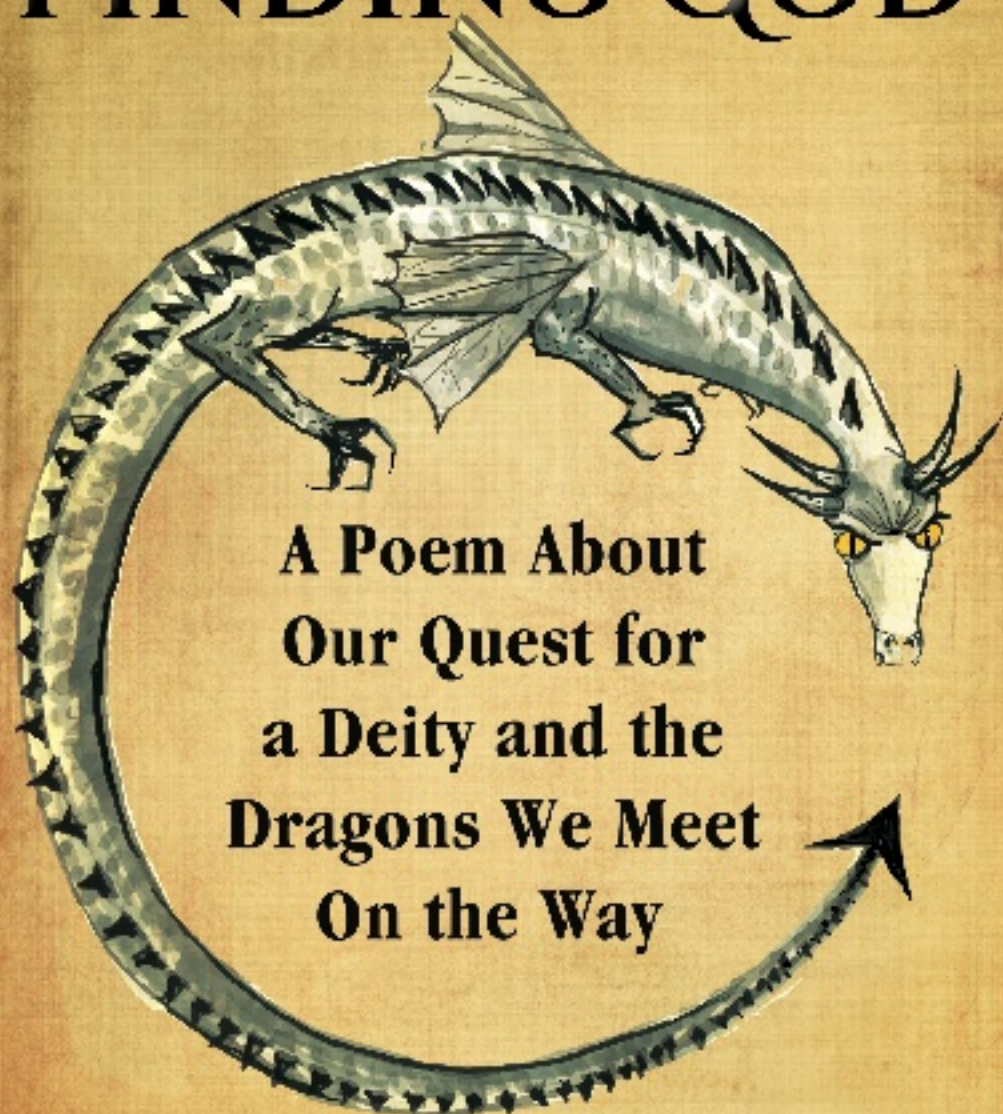
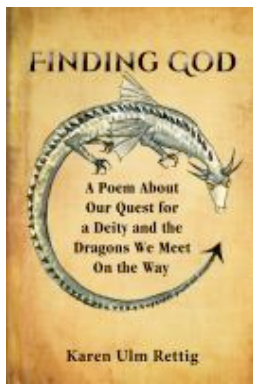


# FINDING GOD



**A Poem About  
Our Quest for  
a Deity and the  
Dragons We Meet  
On the Way**

**Karen Ulm Rettig**



***Finding God** uses poetic imagery to examine man's search for God. It portrays that search as an adventure, a romance, and a fairy tale in which God is an active participant, and it explores spiritual territory seldom visited by serious contemporary literature. Not only is it poetry about God, but it is also the author's conversation with a personal God, who wants to be found but is restrained by His respect for human free will.*

# Finding God

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A Poem About Our Quest for a Deity  
and the Dragons We Meet On the Way

Karen Ulm Rettig

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## 1. Quest

The blithe, unfocused life I led concealed a tiny hole.  
It barely marred the surface, but it reached into my soul.  
Amid my occupations, I would feel a little draft  
    or faintly hear an echo ricochet behind my laugh;  
but youth's nearsightedness dulled my perception, dimmed my view  
    and kept me from distinguishing that what I lacked was You.

Until one night You spoke my name. Your silent call was clear.  
It whispered to my soul but had no message for my ear.  
You spoke though to another sense, for You engaged my eye  
    with color when a single stained glass window lit the night,  
a spill of heaven's radiance to punctuate Your word.  
You told me You were waiting but that You're a patient God.

And that was all. Night re-enveloped me. The moment passed.  
The window once again became a bit of colored glass.  
And yet the impact of that moment didn't fade. Still sharp  
    remained the memory of glory patterning the dark.  
The glimpse was evanescent, but the presence You'd revealed  
    exactly matched the contour of the hole that never healed.

