

Garment for a Long Journey is a collection of poems written by California poet LoVerne Brown (1912-2000). It contains three earlier collections of Brown's works (The View from the End of the Pier, Gathering Wine Grapes at the Hollywood Hilton, and the Under Side of Snow), along with additional loose poems, some not previously published.

# **Garment for a Long Journey**

## **The Collected Poems of LoVerne Brown**

by LoVerne Brown, Edited by Jonnie Wilson

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# GARMENT FOR A LONG JOURNEY



THE COLLECTED POEMS OF  
LOVERNE BROWN

Edited by Jonnie Wilson

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LoVerneBrown.com

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### *3: Being*

#### IN THE SHALLOWS OF SUMMER

Mute and mindless as water lilies  
we float in the shallows of summer.  
The blue above and below us  
is speckled with sun.  
Having rolled up our roots with our pants legs  
we cannot recall  
the work that we meant to do  
(and all of it left undone).  
Open to any pollen the breeze may bring us,  
we drowse in our midsummer trance,  
incubating the poems whose provenance  
we shall ponder on,  
when we roll down our roots  
in the autumn.

DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF A SMALL LAPSE  
IN FIDELITY

Sun in the morning blazes a way through my window,  
plays on my eyelids like fingers of long-ago children,  
tells me the ficus and the philodendron  
cannot receive its blessing till drapes are parted,  
and I rise, smiling, to open my room to the morning,  
bring in my paper, read as I drink my coffee,  
encased in sunshine, loving its touch on my skin.  
I do this daily. The streaks in my hair will prove it.

Hard to remember that once out of choice I lived  
on tundra so bleak the sun would not come in winter.  
Hard faith sustained me as with compass and calendar  
I marked on a hump of sky that spot to wear  
the first pink runner signaling his return,  
became a sun-worshiper, pagan and unashamed.  
Had there been boulders, I would have built a Stonehenge.

And yet last night, when a wild sea  
called me into the light of a wilder moon,  
I forgot my loftier god, remembered only  
how moon had solaced me in dark Novembers,  
flung arms in welcome, clung to that colder light,  
came home late, shaking moonbeams out of my hair ...

This morning I shut my eyes against the day,  
pulled covers over my head, slept two hours more,  
then woke happy and ready for sun again,  
pulled draperies wide—

to find the sun had not waited.  
The ficus is not yet speaking.  
As further rebuke, someone has stolen my paper.

## HINTERLAND

Spring—and the shoreman  
yields to the pull of the hill land,  
leaps like a backward lemming  
up from the salt flat,  
sallies the coastal hill  
and comes down, gaping,  
into beyond-land,  
the back country.

Here no sound of surf,  
only slap of wind  
on mountain rock—  
a high and a distant sound  
that the ear must listen to find;

sun that at ocean  
skipped like a hand toss of rhinestones  
on the hard skin of water  
sinks without shimmer  
into the green receptacles,  
the soft mouths of grasses.

Here no horizon, only the salmon leap  
of mountains to the sky,  
and a blue distance  
that hides more than it tells,

no pelican,  
but sun-crisp lizards scampering over stone,  
the hawk hung like a pendulum above  
a rabbit in the brush,  
the horned toad  
flat as a sunfish on the shoals of summer;

loud in the manzanita  
chatter of birds that only know the sea  
as something to fly over,  
coming home.

## A RIDE FROM THE AIRPORT

We crouch in your sports car  
wildly careening south;  
four hundred hooves  
pummel the road we ride on,  
the landscape streaks grey.  
I shut my eyes and remember  
that slow carrier out of my childhood,  
the wise-eyed horse  
with a roadmap inked in his brain  
who carted my grandfather home  
from his glorious drunks,  
and I think it strange  
and a little sad, somehow,  
that a hundred metal horses  
leap when you flog them,  
but not one has the sense  
to flatten his ears to tell you  
your driving's too fast and too careless;  
it's time to pull rein.



FOR A FRIEND WHO THOUGHT TO DESERT TO  
THE DESERT

Forget your plan to decamp to the desert, friend!  
Put back the packing crates, allow your begonia  
more time in the window, since—is your name Mahomet?—  
the desert you talk of is rapidly coming to you.

Was it in May we saw the last of the roses?  
Was it in June when the grass burned to its shocked roots  
in the hydrochloric rain? Now dust is with us,  
thickening voices, eating its way into lungs,  
filling the crotch of the pepper tree so heavy  
the trunk split open. And when did the leaves go?

Also—  
The goldfish float belly-up,  
a bird leers from the lamp pole,  
and Roger Tory Peterson  
has told me that bird is a buzzard.  
Pull back the packing crates, friend—  
If your aim is to say goodbye to civilization,  
just step to the window and wave.

