

Sophia in Arcadia



RICHARD WEHRMAN



S

Sophia in Arcadia



RICHARD WEHRMAN

MERLINWOOD BOOKS

Copyright © 2010 Richard Wehrman
Digital PDF e-book Copyright © 2012 Richard Wehrman



Merlinwood Books
PO Box 146
East Bloomfield, New York 14443

www.richardwehrman.com
richard@merlinwood.net

These poems arose from the awareness of a feminine presence that made herself known during the preparation and growth of a small garden on our country land, planted after many years of neglect.

Writing early every morning out-of-doors, looking out across the grass and trees, a presence was often felt in the air above the garden—which hovered, expanded, came close, or seemed to disappear..

The poems were written in the order presented, between mid-July and late August, 2009.



For Sophia

Inwardly she rises,
the one you always wanted:
protector, warrior, fierce queen
of the bright blade.
She confers no invulnerability
to the body, but builds
your inner bones of steel.
Bodies are cut down,
wounds suffered, and age abets decay.
Her strength, you will see in time,
was all your own: Inviolability.
The One you both guard
needs no protection:
you and she are essential parts.
Body blunts the blow that
aims to damage spirit;
She comes—not only inner strength—
but Strength Herself.
Past her no foe can find an entry:
all weapons lose their power,
and Who We Are moves forward
into silence, able now through her,
to serve.

She, No Figment But The Air Herself

*Watch, and I will spin a web
for you—not one of being caught,
but one that sets our being free;
eyes open wide, let ears attend to what
these written words now say:*

The green world forms
upon the flutter of a wing,
the coolness of the breeze sighs out
from bird song all about;
tiny bee and beetle dance upon the
currents of the day,
waters made of air now swirl
in vortices combined in dizzying array;
hawk and deer appear, as on command—
not mine, but She who strides in measured steps
so regally across the field;
garment glistening in greens of summer's
bright display, blooms trumpeting
from vines entwining in
her garment's interwoven weave;
Her gaze about—itself the growth of mid-July—
as She and I, eyes linked do to each other
gaze, then bend upon our
knee and bow.

Would I flow into the very air,
soul inside of birdsong lifted there—
sliding in the ease of sun set down,
gently to the earth, where all about
is bliss, unbound.

These arms that hold me are my very own,
the arms of every lover ever known—
whose comfort wraps around me
like a leaf blown breeze,
as empty of all strife, I sink—relaxed—
in my own ease.

Daylight abounds,
yet I hear her—Moonlight
calling: Why abandon me, favoring
your bright father?
Lonely I am without you,
who stay inside with your yellow lamps
and trembling blue-white shadows.
Forsake sleep, and arise with me!
Lovers pine always for attention,
and I call over and over
at your window.
How can ears be so dumb
and eyes so sightless?
My love, everything you want is here,
And only your age-long ignorance
keeps our love-dry lips,
our arms, our
souls apart.

Boatman, boatman,
turn the boat towards shore!
She awaits whose beauty
called us here.

Oceans away we heard her call,
over water to our empty land
of rock and sand:

Sunset piled her tresses high
into the azure evening sky,
gilt upon gilt
upon gold.

At night she loosed her robe for us—
diamonds and pearls adorned the sky
above the canopy of our
empty marriage bed.

We took to sea and
traveled all the world to find her—
now she moves beyond the
trees upon the shore.

Boatman! There! Her light
illumines night, she beckons on
the waters.

Beached, we are running towards
our utmost dream—our hearts,
your heart—
we are apart no more!

These words are so tired
of being words;
these words want desperately
to be bodies, to be hearts
and souls that meet—
without restriction, beyond
inhibition.

These words want no clothes,
no meanings that overlay,
no convolutions, no confusions.
These words want your
body, your soul, your infinite
beauty that enraptures;

these words want to fall away—
sentence into syllable,
sense into senselessness,
giving up everything:
I into you, we,
into each other.