I knew I had to find You then, was certain You were near;  
Religion nodded in agreement but did not say where.  
I sought advice from Science, confident it would resolve  
    this mystery, but Science didn't want to get involved.  
Philosophy could only throw out tantalizing hints,  
and all of Nature's majesty was but Your fingerprint.

I questioned You directly then, but silent You remained.  
If You weren't seeking a response, why had You called my name?  
And I could not forget about You; longing only grew;  
contentment was reduced to fidgeting for want of You.  
The earth seemed flat and monochrome, more faded than before:  
its spectrum didn't satisfy once You had shown me Yours.

One day I heard a person speak whose radiant belief  
    stood out against that drabness in kaleidoscope relief.  
His faith was neither blinding nor too hot, but it had force;  
his light inspired, though it was but facsimile of Yours.  
The strength of his conviction fortified my certainty  
    that, though You hadn't answered, You were waiting still for me.

I told him of my emptiness, how I did not feel whole  
    without the God who'd left His image etched upon my soul.  
I told of my distress at being impotent to find

the God whose summons smoldered like an ember in my mind.  
I told of my confusion, my despondency profound  
that God, who'd set me searching, had not let Himself be found.

No architecture had contained Him, sanctum, shrine or church;  
no scholarship enclosed His measure. Where else could I search?  
He hid Himself in labyrinthine timelessness, a maze  
which I could never hope to penetrate with numbered days.  
What merely mortal enterprise unlocks eternity?  
I had an invitation, but I didn't have a key.

So I explained my problem. He admitted we can't find  
a deity by any enterprise of humankind.  
No stretch of hand or leap of thought secures Your presence, nor  
do feet on pavement ever bring us closer to Your door.  
He knew though of another route and set me on a path  
that leads to You, a byway not displayed on any map.

He said I should reserve some private moments every day  
to tell how I was yearning for Your light, a single ray;  
retreat from noise and industry to whisper heartfelt words;  
explain that I was searching and be confident You'd heard.  
Though duties might be beckoning, make certain I withdrew  
to instigate a dialogue, then leave the rest to You.

I followed his instructions, though I had no way to see  
the God to whom I whispered. Unbeknownst I held a key  
no bigger than a mustard seed, engrained in that command:  
confide my sore predicament, then leave it in Your hands;  
acknowledge I was powerless to find a deity;  
concede initiative; concede control. Let You find me.



I didn't know You'd be so eager, nor was I forewarned  
that You were likely to arrive accompanied by storm.  
Your love was said to be a gentle breeze, a zephyr sweet,  
but that typhoon had force enough to sweep me off my feet.  
It turns out You are not the stolid Godhead we've heard tell,  
and those who call You stodgy clearly do not know You well.

I'd counted on tranquility, but that's not what occurred.  
Instead my poise was rocked, my equilibrium disturbed.  
When I embraced security and didn't want to budge,  
Your gusts propelled me forward with a less-than-gentle nudge.  
You pushed me—who had asked to go but wavered at the door—  
while coaxing me to trust that what it cost You would restore.

I dwelt then in an old relationship that swayed and creaked,  
a home despite its tottering foundation, roof that leaked.  
It was at my solicitation You assumed command,  
but once in charge, You disconcerted me when You began  
to blow away the broken shingles, raze the crumbling walls.  
That place had been a haven, though I knew it was too small.

I'd longed for Your companionship, but how was I to know  
    ahead of time that those who keep Your company must grow?  
I'd looked to You for sanctuary. How was I to guess  
    that You would preen me tenderly, then push me from the nest?  
Religions hadn't warned of Your propensity to shove,  
nor had they cautioned me about the fury of Your love.

A tempest, it surrounded me. My world was tossed and thrown,  
yet at the center bode a silence I had never known.  
That storm drove me before it, irrespective of my will;  
emotions whirled about, but at the center I was still.  
Your presence was an eye of calm that reassured my soul  
    and filled my aching hollowness. At long last, I was whole.

I saw Earth's link to heaven then, their union manifest,  
a vision that escaped the eye, but vision nonetheless.  
I marveled at Your comprehensive reach, for I could see  
    You'd rearranged affairs whose repercussions now reached me.  
I didn't see You move Your arm, but governing events  
    were interlocked too cleverly to fit by accident.

The mindless, drifting cosmos, which had seemed a random place,  
was now revealed in patterns as elaborate as lace.  
This wilderness, where I'd imagined fate held upper hand,

was Your well-tended garden plot, meticulously planned.  
Its door was open; heaven was invitingly arrayed  
and I was summoned in, but a decision barred the way.

Were I to enter, I'd have to accept You as You are,  
resign myself to worshipping an interfering God.  
You'd taken brazen liberties and would do so again;  
I'd be propelled to grow in ways that I did not intend.  
And yet in Your disruptive presence I'd discovered joy.  
I closed the door behind me and did not regret the choice.

A question still perplexes though. Why did You take so long?  
I called, but You were not in any hurry to respond.  
It seemed capricious at the time and, though that isn't odd  
for mortals, I considered it ungracious for a God.  
But maybe I misunderstood. When I could not discern  
Your voice, I gathered You were silent; but perhaps You weren't.

Perhaps instead You were loquacious and I couldn't hear  
because of all the static and small talk that interfered,  
life's amiable chatter, work and worries, jobs and joys,  
which I had previously not identified as noise.  
Perhaps distractions hid Your words and babel drowned them out:  
we play life at full volume and You're not a God who shouts.

