

Rainer Maria Rilke

My eyes already touch the sunny hill.
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has inner light, even from a distance-

and charges us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it,
we already are; a gesture waves us on
answering our own wave...
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

Translated by Robert Bly

NO ONE LIVES HIS LIFE

Disguised since childhood,
haphazardly assembled
from voices and fears and little pleasures,

We come of age as masks.
Our true face never speaks.

Somewhere there must be storehouses
where all these lives are laid away
like suits of armour or old carriages
or cloths hanging limply on the walls.

Maybe all paths lead here,
to the repository of un-lived things.

RIPENING BARBERRIES

Already the ripening barberries are red
and the old asters hardly breathe in their beds.
The man who is not rich now as summer goes
will wait and wait and never be himself.

The man who cannot quietly close his eyes
certain that there is vision after vision inside,
simply waiting for nighttime
to rise all around him in darkness –
it's all over for him, he's like an old man.

Nothing else will come; no more days will open
and everything that does happen will cheat him.
Even You, my God. And You are like a stone
that draws him daily deeper into the depths.

IMAGINARY BIOGRAPHY

First childhood, no limits, no renunciations,
no goals. Such unthinking joy.
Then abruptly terror, schoolrooms, boundaries, captivity,
and a plunge into temptation and deep loss.

Defiance. The one crushed will be the crusher now,
and he avenges his defeats no others.
Loved, feared, he rescues, wrestles, wins,
and overpowers others, act by act.

And then all alone in space, in lightness, in cold.
But deep in the shape he has made to stand erect,

he takes a breath, as if reaching for the First, Primitive - - -

The God explodes from his hiding place.