Before I saw your face
you were always before me;
you leapt from any woman's eyes—
the rope of desire drew me
next to you.
Deep inside I knew you were there,
but my eyes were caught by your outer beauty—
the ecstatic gift of the flower:
your dark soft eyes,
your luscious open lips.
And who am I to say they are different?
Your magic weaves all passions
of this world into one.
Now I dive into each, as a treasure—
always coming back,
always to you.

It comes, this early
early light of dawn. The stars,
so brilliant in the night have given up
their light—not loss but lent
as power for the day—but here, too soon
to speak of sun light.

All is hushed.
A stillness in a balancing between.
We wait.

As though a trial has passed,
a passage through some ghostly
realm of fear—and we await in silence
that which comes.

Not seen, or only barely seen.
Not felt, yet something moves within us.
We strain, but only with the ear alert,
the eye resolved, our attention at the edge of
every waving hair—the skin
itself leans forward.

It comes.
We know it now
without our knowing who or
what or when. We know the light will come:
we are assured, we are upheld, our
strength is gathered in our
readiness to step.

Now quiet all.
The wind!
I hear the wind arise!

To love Me,
you must be fearless.
If you say I don't exist,
then of course, we can never be.
When you first saw
the raging beauty in my being—
do you remember, how
your whole world fell apart?
There was no space
in your heart for drawing
lines of distinction—
you would have done anything
to reach me, to draw my
breast to yours.
Give up your old ways
of counting money and keeping
accounts, balancing this
meaning against that.
I have returned to offer you
this doorway into ecstasy:
abandon all your old reasons
why not, and leap into me,
into my very heart.

She comes closer.

From the woodland where
I felt her softness and my sinking in,
she steps—aglow in
radiant resolve.
Within her grasp
an unexpected gift she cannot give,
but only I can claim: unsheathed,
its ruby handle bright, it flares
above the brilliant sharp-edged blade—
A wonder out of beauty
in the unity we made, a sword,
astounding to behold: Truth made metal,
bright, unstained,
upon which ignorance must fall
and be reborn, as I myself have done
and been remade.

Hands of healing gathered round,
as I slept in my chair—
Green the light that filtered down,
her hands upon my hair;

She, the tallest stood behind—
her helpers in a row,
Breezes brought their entry in,
hands gentle and so slow—

as I was held so was I healed—
from consequence of sin,
from time's long residue of fear,
from separateness, within.

You and I speak of the
same things—that's why we have
these conversations.
We've known inside what's important,
what has been denied by so
many around us.
We are like lovers long apart,
who find each other on a crowded
street in a strange city.
Our joy obliterates armies,
and thousands of gray buildings
cease to exist. Leaning close, holding hands,
we tell with excitement of our worldly
trials, as all the while
She gathers closer around us:
birds and flowers stop to listen, the
very dew opens an ear.
All it takes is this opening—one to the other.
Blessedness flows out from that crack;
right here, the whole world
is born.

Can we call these words,
as she and I sit in conversation?
You would see an old man writing in his book,
pencil moving slowly over paper.

But I see her gathered robe,
her gown of green iridescence;
her fingers ringed with flowers,
her starlit eyes, jewels of deep water.

I hear her voice in the liquid song of birds,
the rustle of her skirt, the very air.
And when she speaks, her lips invite of me
so many long dreamed things,

That I am struck with dumbness and an open-throated joy.
For I am hers, to do with as she will,
her servant glad to leave his self behind,
becoming nothing, if it serve,
in any way at all,
her will.

You can never end
your love songs to her beauty,
for she comes in a thousand ways—
not in disguises but adornments:
you could call her any name you choose—
each one is the right one,
if your passion is pure and the thought
of her name inflames you completely.
But don't get caught in the
wild ride of your own imaginings:
this is her garden. She brought you and I
into being, not the other way round.
Yet here I am lecturing again—
fool that I am—while above
me her lips descend, and I am lost
once more into the brilliant
light of the world.