With words as quiet as a sigh, as light as a caress,  
You murmur but don't raise Your voice, propose but do not press.  
Yet with a soft communication You make Yourself clear  
in language we can understand if we know how to hear.  
Your message has no fanfare, but You whisper it about  
from bee to flower, field to countryside. The word gets out.

Still, I had never heard Your whisper livening the breeze,  
for I walked deaf through fields of speechless flowers, tongue-tied bees.  
I couldn't hear Your voice, for I lacked necessary skills:  
I hadn't mastered listening, the art of being still.  
Although I'd searched for You, it is impossible to find  
a God if we are listening with only half a mind.

To listen is to make the inner calculations stop.  
Turn the clock to face the wall and let the shoulders drop.  
Leave the day's requirements for a moment. Close the blind  
on all of life's responsibilities that flood the mind.  
Pause the ruminations of nostalgic memory.  
Hang "do not disturb" upon the door and turn the key.

Then fearlessly compose the restless hands and bravely sit,  
a formidable feat for one who isn't used to it.  
Each whisper echoes if we've only hollowness inside,  
and without duties and distractions, we've no place to hide.  
The silence can be deafening when we are so interred,  
but it is in the stillness of the heart that You are heard.

That chamber is a secret place, to prying eyes unknown,  
but from the walls of its seclusion I can come and go.  
Beyond its door, I hear the bees converse, the flowers laugh;

the breeze confides Your mysteries to every blade of grass.

If I pay close attention, I can see creation swell,  
exploding with a secret it can barely wait to tell.

I clean that chamber, clearing it of clutter and debris  
and plans and worries and distractions, then put out a key.

I know that if I keep it tidy, You cannot resist  
the lure of that enclosure, so ideal for a tryst.

I furnish it with ottoman and comfortable chair  
so I might enter frequently and find You waiting there.

Perhaps You did delay though. Maybe You prolonged my quest  
until I could appreciate a detail I had missed.  
The fact that I was ill equipped to find a deity  
was probably self-evident to everyone but me.  
I was determined, confident, and full of youthful cheek;  
it never once occurred to me that You'd be out of reach.

Atop a lofty steel and concrete edifice I stood.  
Surveying human handiwork, I saw that it was good.  
Night terrified no longer, for I gave a finger's flick  
and separated light from darkness with a simple click.  
I summoned increase from the land, and vegetation came.  
I classified the animals and called them each by name.

Nor did I stand alone. The few had swollen to a corps  
and Mount Olympus wasn't so exclusive anymore.  
When pestilence or famine or adversity befell,  
we smote them with the rod of science, and they were repelled.  
Fey fortune we had tamed, the fates and furies overcome:  
this world was full of deities, albeit minor ones.

So when You summoned me, I took for granted I would leap  
to heaven's posh vicinity, but leaden were my feet.  
I thought I'd climb celestial stairs, but I am flesh and blood,  
Earth's grimy child, so I could only leave a smear of mud.  
For one so able, failure was a stupefying blow,  
but failure is a soil from which humility can grow.

That shoot looks like an ordinary weed when it pokes out,  
but, though innocuous, it is a carefree little sprout.  
Acknowledging that I was only mortal, but a man,  
allowed me liberty to put my problem in Your hands.  
That move was one whose outcome I could not anticipate,  
but suddenly my step was lighter and my shoulders straight.

Still, common sense directs us to embrace reality.  
We've cut our teeth on skepticism. We want guarantees.  
Surrender may uplift the spirit, but it's difficult  
to verify that it produces down-to-earth results.  
Instead we're practical and turn to science to create  
security, preferring to be masters of our fates.

We think we hold dominion upon this orb of ours,  
but fate, that ancient arbiter, still wields substantial powers.  
When it is obliging, we take credit for our lot,



but we learn the extent of our misjudgment when it's not.  
We're shaken, tossed, and teased by its impersonal caprice,  
but You can summon it to heel and keep it tightly leashed.

Perhaps You let it slip its tether every now and then  
to keep us from forgetting we are vulnerable men.  
Its ravagement can bring about a change in attitude:  
pride loses its aplomb when it's been slobbered on and chewed.  
But then we might remark a sprightly leaf upon a shoot  
and recognize that blithe humility has taken root.

Our problems may be massive still and matter weigh a ton,  
but we can give to You the heavy lifting to be done.  
Though prudence shakes its head, declaring such behavior daft,  
when we are with You, common sense cavorts and logic laughs.  
We get a glimpse of paradise, insouciant and sly,  
another vision pleasing to the mind more than the eye.

Your heaven is not practical—mere prudence it transcends—  
but it steps with a buoyancy the world can't comprehend.  
While mustard seeds move mountains and the lilies still don't spin,  
uncounted angels dance without a care upon their pin.  
Feet have to follow when the heart in jubilation leaps,  
for You have numbered every hair, and You retain fate's leash.



## 2. Fairy Tale

We may not have capacity for heavenly delight;  
the air may be too thin for us to live upon those heights.  
The soul is made for ecstasy, but matter still decays;  
our hands can whittle marble; still, our feet are made of clay.  
We're refugees from somewhere we're unable to recall,  
and heaven is too grand for us, but so is Earth too small.

We humans bear the scar of some calamitous mischance  
    which doomed to wandering our feet that once knew how to dance.  
We harbor hazy memories of once-upon-a-time  
    when life was full of poetry instead of merely rhyme,  
when joy was our inheritance and happiness was cheap,  
before we fell, by catastrophic folly, fast asleep.

Today we earn our bread with calloused hand and wrinkled brow;  
though we've heard tell of Eden, it's considered fiction now.  
We plant our flag on Earth, the only heritage we know,  
extol her virtues, spare her faults; we've nowhere else to go.  
She's goddess, comrade, servant, ally. We feel almost safe,  
consoled by her predictable routines, her pleasing face.