## NIGHTFALL

November twilight hangs between us and sky,  
a violet blanket, red tassels on its western hem.  
Soon silver needles of stars  
will pierce its texture,  
brocade upon it the North Star and Orion;  
the rising moon will roll it back like a carpet  
to dance all night on the bare boards of heaven.

But now no light comes through.  
As red tassels dip into Asia,  
we walk under violet shadow, the only glow  
pale frost on stiffening grasses,  
the dull pewter shine of the sea,  
and, as we round the cliff,  
a welcoming light  
at the door of a home  
wrapped loosely in deepening dark.

## THE FRENCH QUARTER

These lanes all named for saints  
come marching in  
to Bourbon Street  
with a wild snort of trombones  
and a rattle of drumsticks.  
Jazz bounces along their cobbles.

The narrow path where saints  
once strode to heaven  
now leads us to a daiquiri drive-up service,  
Big Daddy's Girls,  
topless and bottomless  
(descendants maybe  
of the maids the convent  
once taught it sinful  
to display an ankle),  
and young men break-dancing.

We are all strangers here  
in Bourbon Street.  
It is the music homogenizes us,  
like pure sweet water  
flooding us free  
of human difference;

it is the music  
spilling over our levees  
rips open the heart  
so joy can come marching in.

## TO HAWAII FROM HER ALEUTIAN SIBLINGS

Your isles came lately from the ocean's body,  
still hold a claim on her maternal caring,  
rock on her ample lap like cherished babies;  
caresses ride in on each wave.

Our island chain was born  
of an earlier litter,  
long ago weaned,  
pushed north to make room for new siblings;  
intimacy no longer encouraged,  
she expects us to cope,  
does not temper her storms  
for our sake.

We love our ocean mother, just as you do,  
yet keep a wary eye out—  
if riled, she'll cuff us.

## GOING FOR THE WILD

I like the wild in things—  
our river revving up rapids  
before rushing to freefall  
from the granite wing of a mountain,  
the rough breathing of desert wind  
as it saws an escape hatch through rock.

Walking by ocean at high tide  
I exhort it to leap forward, exceed  
if only by inches the arbitrary line  
decreed by moon,

applaud those dogs who, when a stick is thrown,  
forget their duty in ecstasy of swim,  
bringing back only seaweed and wet affection  
to embarrassed owners,

Yes, and I love the poet  
who on a sunlit morning  
leaps bareback astride his talent  
to jump the horizon,  
trots back triumphant  
with half of a sudden poem  
athrob in each lobe of his brain—

and the sparks that fly  
when those two halves arc into one!

## WHEN IN OCTOBER

When in October, looking to the skies,  
I drink so thirstily only emptiness  
remains of what is blue, to pour the eyes  
so full of wonder even time grows less  
a question than an answer that has need  
of no interpretation of the sense,  
when the heart stills its cry for permanence  
and the mind leans to harbor and is calm,  
and fingers spread to let the sands run through—

On such a day, drunken on such a blue,  
lustily stocked with living and my greed  
even for beauty being satisfied,  
almost my fattened spirit might give heed  
to death without resentment, as have died  
many before me, to whom life has meant  
such quality of beauty and of pain,  
and love and valor and enduring strength  
of such intensity and to such length  
identity grew narrow and they went  
most pridefully into the earth again,  
dust settling readily to dust, content  
to be a molehill or a continent.

## FOR AN INSOMNIAC FRIEND (ROSLYN)

For you who nightly watch time creep  
between your lights-out and alarm,  
I send this cool and curious charm  
to pour your body into sleep  
as water pours into a keg—  
a gurgle for each heavy leg,  
a gargle for each heavy arm,  
and singing water-words to seep  
into your mind, that vow to keep  
you safe from nightmare, safe from harm,  
each heavy leg, each heavy arm  
suspended in a sea of sleep,  
suspended ... in ... a ...  
sea ... of ... sleep.

## BEACH WALK

To live is to be forever amazed  
at the intricate rhythms of being:  
the sturdy beat of the drum beneath the rib cage  
plays counterpoint to the more excitable bellows,  
the pulsing throat strums a tune on the strings  
of the larynx that the lips broadcast,  
a blue pulse in the wrist taps out the time,  
messages hum along nerve lines,  
sliding muscles to action.  
I walk along the beach;  
feet squish the sea-drowning sand;  
warm skin ripples along the xylophone of my back.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF DEBT

Much do I owe to twilight and to rain,  
weavers alike of memory with lies—  
one, that it clouds the crystal of the pane,  
one, that it blinds the ever-staring eyes.

