

Breaking Free

Stuart Kestenbaum

I am pledging allegiance to the flag
in the basement classroom when
my crewcut friend appears at the door
with a message. He whispers to the teacher

who motions to me and I learn that
my dog has followed me to school.
What an occasion, that above all the other
scents in the world, all the other

high-topped sneakers, he has found me out
I learn that he has already made it through
the first grade, where he has
muddied a teacher's dress with his dark paws.

I imagine his journey as he runs down
the long corridors that smell of chalk dust
and institutional cleanser, cantering
past the principal's office, the holy of holies,

where the records are kept. I see him sniffing
at the blunt toed shoes of the army
of teachers who find him.
He wags his tail when he sees me, but I am

overcome with my notoriety. Why did you
follow me, why single me out? I get the dog
and put him out the front entrance.
Go home, I tell him, go on home, ignoring

his optimistic eyes, shutting
the great wooden doors
on that part of me that is
without a collar and wild.

Sick

Shel Silverstein - 1930-1999

"I cannot go to school today,"
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
"I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I'm going blind in my right eye.
My tonsils are as big as rocks,
I've counted sixteen chicken pox
And there's one more—that's seventeen,
And don't you think my face looks green?
My leg is cut—my eyes are blue—
It might be instamatic flu.
I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,
I'm sure that my left leg is broke—
My hip hurts when I move my chin,
My belly button's caving in,
My back is wrenched, my ankle's sprained,
My 'pendix pains each time it rains.
My nose is cold, my toes are numb.
I have a sliver in my thumb.
My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,
I hardly whisper when I speak.
My tongue is filling up my mouth,
I think my hair is falling out.
My elbow's bent, my spine ain't straight,
My temperature is one-o-eight.
My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,
There is a hole inside my ear.
I have a hangnail, and my heart is—what?
What's that? What's that you say?
You say today is. . .Saturday?
G'bye, I'm going out to play!"

Give Yourself Some Flowers

Marcus Amaker

And in the beginning,
God gave your body
a checklist:

Keep your heart
on beat
and your lungs
dancing with oxygen,
not passive to air.

Make sure
the path of your blood
slows down
for checkpoints
and avoids
bumps
in the road.

Train your nerves
to keep a balanced pace
and stay within
the lines
of steady flow.

Push forward
without putting
too much
pressure
on movement.

Remember
to return to water
when your spirit
and its frame
are in drought.

Treat your body
like a well-rounded planet
built for all seasons,

or pretend you are
an adaptable star:

Float in the black
and stay there
if you need to,

save some light
for yourself.

In other words,
rest like the sun does:

Schedule some time
to stay out of sight
when too many people
praise warm energy.

Keep in mind
all of these things

when depression
tells you
nothing is working.

Keep in mind
all of these things

when it tells you
there is no
invisible force
connecting us,

when your veins
are stopped by blood clots,

when your bones are dry,
and the water
is too quick to boil.

Keep in mind
all of these things
when it tells you
that the soul is like the body:

Made to be broken,
open to deterioration
and doubt. Yes,

keep in mind
all of these things
and remember:

Even when it
seems like
the clock isn't ticking,

you were made perfectly
for this moment
in time.