But though consoling attributes provide us much to love,  
sometimes predictability and looks are not enough.

Although that lady's contours are delightful to behold,  
her manner is a little too detached, her comfort cold.

And when in dark of night or depth of loneliness we cry,  
she never has an answer to the ageless question *Why?*

Though we traverse her every acre, claim each tree and stone,  
dominion unchallenged, Earth has never been our home.

The roots we sink into her soil form no enduring bond,  
and when we call for her assistance, she does not respond.

She's frequently hospitable, but we are misinformed  
to think we'll find a haven in her bosom, safe and warm.

Her beauty only goes skin deep, not grace of blood or bone;  
she's dressed in splendid finery that masks a heart of stone.

Though generous by nature, she will thoughtlessly betray,  
bestowing gifts with one hand while the other takes away.

Short-lived are her assurances, because those arms that must  
embrace our ashes for eternity are only dust.

How can we be content with so ignoble a return?

Though Matter isn't choosy, Soul is restless and it yearns  
for something more inspiring than interminable sleep,

for someone who is chivalrous to sweep us off our feet,  
for rescue from Earth's disregard, for freedom, for a glimpse  
of dashing steed and flashing sword and valor. For a prince.

But Earth is at our fingertips. Her presence is a fact,  
so Sense and Reason cling to her, despite the warmth she lacks.  
When Soul complains of emptiness, a need for something more  
than Earth's indifference, it's customarily ignored.  
Earth may be negligent, but she's intriguing nonetheless,  
may not be worthy of our trust, but she's a comely wench.

No person could dismiss the undeniable allure  
of that voluptuous and easygoing paramour.  
She's patient with our schemes, allowing humankind free rein;  
a careless and indulgent mistress, she does not complain  
of failure or ineptitude. She doesn't criticize,  
and we shrug off her casual betrayals, artless lies.

Sense, dazzled by her beauty, is at home in her boudoir,  
delighted that her favors are provided free of charge.  
Soul, less enthralled, insists that something crucial has been lost,  
but Sense is too beguiled to give the matter any thought.  
It doesn't hear Soul's argument, and Reason won't rely  
on any testimony which cannot be verified.

Still, Reason, if it's honest, must acknowledge something's wrong,  
for we are aberrations who don't know where we belong.  
Earth couldn't have created us—she isn't smart enough—  
and we're unlike the brutes, though we are made of kindred stuff.  
Our difference is more than genus, family, or class,  
for we pose questions baser creatures never think to ask.

We wonder how the universe could be so unaware  
and yet so orderly without an architect somewhere.  
We study its dynamics, praise its elegant design,  
conjecture how it got here, but we have less luck with why.  
Some credit God, but Reason is reluctant to agree  
without His being proven by recorded history.

Here Reason wears the blinders of a doctrine, preconceived,  
that only what is verified by Sense can be believed.  
Allegiance to that stale, unproven theory shuts a door,  
and heaven's peaks remain unseen, its pathways unexplored.  
What irony to live in this emancipated age:  
once freed by shining Reason, now we're trapped in Reason's cage!

With arrogance unprecedented, Reason may insist  
that since it hasn't found a God then He cannot exist.  
It takes a bow for having bared the myth of the divine,

deduces we've been jousting with a windmill all this time.  
But though this triumph should cause joy, it causes the reverse:  
once God has been abolished, we are faced with something worse.

Why should we be content to be but stolid clods of clay  
or mindless pyramids of atoms? Reason holds at bay  
the prospect of our mean finale, disinclined to face  
that we'll be, in the end, unceremoniously erased.  
Why celebrate if callous fate must have the final word?  
For what should we rejoice if our existence is absurd?

We keep those questions at a distance, for we comprehend  
without admitting it that we can't have a happy end.  
Soul iterates that we've an emptiness, to no avail;  
without hard data, Reason writes it off as fairy tale,  
a figment of our fancy; but in silent depths we know  
those layers of denial camouflage a gaping hole.

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Bewildering this mystery! Could it have been caprice  
that made Him fashion us without a necessary piece?  
He offers no reply to our irreverent critique

that He enjoys at our expense a game of hide-and-seek.  
We never tag Him, though our failure doesn't end the chase;  
we often see His footprints, but we never see His face.

Gods needn't justify themselves, but someone tell me why  
a God so bold to make a universe would then turn shy.  
Is He fed up with our contentious tribe? Would He be rid  
of our incessant bickering, preferring to stay hid?  
But why then leave such tantalizing evidence around?  
Why would He be so careless if He'd rather not be found?

It might be He's forgotten us. Could we be nothing more  
than ravelings, just loose ends of creation on the floor?  
We once were royalty, but our magnificence has frayed;  
we may be robed in purple, but that robe's seen better days.  
Diminished and without distinction, loose ends we may be  
but torn from some illustrious and noble tapestry!

A negligent divinity would seem a bit too small  
to merit our regret, indeed, be called a god at all.  
We're shabby and disheveled but, by impudent conceit,  
we set a black-tie standard for our deity to meet.  
Perhaps it is our defects, our threadbare morality,  
that show us by omission what a deity should be.



What's striking, too, is that our worse-for-wear attire is wove  
of tattered fibers interspersed with filaments of gold.  
Our love, when pure and genuine, in shining splendor stands  
too clean to have been fashioned by a god with dirty hands.  
In He who made us, fundamental virtue must be found,  
and such a God would have to be by His own goodness bound.

