

## Optimism

Jane Hirshfield

More and more I have come to admire resilience.  
Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam  
returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous  
tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side,  
it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true.  
But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers,  
mitochondria, figs — all this resinous, unretractable earth.

## Things to Do in the Belly of the Whale

Dan Albergotti

Measure the walls. Count the ribs. Notch the long days.  
Look up for blue sky through the spout. Make small fires  
with the broken hulls of fishing boats. Practice smoke signals.  
Call old friends, and listen for echoes of distant voices.  
Organize your calendar. Dream of the beach. Look each way  
for the dim glow of light. Work on your reports. Review  
each of your life's ten million choices. Endure moments  
of self-loathing. Find the evidence of those before you.  
Destroy it. Try to be very quiet, and listen for the sound  
of gears and moving water. Listen for the sound of your heart.  
Be thankful that you are here, swallowed with all hope,  
where you can rest and wait. Be nostalgic. Think of all  
the things you did and could have done. Remember  
treading water in the center of the still night sea, your toes  
pointing again and again down, down into the black depths.



## Wild Peaches

BY ELINOR WYLIE

1

When the world turns completely upside down  
You say we'll emigrate to the Eastern Shore  
Aboard a river-boat from Baltimore;  
We'll live among wild peach trees, miles from town,  
You'll wear a coonskin cap, and I a gown  
Homespun, dyed butternut's dark gold color.  
Lost, like your lotus-eating ancestor,  
We'll swim in milk and honey till we drown.

The winter will be short, the summer long,  
The autumn amber-hued, sunny and hot,  
Tasting of cider and of scuppernong;  
All seasons sweet, but autumn best of all.  
The squirrels in their silver fur will fall  
Like falling leaves, like fruit, before your shot.

2

The autumn frosts will lie upon the grass  
Like bloom on grapes of purple-brown and gold.  
The misted early mornings will be cold;  
The little puddles will be roofed with glass.  
The sun, which burns from copper into brass,  
Melts these at noon, and makes the boys unfold  
Their knitted mufflers; full as they can hold  
Fat pockets dribble chestnuts as they pass.

Peaches grow wild, and pigs can live in clover;  
A barrel of salted herrings lasts a year;  
The spring begins before the winter's over.  
By February you may find the skins  
Of garter snakes and water moccasins  
Dwindled and harsh, dead-white and cloudy-clear.

3

When April pours the colors of a shell  
Upon the hills, when every little creek  
Is shot with silver from the Chesapeake  
In shoals new-minted by the ocean swell,  
When strawberries go begging, and the sleek  
Blue plums lie open to the blackbird's beak,  
We shall live well — we shall live very well.

The months between the cherries and the peaches  
Are brimming cornucopias which spill  
Fruits red and purple, sombre-bloomed and black;  
Then, down rich fields and frosty river beaches  
We'll trample bright persimmons, while you kill  
Bronze partridge, speckled quail, and canvasback.

4

Down to the Puritan marrow of my bones  
There's something in this richness that I hate.  
I love the look, austere, immaculate,  
Of landscapes drawn in pearly monotones.  
There's something in my very blood that owns  
Bare hills, cold silver on a sky of slate,  
A thread of water, churned to milky spate  
Streaming through slanted pastures fenced with stones.

I love those skies, thin blue or snowy gray,

Those fields sparse-planted, rendering meagre sheaves;  
That spring, briefer than apple-blossom's breath,  
Summer, so much too beautiful to stay,  
Swift autumn, like a bonfire of leaves,  
And sleepy winter, like the sleep of death.