

## AT THE QUARRY

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*Carl Dennis*

To notice the pleasure my cousin takes  
In swimming slowly across the quarry  
Near the end of a summer day  
Is all I need for evidence that the world,  
For her at least, isn't a clumsy replica  
Of a genuine world that's been denied us,  
But the very one we've been longing for all along.

This is not to say that the work  
She did all morning and afternoon  
At the crowded addiction clinic  
Isn't important, the help she offered  
Those resolved to be better mothers  
And fathers than they've been recently,  
Better wives and husbands.

It's only to say that the time may come  
When the clinic, a godsend to many now,  
Having done its work, can be dispensed with,  
While she wouldn't want to imagine a day  
When swimming here at the quarry  
Is dismissed as the shadow of a deeper pleasure  
Available elsewhere at that moment.

Just look at how slowly  
She's approaching the other side  
As if she wants nothing more  
Than to make the crossing last as long  
As possible, and then to linger  
On her leisurely turn before beginning  
Her slow swim back.

## THE RIGHT TIME

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*Carl Dennis*

This may be the right time, my friend believes,  
Now that his joints have begun to creak,  
To work at making his spirit more limber,  
Stretching out the kinks, for instance,  
In the ligaments used to set grudges aside.  
This could be the right time to remind himself  
That his parents raised him as best they could.  
Yes, he still wishes they'd told him more often  
To be brave rather than extra-cautious.  
Yes, he wishes they had assured him  
At least once a week that he was wonderful  
Rather than warning him that the world  
Didn't owe him anything. They served the truth —  
It's time to remember — as they saw the truth:  
Through the cracked window in the rented kitchen  
Overlooking the weed-choked alley,  
Where it wasn't a good idea for a child to play.  
Instead of regretting the time it's taken  
To widen the angle of his perspective  
As he's searched for a setting more bright and airy,  
It's time to regret he couldn't bring them along,  
That he can't reach them now, except in dream,  
To urge them not to delay their visit.  
Let them come over the river and through the woods  
In their one-horse sleigh to his airy bungalow.  
It's time to welcome them in the dusk with lights  
Burning in every window and the shades pulled up.

## REAL ESTATE

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*Carl Dennis*

She knows that her realtor is right to advise her  
Not to attend the open house, not to expose herself  
To any slighting remarks about the rooms  
That have lifted her spirits for forty years,  
The house she would never be selling  
If she weren't too old now to climb the stairs.

But she won't be attending merely to answer questions  
She could address in an honest fact sheet:  
Assuring anyone interested that the furnace  
Can heat the house when the temperature  
Drops to single digits, that the wall in back  
Is prone to mildew and needs to be washed  
In spring with a bleach solution.

She's attending to gather information  
On the would-be buyers, to scout out details  
That could tell her which seem interested  
In keeping the lines of the house as they are,  
Not in marring their symmetry with an ugly annex.

She's attending to choose, among those  
Who can meet her price, which seem sincere  
In admiring her garden, in her use  
Of the modest garage as a potting shed,  
People unlikely to build another  
Big enough for three cars and two snowmobiles,  
Shrinking the garden to the size of a grave.

Yes, she knows that in the long run  
Protecting the house is beyond her power,  
But is that any reason, she asks her friends,  
Not to do what she can in the short run?  
What if she had to sell a loyal,  
Sweet-tempered dog? Could she be faulted  
For finding out all she could about the people  
Who claim they're eager to welcome it to the family?

And don't forget, she adds, that a dog,  
If mistreated, has the option of running off,  
While a house has to sit there with no defender,  
No one who cares what it used to be.