But if we look into a mirror, we must question how  
a race that was the fairest then could be so faded now.  
Is mankind simply paying for Pandora's one mistake?  
Or can our plight be blamed upon an enterprising snake  
that duped Pandora's sister, fooled the unsuspecting Eve  
who's dealt more blame than Adam for the misery bequeathed?

Though not historical, those tales insist that paradise,  
that priceless plot of real estate, was raveled by a choice.  
They're only myths, no evidence supports them, not a shred,  
yet they concur in ruing our desire to pull that thread.  
Could such mismatched, archaic fables weave a seamless truth  
despite the doubtful authenticity of warp or woof?

Perhaps they do, for Truth can be quixotic and will thrive  
in places where contemporary fact cannot survive.  
Free-spirited and sociable, she doesn't stand on show

but frequents the familiar places common people go.  
She dresses in embroidered garments, fanciful and gay,  
to charm us when particulars would just get in the way.

She dances on the weathered page of Eve's unlikely tale,  
declaring with authority that it was we who failed;  
that it was man who turned from God, though she won't vouch for when;  
and she will not embellish who, but stresses they were men.  
If pressed for priggish detail, she will not commit to where,  
will not elaborate beyond insisting we were there.

Yet she is sure of this: that mankind, lord of all he trod,  
was not content to rule the earth but wanted to be God;  
was eager to bedeck himself in knowledge, long ago,  
be clothed in a sophistication only gods should know.  
We shrugged off innocence for new and ostentatious robes  
but found, in light of day, that we weren't wearing any clothes.

Could any woman single-handedly have doomed us all?  
How many Adams did it take to consummate our fall?  
Was our demise immediate, plucked freshly from the bough,  
or only realized when they had passed the apple 'round?  
And are we guilty yet today? Is shame an outfit donned  
before we leave the womb, or do we choose to put it on?

Accounts of our first sin make it sound relatively mild,  
less wickedness, perhaps, than curiosity run wild,  
a tragic lapse of judgment with an outcome unforeseen:  
God hidden from our mortal sight, a curtain drawn between.  
That pioneering sin might look less black than sins today,  
but in a pristine world it would appear a darker stain.

A shiny apple may be fitting symbol of our fall,  
for evil's origin can look that genial and small.  
Its affable demeanor rarely heralds what's within;  
what's rosy on the outside may have worms beneath the skin.  
Perhaps it really *was* an apple, poisonous and sweet,  
delectable and deadly. One bite put us fast asleep.

Deprived of easy conscience by that morsel, we became  
reluctant to encounter God and loath to call His name.  
We covered up our nakedness against a sudden chill  
with shoddy, improvised apparel we are wearing still.  
We turned to Earth for comfort, burrowed deep, avoided light,  
and stayed there safely tucked away in shame's eternal night.

Because of that one mouthful, vice and wickedness took root  
and grew into a jungle, choked with rot, opaque with gloom.  
We dream of Earth that cradled us, so virtuous and clean,

but evil growing rank around us isn't any dream.

It hides the path and skews direction, leaving us alone

and lost in hopelessness. No trail of breadcrumbs leads us home.

We shake our fists at heaven then, apportion God full blame

for tolerating wickedness and letting darkness reign.

A God almighty, He could surely purify the land,

eradicate that jungle of corruption with one hand,

destroy the dismal canopy so ruinous to men,

eliminate despair; engender Eden once again.

We chalk it up to His indifference that evil thrives

then pay the bills and feed the cat and get on with our lives.

We still inveigh against iniquities that grow like weeds,

but never do we look Him in the eye when we're aggrieved.

Once mankind could converse with Him, but now we've lost the knack,

conveniently forgotten it was we who turned our backs.

In making sense of evil, we traverse a well-worn path

that circumvents self-inquiry and leads to righteous wrath.

It's better to be roundabout, for we might diagnose

some private liability were we to look too close.

When wickedness proliferates, we'd rather not find out

where fertile soil and advantageous climate let it sprout.

Each vice was germinated in a single human heart,  
a tiny shoot unscrutinized until it cast afar  
the spores of crime and cruelty and other noxious fruits  
that grew into a choking wilderness when they took root.  
We rue its foul profusion but neglect its origin:  
evil, as a tender sprout, is commonly called sin.

It's better to stand back and be indignantly put out  
by faraway injustices we can't do much about.  
Let's keep it general and don't get too inquisitive;  
be blind to culpability that's close to where we live.  
(Sincerity, here, tangos to an energetic beat  
with artifice, a partner that is nimble on its feet.)

Sincerely we bemoan the fact that God is not around,  
but our positions might be awkward should that God be found.  
We've attitudes and dispositions He might not condone,  
especially where charity does not begin at home;  
or He might dig in places where we'd rather no one delve,  
where neighbors have been treated less benignly than ourselves.

Most likely, He would challenge us to take up garden work,  
a solitary task, a chore mundane enough to irk.  
That God would have us weed out budding evil close to home,

plant Eden in the little plot of garden that we own,  
set out domestic paradise, then fertilize and till;  
let heaven sprout in tended pots upon the windowsill.

The flowers we would cultivate are small but bloom all year;  
they carpet life's hard surfaces and scent the atmosphere.  
But all too often, overly ambitious, we disdain  
    such humble horticulture; there's no glory to be gained.  
Or we may be put off by the investment it entails,  
the time and toil and getting dirt beneath our fingernails.

We've no desire to pull up weeds or plow up private ground,  
so we seek Him in places He's not likely to be found.  
If we can feel religious underneath an arch of trees,  
we never have to break into a sweat or grime our knees.  
But then when we in hollow solitude cry in dismay,  
He leaves us to our weedy acreage and backs away.