Today a quietness abounds,
as though you have withdrawn,
and yet your presence waits

in everything: the leaves upon the trees,
the stillness in the grass, the absence
of the birds and squirrels and bees.

There is no sense of loss—
only the mystery of change:
how you can turn and seem to disappear—

and yet I know with every sense
that you are fully here.
Like breath drawn in,

you move from outer to the inner:
the sky is full and humid overhead, all
moisture seems to gather there—

we know it comes,
assured, we wait and drink this silence:
soon it falls, the rain.

Out of the green mist and
gray-blue haze, your face is lit
with the orange light of pine bark,
struck from the side, laid with
a whispered touch.

I strain to see, beyond the black oak,
past the density of fir, to the hill's edge—
gold glows out of green and fills the par-
ticles
of air with pale peach radiance.

Now it brightens at the edge of you—
a flaring down your cheek, your neck,
the angle of your eye—and we
are each revealed in beauty
from the shadows,

At the coming of the king,
at the heralding of dawn.

Light strikes darkness,
as flint does steel—but
only by arising.

Sequins glitter from her gown,
last night's raindrops
formed upon the feather lace.

Old stumps rise to shake off sixty years
and dance—a stately dance, in socks
with soaking feet—

but who could care,
when one so dazzling in beauty,
comes close and holds your hand?

Whose smile is it,
that breaks through the wrinkled
mask of age?

You've seen the way it happens:
someone stern and bent about their business
falls into your trap of happiness;

Their eyes light up,
the clay around their body breaks
and falls away,

And in an instant someone
ageless shines their god-light back at you,
a smile spreading wide,

Bright eyes deep with joy in joining yours,
maybe with a laugh: each gives
the other up into each other,

Children again,
lovers who have stumbled in, and just
discovered love.

Today, dear one, I thought that you were distant.
I—unable to see you, standing by the garden,
or moving among the trees.

Then the wind moved, tiny caterpillars
climbed on silken threads, sunlight shifted green-lit
patterns on the grass like curtains
on the bottom of the sea.

And I saw that you were with me
everywhere, always in front of me, behind—
and as I close my eyes—inside.

Once I thought you were a trickster,
always hiding in plain sight.

Now I see the trick was one I played upon myself:
for you are where you always are,
have been, and will be—

In the space of my own being, filling the very
world, herself.

This morning you are everywhere:
moisture in the air,
moisture in the leaves,
moisture in the grass and
soaking into all.

Long ago we learned the words to call
you something else: rain or wind or sunshine.
This morning you bring the essence
of rivers, lakes and oceans;
our dry world remembers our old
home in your womb.

These gray wet days send us inside,
not to escape, but to feel the way
you permeate all:

how dryness is the home of bones and sand;
how moistness is what moves inside us,
tides and currents in the vast sea
of our heart.

Outside, silence means absence;
how often we live on the outside!

Inside, silence means presence:
a fullness that touches everywhere,
all the way up, all the way down.

This is the silence we are born of;
this silence welcomes us home, as we
leave behind our last breath.

In-between, we wander—
trying to fill up what is already full.

Let us relax from this seeking outside;
to watch in amazement, the empty cup
fill before our eyes.

Slowly, quietly, she approaches.

Not by keen sight, but by
dropping away, as the tide recedes
from the sand.

What we brought with us
must be loosened and drained away,
that we be filled with her form,
her essence—recognized as our own.

In this way she is come, completely.
And if not, all we have left
are ourselves, tired and worn from
constant reassertion.

To enter the presence of the
Queen, we must be absent. What we
do not willingly give up, she will
claim anyway.

Only glory remains, and a chorus
of exultation, floating as it came, on
the whisper of a breeze.

Suddenly, out of silence,
you are heard—

All about, seen by our ears:
Aliveness. Our eyes fall upon the
movement of light: pale green,
aqua, ochre.

