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Poem

Wanting to die

Anne Sexton

Since you ask, most days I cannot remember.
I walk in my clothing, unmarked by that voyage.
Then the almost unnameable lust returns.

Even then I have nothing against life.
I know well the grass blades you mention,
the furniture you have placed under the sun.

But suicides have a special language.
Like carpenters they want to know *which tools*.
They never ask *why build*.

Twice I have so simply declared myself,
have possessed the enemy, eaten the enemy,
have taken on his craft, his magic.

In this way, heavy and thoughtful,
warmer than oil or water,
I have rested, drooling at the mouth-hole.

I did not think of my body at needle point.
Even the cornea and the leftover urine were gone.
Suicides have already betrayed the body.

Still-born, they don't always die,
but dazzled, they can't forget a drug so sweet
that even children would look on and smile.

To thrust all that life under your tongue!—
that, all by itself, becomes a passion.
Death's a sad bone; bruised, you'd say,

and yet she waits for me, year after year,
to so delicately undo an old wound,
to empty my breath from its bad prison.

Balanced there, suicides sometimes meet,
raging at the fruit a pumped-up moon,
leaving the bread they mistook for a kiss,

leaving the page of the book carelessly open,
something unsaid, the phone off the hook
and the love whatever it was, an infection.

From *The Complete Poems of Anne Sexton* (Houghton Mifflin, 1981). ©1981 Linda Gray Sexton and Loring Conant, Jr. Reprinted with the permission of Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc.

Anne Sexton (1928–1974) was an American poet of the Confessional school. Throughout her life she had severe depression and was hospitalised on several occasions. She began writing poetry while recovering after a suicide attempt in 1956, as suggested by her therapist, Dr Martin Orne, and almost instantly won great acclaim – her first book, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), was critically praised and nominated for a National Book Award. Sexton's poetry explored childhood guilt, mental illness, motherhood and female sexuality in a candid and unflinching way (she thought that poetry 'should almost hurt'), and is characterised by musical rhythms and striking imagery. She died by asphyxiating herself.

Researched by Kasia Krawczyk.