So best we square our shoulders, lift our chins, deny our need—  
a posy on that worn lapel, some rouge upon the cheek.  
Soul criticizes such duplicity, its censure blunt,  
but Reason stifles it with logic, being quick of tongue,  
represses it efficiently with scathing common sense  
(although we might do well to question Reason's vehemence).

Then, cool and ever calculating, Reason shops around  
for, after all, that God is not the only one in town.  
The world is full of deities that we can see and touch—  
utilitarian if we do not expect too much.  
They're flashy dressers, smiling big, and fashionably shod.  
We worship at their altars, not admitting they are gods.

They promise to replace our rags, our shabby lives transform:  
brocade to brighten, silk to soothe, and fur to keep us warm.  
They'll clothe us in delight; in satisfaction we'll be rich;  
but we must pay for every ruffle, buttonhole, and stitch.  
Our happiness is dearly bought, yet it is poorly made,  
and we might be astounded at how quickly it will fade.

We don't require that other, distant God—so we declare—  
but on the untamed edge of consciousness lurks mute despair.  
It circumvents close scrutiny, recoiling from the light,  
but sallies out to ambush us in dark of sleepless night.  
The covers can't protect us, nor can blanket warm the chill  
that grips us when we realize that we are naked still.

So better if our eyes are closed, our vision none too sharp.  
We slip into our worse-for-wear apparel in the dark;  
add glittering accessories to fig leaves full of holes;

give polish and a hearty buff to shoes with worn-out soles;  
and cover up the painful truth that we are Adam's kin  
and God has not abandoned us, but we've abandoned Him.

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How maudlin is this story! Shouldn't humankind forsake  
so ludicrous a melodrama? Yet the soul still aches.  
What started as romance turned into farce, and we assume  
that only we are bleeding and forget who jilted Whom.  
We find it hard to credit that a mighty Godhead, spurned,  
might grieve for our departure, yet, and long for our return.

Mankind was wounded when he bit a fruit and broke a troth,  
but we don't realize it was calamity for both.  
You empathize with how the pain of separation feels,  
for You too are afflicted with a wound that never heals.  
Your sorrow washed each pebble, bathed each blade, a drenching dew,  
when Earth was cleaved from heaven and the soul estranged from You.

Your wish for reconciliation is beyond our ken,  
for we judge You by standards only pertinent to men.  
Such prodigal fidelity is folly in our eyes



and disproportionate to our significance and size.  
We're skeptical that any deity would stoop so low,  
humility and majesty in equal ratio.

But You are big enough to take humility in stride;  
You never trip on dignity or stub Your toe on pride.  
We've spurned You time and time again, but You're too chivalrous  
to spurn us in return when humankind is in distress.  
You ride to rescue, for You are a knight in shining mail,  
and this is not a melodrama, but a fairy tale.

You first aspire to woo us from those other, flashy gods,  
who may resemble princes but are really only frogs.  
They promise to espouse us, give us wealth and wedded bliss  
and lifelong happiness if we'll bestow on them a kiss.  
They lure us to a passionate and carnal liaison,  
but we awake next morning to discover they are gone.

Our wanton loneliness and unabashed desire can breed  
all manner of seductive gods, but You're the prince we need.  
It's You who are the ardent one, determined to restore  
the intimacy we enjoyed, who's knocking at the door.  
You serenade, write sonnets, vow Your love as You pursue  
an earnest courtship, ancient, but perennially new.

Yet all Your serenades and sonnets fall upon deaf ears  
if Your proposal isn't something Reason wants to hear.  
As confident as ever, Reason still is in control,  
too chummy with the senses and cold-shouldering the soul.  
With best intention, it may hear Your offer and refuse,  
mistaking faith for superstition, not to be confused.

Cool Reason is a skeptic—after all, that is its job—  
and much too sensible to fall for every gallant god.  
It shuns crusades and keeps us from pursuing every grail,  
too shrewd to fall for sleight of hand or credit fairy tales.  
It guards the portals of belief, unyielding at its post,  
but may end up protecting us from that which we need most.

Distinguished Reason! Glorious defender, peacock-proud!  
Mankind is fortunate to be so splendidly endowed!  
Material and Earth-confined, that visionary soars;  
diminutive divinity, that feisty midget roars.  
Despite its size, it rules a world and dares a universe.  
Magnificent and terrible, our glory is our curse.

It claims ascendancy by right, but we must come to grief  
if Reason's bloated tyranny leaves no room for belief.  
It guarantees our victory in evolution's race,

our primacy on Earth; but it should know its proper place.  
Mankind would be no more than brute if Reason didn't reign,  
but if we want to know You, it's a dragon we must tame.

That venerable guardian must be induced to see  
    that, though You might be dangerous, You aren't the enemy.  
But Reason blows a blast of flame whenever You draw near.  
It's been too often caged by ignorance or cowed by fear,  
held prisoner by canting gods or enigmatic rites  
    until it's eager to attack religions of all stripe.

A few of those, it must be said, do warrant Reason's sneer  
    because the clink of money is the hymn they long to hear.  
Still others have a history of smothering dispute,  
afraid of Reason's questions and preferring it be mute.  
It wisely chooses not to congregate around the spire  
    of any god who disallows the freedom to inquire.

But You aren't dictatorial. That's not how You behave,  
for You made Reason free to challenge, doubt, and speculate.  
Applauding its pugnacity, You would not quench its fire  
    but rather show it adversaries worthy of its ire.  
Your weapons are withheld. Still, it is bruising for a fight,  
and it appraises You as one more armed and deadly knight.