All day the rain has bent the sky so near,  
shutting that beauty in that I thought fled,  
almost it seems the face will reappear  
I loved, or the voice whisper that is dead,

and now the twilight joins us, to declare  
all love secure, to promise to replace  
the hot and silken heaviness of his hair  
fallen across my face.

## REMEMBERING SCIENCE CLASSES

Slender myopic youth who stood  
beside me in that narrow booth  
whose microscopes set fast in wood  
were keyholes where we spied on truth,

you who of all of us gave love  
no second glance, infringed no rule,  
but spent the engulfing fervor of  
your passion on the molecule,

your faith was in the little blocks  
that build existence, one by one.  
Now that the whole foundation rocks  
with the disrupted cornerstone,

I need no telescope, no rayed  
revealing lens to see your frown,  
to know how, stern with trust betrayed,  
your hurt eyes stare the atom down.

## MORNING

Morning's for joy ... there's more around  
than one hears of.

There are people all over this city  
who wake up happy, for no discernible reason,  
leap into showers, to come out pink as flamingos,  
relish the tang of their toothpaste,  
smile into mirrors,  
and in spite of what radio mutters  
expect only good of their day.

And I know it doesn't make sense—  
air so full of smog, pockets so empty—  
but people are found being happy even on buses,  
people who smile—at the comics, at friends,  
in remembrance of loving,  
aware of the blood in their bodies,  
in tune with its beat ...

On the porch of that yellow house  
where we turn the corner  
a child in footed pajamas  
is happily jiggling  
the household cat on his knees,  
both of them purring.

## LOST POEMS

When I was ill  
too weak to lift pen to paper  
poems yapped at my consciousness  
begging to be let in,  
howled through the caverns of mind  
till stalactites splintered,  
raked me naked  
screaming for words to wear.

Today, recovered,  
I sprang to open the gate,  
whistled a siren song,  
yelled like a pig caller.  
No poems came.

Where did they go, I wonder?  
I hope that somewhere  
somebody took them in  
and made them welcome  
and stitched up some words to clothe them.

I hope the words fit!

## BREAKTHROUGHS

On a gunny sack beside the fire  
the beagle worries the bone;  
hard and dry, it nimbly  
slips from the menace of teeth,  
but he makes a vise of his paws  
and growls his intention  
to break through that ivory or else.

At the kitchen table  
I worry over a poem,  
turn a phrase sideways,  
backwards and upside down,  
try it with meter,  
balance it without,  
hellbent to loose from the encapsulated thought  
the juice of real meaning ...

Crack! Bang!  
The crack is the bone succumbing,  
the bang the dog's tail hitting the floor  
in salute to victory.  
He lifts his head, his eyes gleam,  
the rich marrow he craved drips from his tongue.

Well done, beagle!  
I, at my littered table  
have a while to go yet.

## NO CAUSE FOR QUARREL

I have no cause for quarrel with the gods.  
When it was dark and most incredible  
a star could shine,  
for me one star was given,  
and for a moment undeniably full  
one love was mine.  
I have no quarrel with heaven  
which in my time of stress  
flung me a star,  
wherefore I wear for its withdrawn caress  
this very brilliant scar.

## CONFRONTATION ON A SUNNY DAY

Let us not waste a day so sweet with sun  
debating on the ultimate mystery—  
what will become of us when breath is done.

One says oblivion, one eternity.

Too soon we each will leave the obdurate mind,  
forsake our limbs, become what men call dead,  
and tumble into timelessness, to find  
our final destination still ahead.

Perhaps the entity one tells us of  
will clasp our souls to its eternal spark,  
or yet our spirits may dissolve in love,  
or some black hole absorb us into dark.  
But if we cease, or celebrate, or burn,  
on days like this one, I can wait to learn.

## CHECKMATE

That sense of peril  
endemic to the times we live in,  
keeping nerve and eye alert  
as we hurtle down freeways,  
that tells us the footsteps behind us  
as we walk a dark street  
are boding no good  
and it's time to run for it,

leans on my shoulder now  
in the voting booth  
as I lift my hand  
to opt for the politician  
I think least likely  
to light the fuse of our finish,  
and it palsies that hand  
with churlish mutterings  
of the long sad list  
of my previous miscalculations.



## FOR A 21ST BIRTHDAY

If I were a fortune cookie  
I'd grant you a happy forever,  
a rock star lover,  
a cuddlesome cat in your kitchen,  
and, for your daily dinner,  
hot carrots and tacos.

If I were your fairy godmother  
I'd kiss you three times on your forehead  
and tell you, "Today you get nothing—  
I gave it all at your birth:  
Your Irish charm,  
your willful but wonderful mind,  
your love for music and art,  
how you make and keep friends,  
and a special talent  
I hid so deep in your heart  
you haven't yet found it  
(but you will any day now)."

