphan gram of grain pushing, rising its little murmur through the lips of a god.

I know a meadow where the touch of time melts with no stain. All colors are found there, bright, but soft. Ever falling, falling, falling through parting clouds, warm sunbeams served on plates of gold.

Upon soft moss you may stay in human form, or take the ever changing shapes of water. Like a wild thing, come, oh, come with me away. I promise you limitless waves in the long slow stroke of the midnight bell.

Fear not the strange new path on which your feet are set. This way the stars have led. Under the glistening cherries, fear not my teeth so white, all in a row. Off there, through the mist, is home.

About the Poem

"In the Long Slow Stroke of the Midnight Bell" was created from the following works, listed in the order of their publication date:

Needwood Forest, by Francis Noel Clarke Mundy (1776)

The Metamorphoses of Ovid: Literally Translated into English Prose, with Copious Notes and Explanations, by Henry T. Riley (1893 edition)

Favorite Fairy Tales: The Childhood Choice of Representative Men and Women (1907)

The Wounded Eros: Sonnets, by Charles Gibson (1908)

The Trail of the Lonesome Pine, by John Fox Jr. (1912 edition)

Love Poems and Others, by D. H. Lawrence (1913)

A Book of Myths, by Jean Lang (1914)

Kazan, by James Oliver Curwood (1914)

Tender Buttons: Objects - Food - Rooms, by Gertrude Stein (1914)

St. Nicholas Book of Plays and Operettas: Second Series (1916)

The Story-Book of Science, by Jean-Henri Fabre, translated by Florence Constable Bicknell (1917)

Geography and Plays, by Gertrude Stein (1922)

About the poem and the process of composing it, Basiliké Pappa writes:

> They say a wolf in a dream often stands for one's inner power and intuition, for one's wild nature and yearning for freedom. A wolf may appear in our dreams to point us in the right direction, help us find our way home or what it is we really want. "*Trust yourself again, dare to roam free,*" says the wolf. *"Run with me, and I will show you how."*
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> I can't pinpoint the exact moment when the idea to write about a dream-wolf came to me. What I knew though when I began picking words from Gertrude Stein's books was this: the number twelve was somehow going to play a part in my poem.
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> I copied excerpts from Stein in a clean file and started rearranging the words. Gibson's sonnets came next, so contrary to Stein's experimental prose. I wove his words and phrases into hers. From there, I moved from one book to another, selecting passages; adding and replacing words; cutting, combining, and dismantling sentences, until I had

drawn from twelve sources. The wolf that appears in a dark dream to offer guidance and light was somewhere in there, waiting to be found in the long slow stroke of the midnight bell.

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