Defending its position, Reason belches smoke and flame.  
This dragon lays theologies to waste and won't be tamed!  
It slashes with a logic that can leave its rivals torn;  
if wit alone does not prevail, it slays with searing scorn;  
but You approach its lair, and You entice it to come out  
by strewing crumbs of discontent, a scattering of doubt.

You play on Reason's appetite, suggesting it has needs  
that senses, though they comb the earth for pleasure, cannot feed.  
They aren't equipped to cull or ponder Your nutritious words,  
and meanwhile Reason famishes for what they haven't heard.  
It's not that senses are dishonest, but Your word eludes  
their filter and, unnoticed, passes through a sieve so crude.

This alien idea captivates, so Reason dares  
to crack the door, for it smells something novel in the air.  
The redolence of foreign spices makes its nostrils twitch,  
evocative and fragrant essences, aromas rich.  
Should it decide to venture forth, it would enjoy a feast  
that's guaranteed to satisfy, though ravenous the beast.

A lush, unruly beauty animates the world outside,  
where everything is slightly skewed and not quite civilized.  
Though marble Truth still stands erect, it trails untidy vines,

and Logic still smiles coldly, but with Mystery it dines.  
This place is fey and yet familiar, wakeful but laid-back,  
and paradox can flourish in proximity to fact.

A careless sort of magic here lets contradictions thrive;  
this garden, although messy, is remarkably alive  
    with much to be interpreted and much to be explored:  
delectable discoveries which Reason can't ignore.  
You bait it with such toothsome fare that it does not withdraw.  
Fire-breathing Reason has at last been brought to terms by awe!

Why feels so like a victory this obvious defeat?  
What causes solemn Dignity to jubilantly leap?  
First Logic bows to Wonder, and they dance a little jig,  
then Reason, having sipped at joy, belts down a bigger swig.  
It tries to reconstruct its weighty qualms and sober doubts  
    but can't remember now what those misgivings were about.

Uncertainties disintegrate once we are disabused  
    of our conceits and learn that pride is not so much to lose.  
Objections fade, evasions falter, barriers fall down,  
and Reason's iron doctrines tumble clanking to the ground.  
Now, more magnificent than ever, noble Reason stands  
    with wings unfurled and faith unshackled, eating from Your hand.

You have, though, to confront another formidable foe.  
One dragon down, a different antagonist to go!  
While Reason was a fierce combatant, fired with righteous wrath,  
adroitly crossing wits with all who dared to cross its path,  
You face a new competitor whose impact is as dire;  
it seems innocuous, but not all challengers breathe fire.

Sense hasn't any pretense, which is part of its allure;  
incapable of moral thought, that giddy epicure  
    has neither wit nor subterfuge and cannot be chastised  
    for grabbing shiny pleasures held before its willing eyes.  
Earth flaunts her shameless opulence; Sense follows every time,  
so easily distracted, all exuberance, no mind.

It's not that Earth is villainous—I'm sure she means no harm—  
but she is unaware of the allurements of her charms.  
Her ponderous endowments tumble out in ripe display,  
a primitive seduction that can make us lose our way.  
Her draughts of heady wine leave the unwary mesmerized,  
and Sense drinks deep her toxicants, not one to analyze.

The two of them are kissing cousins, matter's sundry spawn,  
unblushingly incestuous, akin since primal dawn.  
Up to a point, we humans should not fault their rude affair,

for we are sheltered by Earth's fabric, nourished by her fare.  
It is her generosity that keeps us clothed and fed,  
yet Reason should know better than to climb into her bed.

But though it should mistrust her, it may fail to analyze.  
The fact that it is tame now doesn't signify it's wise!  
Discerning Reason ought to be a bit more circumspect  
    but, squired by Sense, it jumps right in, not pausing to reflect.  
Sense handles all the introductions, Earth's devoted fan,  
providing Reason access to that stunning courtesan.

Then Sense becomes her pitchman, hawking goods, displaying wares,  
enticing us to sample all her assets, claim our shares.  
Held spellbound by her affluence, imprudent Sense is prone  
    to crave the powers we might wield, the kingdoms we might own.  
It honestly imagines that we live by bread alone,  
that we can harvest paradise from Earth's ignoble stones.

Sense undertakes to reap that harvest, keen to have it all;  
but Reason might be startled to find paradise so small.  
It may be choicest real estate, a plot without defect,  
but it's less satisfying than we've been led to expect.  
Its adequate capacity holds everything we own,  
but when we take up residence, we find it isn't home.

Now, though no blood's been shed, this juncture is a battlefield,  
for disappointment is a bloodless weapon that You wield.  
Another weapon, time, is blunt, but it derives its strength  
from its inevitable slope and elongated length.  
You give us all the time we need; Your patience is a sword  
whose suppleness is yet another weapon in this war.

You brandish it with skill, and Reason finally perceives  
that Sense, although convivial, is not the friend it needs.  
Nor is beguiling Earth, who's still a pleasure to the eye,  
for she can't satisfy our needs, though heaven knows she tries.  
Her assets are considerable, but they're oversold:  
it really is impossible to spin straw into gold.

In desperation, Reason looks where once it felt contempt  
and reappraises Soul with open mind and new respect.  
That pallid self, considered too ambiguous and vague,  
has sat in unremembered solitude day after day.  
A ragged stepchild, it has been secluded in its room,  
but it's been waiting for a prince who ought to show up soon.