Being only a grandmother  
who has always loved you  
and remembers with joy  
each day and year of your growing,  
I wish you a life of adventures  
with happy endings,  
health for the body you live in,  
good fortune in friends

and in family,  
a use for your mind  
and courage in moments of crisis;

Life can be perilous, Erin,  
but after you learn  
how to shoot the rapids,  
it's fun!

## OF CERTAIN HANDS

Let it be written, when these moving hands  
are rifled of their flesh and naked lie  
within the facile clasp of things forgot,  
she whom these served loved most the feel of things,  
the copper bowl her fingers met about,  
the oval egg she gathered in her palm,  
the rich and heavy mealiness of earth  
sun-calloused on her thumb; and having known  
the passion brooding in a dappled hill,  
how peace is carven on the scentless rain,  
now in the beaten silences of earth  
finds beauty emptied of impermanence.

## A REASONABLE REQUEST

Yesterday an illness ate my time,  
wallowed, a wayward bacchante,  
across my bed,  
swallowed my hours like oysters,  
cracked open my minutes,  
spat out unwanted seconds  
as though they were grape seeds,  
left me—fevered and enfeebled—  
only scraps to sustain me.

When well it is I who eat time,  
open each ribboned day  
like a box of chocolates,  
consume the hours in rotation,  
take fillings—love, pain, poetry—  
as they come;  
share minutes with friends,  
count no time wasted  
that was somehow enjoyed,  
and each night  
leave the empty box by the east window  
with a note for the time-man:

“My usual order, 24 hours, please.  
If any leftover minutes,  
I’ll take them, too.  
Oh, yes, and yesterday  
an illness ate my time.  
As a long-term customer,  
I think I deserve a replacement.”

## ON THE NEED TO BE NOBODY

Truly I prefer always to be anonymous,  
a shade-dweller in a klieg-lit world.  
I am afraid of praises,  
platitudes on paper  
pinning me like a spreadeagled specimen  
to the floor of tomorrow's bird cage.

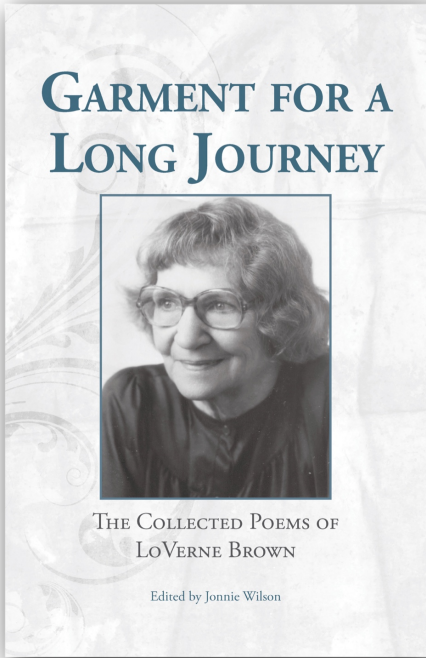
“Poet, circa 19-whatever  
addicted to sonnets  
love life unremarkable”  
(the life I'm so pleased with  
sounds tame when so starkly related).  
Or one might paint me better than true—  
color me rainbow,  
pepper me with rhinestones;  
there is danger also in that,  
since then and thereafter I might see myself  
always within limits  
of that put-round-me frame ...  
might be riveted tightly  
to what someone says I am,  
restricted by proud inertia  
from any further becoming.  
A frozen waterfall is good to look at  
if it's somebody else's.  
I want to plunge on   recklessly  
happily   privately  
into my river.

## GARMENT FOR A LONG JOURNEY

How rich the fabric of life is—a bright serape  
draped lightly on our shoulders at the start of the trek,  
a cloak of many colors, rainbow, with inserts of lightning.  
Applaud its texture: impervious as curls of caracul,  
sinuous as silk, embroidered over with curious pictographs  
that tell the history of our ascent from ocean.

Press face to its ample folds—inhale the bitter  
salt of our wet beginnings, dry dust of our moving on,  
aroma of lusty living, magnolia scent of our dreaming;  
hear, as one hears the tide's song in a conch shell,  
the sweet stern music of the inflexible stars ...

Truly this is a garment fit for gods.  
Wear it with joy, wear it with reverence!  
Do not deface the hem.  
You must turn it in  
when we come to our destination.



Garment for a Long Journey is a collection of poems written by California poet LoVerne Brown (1912-2000). It contains three earlier collections of Brown's works (The View from the End of the Pier, Gathering Wine Grapes at the Hollywood Hilton, and the Under Side of Snow), along with additional loose poems, some not previously published.

# **Garment for a Long Journey**

## **The Collected Poems of LoVerne Brown**

by LoVerne Brown, Edited by Jonnie Wilson

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