





and pass on each other's spirits  
like small packets of leavening,

it is from you I fashion poetry.  
I scoop up, in handfuls, glittering  
sequins that fall from your bodies  
as you fall in love, marry, divorce,  
get custody, get cats, enter  
supreme courts of justice,  
argue with God.

You rescuers on galloping steeds  
of the weak and the wounded—  
Creatures of beauty and passion,  
powerful workers in love—  
you are the poems.  
I am only your stenographer.  
I am the hungry transcriber  
of the conjuring recipes you hoard  
in the chests of your great-grandmothers.

My marvelous friends—the women  
of brilliance in my life,  
who levitate my daughters,  
you are a coat of many colors  
in silk tie-dye so gossamer  
it can be crumpled in one hand.  
You houris, you mermaids, swimmers  
in dangerous waters, defiers of sharks—

My marvelous friends,  
thirsty Hagars and laughing Sarahs,  
you eloquent radio Aishas,  
Marys drinking the secret  
milkshakes of heaven,  
slinky Zuleikas of desire,  
gay Walladas, Harriets  
parting the sea, Esthers in the palace,  
Penelopes of patient scheming,

you are the last hope of the shrinking women.  
You are the last hand to the fallen knights  
You are the only epics left in the world

Come with me, come with poetry  
Jump on this wild chariot, hurry—

by Mohja Kahf

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#### SOME THINGS ARE BETTER THAN THEY USED TO BE

According to Noble Prize-winning economic historian Robert Fogel, human biology has changed dramatically in the past three centuries, and especially in the last 100 years. People in the developed world live twice as long as they used to. They weigh more and grow taller. They're far harder and healthier and smarter. When sickness comes, they're better at defeating it than their ancestors were, and they're not as likely to contract diseases in the first place.

"We're just not falling apart like we used to," Fogel says. "Even our internal organs are stronger and better formed." What has occurred is "not only unique to humankind, but unique among the 7,000 or so generations of human beings who have inhabited the earth."

We're talking about a revolution. In the mid-19th century, Americans of all ages were much sicker than they are now. Child mortality was almost 25 percent, and of those kids lucky enough to survive into adolescence, 15 percent more expired before age 15. Chronic malnutrition was a horrendous curse, compromising immune systems from birth.

During the Civil War, one-sixth of the teenagers who applied to serve in the Union army were rejected because of chronic ailments like malaria, tuberculosis, arthritis, cardiovascular problems, and hernias. As for the older folks, the average ex-soldier in his 60s had at least six health problems, four more than a sexagenarian is likely to have today.

What happened between then and now? First, we harnessed electricity, made it universally available, and used it in a myriad ways to improve our lot. All of the other boons I'm about to name—improvements in our diet, medicine, sanitation, and workload—were organized around this fantastic, unprophesied new resource.

Our relationship with food has changed dramatically in the last century and a half. We discovered more accurate information about our nutritional needs and gained access to a greater variety and abundance of food.

The perfection of the science of refrigeration and the eventual universal availability of refrigerators made a big difference, too. Victory over widespread malnutrition meant that infants got a better start on building strong bodies, making them less susceptible to sickness throughout the course of their lives.

The drastic upgrade in the state of the human body was also made possible by steadily growing medical expertise, including the discovery of the germ theory of disease and radical new treatments like antibiotics and vaccination.

Physicians got better training, large numbers of new hospitals opened, and more people made medicine their career. Among the diseases that were wiped out were diphtheria, typhoid, cholera, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, smallpox, and polio.

Innovations in sanitation have been key to the upgrades in the way our bodies work. Everything and everyone are far cleaner than they used to be. People bathe more frequently and devote more attention to their hygiene.

Among the most important developments in this triumph were two practical miracles: indoor plumbing and the installation of municipal sewer systems. It took a while. As late as 1920, only one in 100 American homes had a toilet or even a bathroom—outhouses were standard—and toilet paper was a luxury.

For those few with bathtubs, a full-body cleanse was often a once-a-week ritual, and entire families might use the same bathwater. Fogel says that even into the early 1900s, "Chicago exported a lot of typhoid down to St. Louis," by disposing wastewater in the Illinois River.

Garbage disposal used to be a hit-and-miss proposition until the 20th century. Private citizens might bury their refuse in their backyards, take it to public incinerators, or offer it to pigs at local farms. But eventually, local governments took over the task. During my lifetime, every city where I've lived has done a stellar job of hauling my trash away.

In the middle of the 19th century, the average American worked 78 hours a week, often at exhausting manual labor and without the help of machines. As work became easier and of shorter duration, our health soared. Technological aids like washing machines and automatic heating systems also contributed to the rising tide of physical well-being.

All of the improvements I've mentioned have flourished because of the most important change of all: greater wealth and more available resources. Despite periodic economic downturns, per capita income in the developing nations has grown enormously in the last 150 years.