Everywhere your voice—
not only as sound, but being—
and we are rocked within, as though
gliding on a swing.

At the edge of the field
you dance with the trees, one
inseparate moving.

Up and down the hill you run,
waving alfalfa, gliding into the sky.
Whatever we are lifts with you,

A winged eye that sees in all directions—
relaxed into our own weight,
carried home on the wind.

Beyond the pines,
the air above the garden
dances with white butterflies.

Squash blossoms welcome
the intimacy of bees,
apples we will never eat offer a home
to wasps, then become a sweet
dessert to deer.

Sunshine brings its own gift:
leaves drinking light, light creating color,
color becoming corn and
peas and beans.

We can pick away no part
that does not gather all the others in.

Each taste is a whole summer,
each meal with you,
feeds the whole world.

Of course you live
in the uncontained—
as soon as I open my door
you flood in.
Walls close us in, and you out.
This tender part of me needs protecting,
and these summer days when we
lie together as lovers
will not last forever.
Seasons change, and you withdraw
as well, deep into the earth.
But even then I can find you,
striding alone on a winter path,
or sheltered against
your own cold wind,
watching wild geese wheel
above the frozen lake.
So we shut ourselves away,
each forgetting the other, like lovers
who broke off with bitterness,
visiting only in dreams
before sunrise.
But your promise is mine as well,
and we find our way back—
as the sun does—year after year.
Is it you who arrives first, or I?
That time, awaiting your
beloved, is difficult.
But the meeting, the return, is so joyous,
as our arms encircle each other,
as our lips, which prayed
through the dark nights,
meet.

All of a sudden
it pulls away—
the surf from the shore—
and you stand turning,
sea bed exposed.
Everywhere is quiet—
the gulls have wheeled away—
and you stand
at the edge of this silence,
straining, leaning into
the limits of listening—
to the sound of waterfalls,
and of cataracts, but
nothing can be seen
but a pressure,
but a distant arriving
roar.

*She Cannot Withdraw For
We Are Bound Together*

She cannot withdraw,
unless I walk into separateness:
we are bound, ankle to wrist,
lip to lip.
Not with rope or chains,
but with being ourselves, with
being each other.

Autumn comes, and I lose my leaves;
winter arrives, and she is snow and
ice everywhere.
Springtime, and we abandon all
rules and customs, becoming fierce
lovers in wild abandon.

By summer, she is filled
with fruits and flowers—and I,
husbanding our bounty,
say prayers at night to the fields of
stars and galaxies, shining
over our dark, vine-
covered bed.

Last night lightening flashed across the skies;
clouds exploded out of blackness,
fire burned etched lines
into the heavens.

This morning all is warm and moist, serene.
Humid breezes lift the leaves, and
the land is caressed—where last night
it was soaked and beaten.

I remember—as a child—drinking in your
many changing faces, as a joy and uncontained
excitement.

Now as an old man, I read signs and
portents, meanings and intent.

Still, I know as little of your deep ways
as I ever did, and long for my
old child-like fearlessness—

when greeting your world was a gift,
when your anger and your smiles were neither—
but only the astounding light and dark
with which every day
began.

In this silence, your presence is duration;
you take all the time there is,
you fill it up completely.
No one rushes you;
there is no way you can be rushed.
So many things—all things—
are done as they are done;
their doing and their being done
is all the time they need.

We turn on a switch, we watch our
clock-work world charge on ahead:
machines of progress, greater productivity,
nine-to-five, twenty-four-seven.

But our franticness floats in you;
you who have as long as the whole world takes,
you who lets the stars run down,
you who gives everything its long due rest by dying,
you who raise the sun, and watch again,
the world begin.

