What We Want

What we want is never simple.
We move among the things we thought we wanted:
a face, a room, an open book
and these things bear our names—now they want us.
But what we want appears in dreams, wearing disguises.
We fall past, holding out our arms
and in the morning our arms ache.
We don’t remember the dream, but the dream remembers us.
It is there all day as an animal is there under the table,
as the stars are there even in full sun.

Linda Pastan, from Carnival Evening.

What We Want

In a poem people want something fancy,

but even more they want something inexplicable made plain,
easy to swallow—
not unlike a suddenly
harmonic passage

in an otherwise
difficult and sometimes dissonant
symphony—

even if it is only
for the moment
of hearing it.

Mary Oliver

What We Want
(after Mary Oliver)

It’s confusing
what those others want,
but I know what I want
in a poem.

Clarity, simplicity,
artistry, not artifice—
bright fibers rising buoyant among
dark threads left in for contrast.

I want something said
worth turning on my palm—
a small, unsought treasure-stone
found beside the path.

I want a modicum of modest music,
so even my tin ear
wakes up to hum along.
I want to be surprised.

I love it when laughter
twirls in at times,
giving a poem flapping wings.
I want a short poem that takes flight.

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...Still, what I want in my life
is to be willing
to be dazzled --
to cast aside the weight of facts

and maybe even
to float a little
above this difficult world.
I want to believe I am looking

into the white fire of a great mystery.
I want to believe that the imperfections are nothing --
that the light is everything -- that it is more than the sum
of each flawed blossom rising and fading. And I do.

Mary Oliver
final stanzas from “The Ponds”
in House of Light