Elsewhere, too: Wealth in India and China has doubled since 1989, according to *The Economist* magazine. As a result, more of us have been able to afford to take better care of ourselves. And more of us have been able to do the research and experimentation and development that advance the common good.

Even poor people are better off than they used to be. During the 17+ years when my annual income was less than \$10,000, well below the official poverty line, I had many amenities the average American didn't have in 1900: electricity, telephone, bathtub, toilet, hot running water, refrigerator, radio, electric hotplate, space heater, TV, cassette player, shampoo, public transportation, asthma medicine, access to a laundromat, garbage collection, and sewer system.

—excerpted from "Pronoia Is the Antidote for Paranoia: How the Whole World Is Conspiring to Shower You with Blessings"  
<https://bit.ly/Pronoia>



SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): Dear Sagittarius: I invite you to make a copy of the testimonial below and give it to anyone who is in a position to support your Noble Experiment. "To Whom It May Concern: I endorse this Soulful Sagittarius for the roles of monster-tamer, fun-locator, boredom-transcender, elation-inciter, and mountaintop visionary. This adroit explorer is endowed with charming zeal, disarming candor, and abundant generosity. If you need help in sparking your enthusiasm or galvanizing your drive to see the big picture, call on the expansive skills of this jaunty puzzle-solver."

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#### BRAINSTORM ABOUT THE BIG PICTURE OF YOUR LIFE

with my Expanded Audio Horoscopes for the Second Half of 2019 and onward into 2020.

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You can also listen to your short-term forecast for the coming week by clicking on "This week (July 2, 2019)."

The horoscopes cost \$6 apiece. Discounts are available for multiple purchases.

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CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Life will conspire to bring you a surge of love in the coming weeks—if you can handle it. Can you? Will you be able to deal adeptly with rumbling love and icy hot love and mostly sweet but also a bit sour love? Do you possess the resourcefulness and curiosity necessary to have fun with funny spiritual love and running-through-the-labyrinth love and unexpectedly catalytic love? Are you open-minded and open-hearted enough to make the most of brilliant shadowy love and unruly sensitive love and toughly graceful love?

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): I don't endlessly champion the "no pain, no gain" theory of personal growth. My philosophy holds that we are at least as likely to learn valuable lessons from pleasurable and joyful experiences as we are from difficult and taxing struggles. Having said that, I also think it's true that our suffering may lead us to treasure if we know how to work with it. According to my assessment, the coming weeks will bring one such opening for you. To help you cultivate the proper spirit, keep in mind the teaching of Aquarian theologian and author Henri Nouwen. He said that life's gifts may be "hidden in the places that hurt most."

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): The Japanese word "wabi-sabi" refers to an interesting or evocative imperfection in a work of art that makes it more beautiful than if it were merely perfect. "Duende" is a Spanish word referring to a work of art that gives its viewers the chills because it's so emotionally rich and unpredictably soulful. In the coming weeks, I think that you yourself will be a work of art with an abundance of these qualities. Your wabi-sabi will give you the power to free yourself from the oppressive pressures of seeking too much precision and purity. Your duende can give you the courage you need to go further than you've ever dared in your quest for the love you really want.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): When the universe began 13.8 billion years ago, there were only four elements: mostly hydrogen and helium, plus tiny amounts of lithium and beryllium. Now there are 118 elements, including five that are key components of your body: oxygen, carbon, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus. All of those were created by nuclear

reactions blazing on the insides of stars that later died. So it's literally true to say that much of your flesh and blood and bones and nerves originated at the hearts of stars. I invite you to meditate on that amazing fact. It's a favorable time to muse on your origins and your ancestry; to ruminate about all the events that led to you being here today—including more recent decades, as well as the past 13.8 billion years.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Most American women couldn't vote until a hundred years ago. Women in Japan, France, and Italy couldn't vote until the 1940s. Universal suffrage has been a fundamental change in how society is structured. Similarly, same-sex marriage was opposed by vast majorities in most countries until 15 years ago, but has since become widely accepted. African American slavery lasted for hundreds of years before being delegitimized all over the Western world in the nineteenth century. Brazil, which hosted forty percent of all kidnapped Africans, didn't free its slaves until 1888. What would be the equivalent of such revolutionary transformations in your own personal life? According to my reading of the astrological omens, you have the power to make that happen during the next twelve months.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Gemini musician Paul Weller is famous in the UK, though not so much elsewhere. According to the BBC, he is one of Britain's "most revered music writers and performers." To which I say: revered, maybe, but mentally healthy? Not so much. He bragged that he broke up his marriage with his wife Dee C. Lee because "things were going too well, we were too happy, too comfortable, everything seemed too nice." He was afraid that "as a writer and an artist I might lose my edge." Don't you dare allow yourself to get infected with that perverse way of thinking, my dear Gemini. Please capitalize on your current comfort and happiness. Use them to build your strength and resilience for the months and years to come.

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Homework: "Know thyself—or else! Follow your dreams—or else!" Please comment. Truthrooster@gmail.com.

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