*I Cannot Find You There,
For You Are Here*

So quietly you stand:
where I leave off and you begin,
there is no way to see.
Over and over,
I thought between us was a meeting—
hands touching,
lips kissing.
But now I have a larger body—
yet it is not mine.
For you and I are looking back
at me in silence—
and there is no way to say
where we leave off,
and who we once called me,
begins.

Once, I could not tolerate
this silence,
this empty presence of you.
Then, I had to fill you up with thoughts,
or entertainments;
people, books, activity
of any kind.
But today—for a while—
this silence is the food I need,
the nothing that is full of you—
tree or leaf or insect,
sunlight in the air,
garden growing, folding chair
upon the lawn.
Within me—whatever these feelings
and these recognitions are—
now slide away from me-ness
and from being mine:
moisture rolling down an ice-filled glass
to emptiness,
to silence now,
to empty presence here,
with you.

What do I call you—
God, Sophia, Beloved?
If I say you are *Earth Herself*,
is that better or worse than
the name *Celestial Heaven*?
You work at me from
all directions,
refusing to wear only one face:
whenever I say this
is who you are,
you show me another, even
more beautiful.
My great desire is for firmness,
a foot hold:
you proclaim, *No Where To Stand*.
Today, you are called
Unholdable,
even as I wrap you
in my arms.

I sleep, I wake,
and you are clear:
nothing to question, nothing to ask.
You are here—
as the air, as my breath,
as the morning light edging
the garden.
These words break you into pieces.
Your arrival was my own,
whole and complete.

This morning, gazing
at the garden,
you are deeper within—
as though entering your grasses, trees,
your tangled growth of summer wildness,
I sink into some dense soft self,
absorbed, drawn down,
and covered up in greenness.

You come forth the easiest at edges—
dawn and dusk—while
my mind grows in sunshine into busyness.
The world of men, too much awake,
falls fast asleep. What opens
at the dawn gets dark
in daylight.

Take my hand, dear one,
as I drift into frantic dreams of wakefulness—
be by my side,
whisper in my ear....

What can I give you,
you who have given me
your whole life?
Since my eyes first opened,
you poured into me;
every touch and taste,
every feeling, sound and smell.
Each lover wore your body,
every gift arrived by your command.
Trial or hardship,
grief or searing pain—
each bore your signature and seal,
the scent of your perfume.
You, the absolute who
gave me everything,
holding nothing back,
who emptied your self out—
atom in extremis—
into me.

What can I do
when everything stops
and waits?

You withdraw further and further—
not away,
but *in*.

I am here,
where you are,
so immersed in you,
in me, I can see neither.

I wait.
I am waiting.

Today you are back,
folding around me.
Is it the movement of the air—
the dancing leaves,
the caress around my arms and legs?
Even the birds are happy and alive,
and deep contentment fills me.
It is something, so strong,
about movement.
In it, your presence is most clearly felt—
a partner in the dance.
Was it because I first glimpsed
you in the wind—your hair flying untangled,
your voice full of passion?
Oh I admit, your silence is the harder.
But when the wind moves,
when leaves and hair are tossed
and I feel the pressure
of your fingers all about me—
Joy arises swiftly,
and I run to climb aboard.

Kneaded I am
like bread by the baker:
silence, storm,
daytime and night,
nothingness folded into everything;
your fist pushing deep,
I, rising in return,
until the universe of every this and that
is merged and ground in
our intimate moisture,
baked until we can rise no more,
cooled in our fulfillment—
food for all the world.

*There Is No End To Your
Coming And Going*

There is no end to your
coming and going, no end to the praise
and sorrowing I bring to the
wonder of your name.

Already the cicada
senses autumn, dry leaves appear
scattered on the grass.
The garden bears the scars
and bruises that we who all have
aged, now bear.

But fruit tumbles out in profusion,
as though to say—Yes, I am bent and old,
half a cripple—yet still I give,
more than you can possibly imagine,
by the magic, by the gift,
of this love.

