

## The Secret of Life

Write a poem about the secret of life or about someone who thought they'd found it.

### The Secret

Two girls discover  
the secret of life  
in a sudden line of  
poetry.

I who don't know the  
secret wrote  
the line. They  
told me

(through a third person)  
they had found it  
but not what it was  
not even

what line it was. No doubt  
by now, more than a week  
later, they have forgotten  
the secret,

the line, the name of  
the poem. I love them  
for finding what  
I can't find,

and for loving me  
for the line I wrote,  
and for forgetting it  
so that

a thousand times, till death  
finds them, they may  
discover it again, in other  
lines

in other  
happenings. And for  
wanting to know it,  
for

assuming there is  
such a secret, yes,  
for that  
most of all.

Denise Levertov  
from *Selected Poems*

## Secret of Life

Once during the war  
on a bus going to Portsmouth  
a navy yard worker  
told me the secret of life.

The secret of life, he said,  
can never be passed down  
one generation to the other.

The secret of life he said

is hunger. It makes an open hand.

The secret of life is money.  
But only the small coins.

The secret of life, he said,  
is love. You become what you lose.

The secret of life, he said,  
is water. The world will end  
in flood.

The secret of life, he said,  
is circumstance.

If you catch the right bus  
at the right time  
you will sit next  
to the secret teller

who will whisper it  
in your ear.

Diane Der-Hovanessian  
anthologized in *what have you lost?*  
Poems selected by Naomi Shihab Nye