When Reason starts to listen now, its admiration grows;  
it pays attention, quizzing Soul to find out what it knows.  
Though lacking mortal intellect, that being is astute,



with roads to knowledge more direct than Reason's plodding route.  
With unassuming self-assurance, Soul communicates  
realities too obvious to justify debate.

It states that Right outclasses Wrong, though it does not ignore  
that Wrong is better dressed and often earns a great deal more.  
It testifies that Truth is virtuous and Falsehood vile,  
though Truth is often dour when Falsehood wears a charming smile.  
It seconds the imperatives of that colossus, Good,  
which spawns by its authority the firm directive, Should.

Soul listens to Your voice, delights to hear Your serenade,  
but it is under matter's long enchantment, so it waits.  
Now Reason, too, is listening, and it perceives Your song  
and understands at last what Soul's been saying all along.  
They eagerly await Your coming, and they strain to hear  
the sound of hoofbeats on the cobblestones as You draw near.

But though they dream about the entrance of a gallant swain,  
await Your step upon the stair, one thing may block the way.  
Your bid appears successful—rivals bested, conquest done—  
and Reason is Your ally now. Your battles have been won.  
Earth hovers at Your elbow, chastened Sense plays at Your feet;  
but You have one more barrier, one challenge more to meet.

Life circles us with obligations, time-consuming cares,  
a bramble of activities, a thicket of affairs  
    whose overgrown and multiplying tendrils cling and creep,  
a lush, narcotic brake forever lulling us to sleep.  
Entangled in the grip of matter's flourishing demands,  
we can't escape to heed Your serenade or take Your hand.

But fortunately You remain adept at derring-do,  
prepared to strike when menace looms: a hero through and through.  
Though heroes come across enchanted forests every day,  
You don't allow unruly foliage to block the way.  
You whistle for your charger, then you gallop in to seize  
    the offense, victory unfurled and flapping in the breeze.

The hand that tames a dragon also trims a rampant hedge.  
Your sword has piercing power but discriminating edge  
    to penetrate the overgrown distractions in our lives,  
lop off responsibilities, pare commerce down to size.  
Your sabering is vehement, but every cut precise  
    and cleanly placed so not to nick our freedom as You slice.

Once flora has been whittled down and obstacles are gone,  
You ride in from the battle, trailing glory with the dawn.  
Material deterrents could not withstand Your fire

or keep You from Your heart's delight and ultimate desire.  
Your aspiration is to rescue mankind from despair,  
to waken us from twilight shame to morning, bright and clear.

Although we bit an apple once and can't undo that deed  
or mask its bitter flavor, we can still spit out the seeds.  
Too long has humankind avoided You and dwelt apart  
beneath a canopy of vice and vileness in the dark.  
It's time to trim those branches, fell the trees that block our view,  
then raise our eyes to radiance and look again at You.

Beyond our shame, our shabbiness, our self-deception, we  
would meet with virtue mightier than that of make-believe;  
with majesty to make the spirit leap and Reason quail;  
with joy to dwarf the gaiety of any fairy tale;  
in You we'd find a hero, bold in love as well as deed,  
who shields his face from mankind but wears heart upon his sleeve.

No merely mortal rescue ever heralded such bliss,  
and never could a happy ending hope to rival this.  
We'd throw away our faded clothes, discard our hand-me-downs;  
a wand would wave and we'd see rags transforming into gowns.  
Then Soul would rest content and Reason would be satisfied,  
and they would happily sit ever after at Your side.

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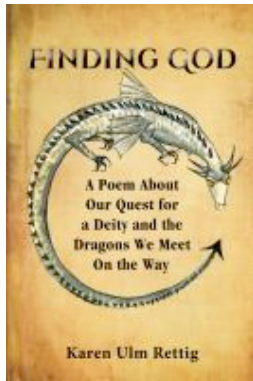
At this point, some will say that happy endings are naïve  
and this account is too improbable to be believed.  
It's taken some fantastic flights, I readily confess,  
but though high-flown this saga is authentic nonetheless.  
Entwining cares and overgrown distractions captivate,  
while senses mesmerize and fiery dragons guard the gate.

Although this narrative may seem romantic to excess,  
I can to its validity especially attest.  
For when I was a youth, I listened only to life's noise;  
God wanted my attention, but He had to raise His voice.  
He had to fence with Sense's many partisans and breach  
a thicket of entanglements to nudge me from my sleep.

I spent my hours and energies on frivolous pursuits  
until His voice reproached me with the mildest of rebukes.  
He hinted that I'd been remiss, implied that I was late,  
suggested that a deity should not be made to wait.  
He parted, momentarily, the curtain to reveal  
that He was no abstraction but was colorfully real.

His voice was but a whisper, soft as silk upon my cheek,  
yet it disturbed my dreams and I could not return to sleep.  
It pierced the bright distractions that around me thickly grew  
and opened up before my eyes a tantalizing view  
of unsuspected vistas, full of promise, wild and deep,  
that made my chamber feel confined, my life feel incomplete.

He summoned the secluded self no other self had seen,  
articulated the quintessence of my very being,  
tiptoed softly to my side and kissed me with the thought  
that, dormant in my soul, was something wondrous I'd forgot.  
Imagine waking up to find that life is a romance,  
the world is full of magic, and there really is a Prince!



*Finding God* uses poetic imagery to examine man's search for God. It portrays that search as an adventure, a romance, and a fairy tale in which God is an active participant, and it explores spiritual territory seldom visited by serious contemporary literature. Not only is it poetry about God, but it is also the author's conversation with a personal God, who wants to be found but is restrained by His respect for human free will.

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