In the end, like a gift,
joy is given.
One battles to step through
the fear, the ignorance and pain—
the worst inflicted early and your own—
and finds, on the other side of grief,
a hand held out to help you up,
to draw you close and hold you,
to ache along with you in heart's
great grief-racked wounding—
then wipe away the tears and stare
into each other's eyes,
so deep that depth now has no name;
to find upon your lips the
widening of a smile,
to feel it grow beyond what bodies
can contain: breaks out, explodes in
freedom's cry of sobbing joy—
all life, which is no longer
yours alone, but which,
in Great Totality,
you claim.

Whenever I looked for you,
I have been the reticent one;
holding back, sunk in my quietness—
expecting you to lead the way,
to be the initiator, to carry
a standard and a flag.

There *are* those who lead, of course.
To hear the call, someone must be calling.
Each beloved has their own
mountain top.

But you and I have come forth together:
without my leg moving, you took no step.
When you were withdrawn
from the world—
so was I.

Some days it took so much effort—
leaving my own private cell,
coming out, welcoming the world
with no reservation.

But when I did, we were always there together,
in ecstatic interpenetration.
Your presence came through me;
my existence, through you.

We awaited, we longed, for our reemergence:
now, birthed from our immersion
in your beauty, we smile at your arrival,
as we do at our own.

Now when we meet,
there is almost no meeting:
as soon as either arises,
we fall into each other.

Speaking of you and I,
as of two different things—
this has no meaning.

To see you is to be you,
yet even now I use these old words
of distinction.

I breathe your breath,
you breathe my eyes;
my eyes breathe you into being,
you fill my body—moving
my arms and legs,
as I soar on your feathers and wings.

Wind blows through our pores,
light streams around us
in ribbons.

We taste into each other—bitter
and sweet is our delight;
we know fulfillment,

For it rests in our being
every, single,
thing.

A little spark—you brought it.
It was all we needed: I blew upon
your soul and watched
your spirit flare into a brilliant flame;
a light of your own brightness,
a doorway for your heart
to let us enter in and out—
and I so glad to witness beauty's
radiant life unfolding,
that I would weep,
were not I so consumed
by joy.

Before my eyes
I sense your change,
though I am too slow to see
that which moves slower than me.

Where I know was green perfection,
now raggedness appears;
your veins have risen, dryness eats the edges,
there is a shrinking, and the earth appears
again beneath your gown.

Yet even as you go, you grow.

The nasturtiums still overflow in yellow
and in sun burnt red. Tomatoes tilt over the edge,
plump and brilliant crimson.

Beneath the earth, bulbs swell, potatoes fatten,
and worms work deeper
into the rich dark earth.

Apples overshadow the long grass, limbs
pulled down by heavy sweetness. The bees work
into the night, in secret, filling their hidden hive.

Last week an owl reappeared in the treetops,
sending the emissaries of mice
running for their lives.

So you draw your summer veil about you—
threadbare—shifting in its colors like
an autumn leaf,

Rising, in a grandeur strange to see
as such lush and heavy fullness fades away,
as you grow larger, grander still

By what it seems is gone,
by all the empty space between,
you fill.

You are a particular
kind of fruit—
no other is so sweet.

I have gardened long—
in the garden of all gardens—
pruning your vines and tendrils,
shaping your errant leaves.

I have given you my full face of Light,
every day of your being—
and in the evenings, the absolute
love of the moon.

You have been bitten, cut, buffeted by storms.
Insects and elements have attacked you,
but I am far the stronger;

now you are luscious, delicious,
the fruit of our mutual hours of labor.
Your sweetness is almost complete—

when you will shine, held in our hand—
nourishing the world with fulfillment,
with the ecstasy of your
own taste.

Quietly, we step back,
receding with a bow.
Separateness has served its purpose,
this ache, this longing,
each for the other.
Now, nourished on milkweed
and moonlight, we are transformed:
radiant, large and lifting,
we—in brilliance—
survey the World.

