



In those sad hours,
those pallid days
when time seems to
spin like rotary phones,
look up to the ceiling
and trace the cracks there
with your eyes. These are
not times to unravel,
not times for bluster and lurching.

Grey

Aaron Gardner

Do you feel your hands?
They are attached to your body,
remember this. Follow
the crack in the ceiling
to a corner cobweb.
Let your gaze linger there
awhile. They are not just
accumulations, they hold this
room up. Breathe like you're trying
to levitate. Fill your lungs to the
point of panic. Now relax,
feel the embrace of your chest,
the expansion inside, it has limits,
there are rules to this. Trust them.

That quickening you feel in the back
of your head is supposed to be there
that's your brain, working. You've been
too distracted to feel it before. The heat
rising from your stomach and settling
on the tops of your ears is a blanket -
wear it. It's been passed down through
so many generations the threads have begun
to look like rungs. You will climb them one day.

There is a window on the wall.
It is large and contains no glass.
Open it anyway, it is your heart.
Outside is a menagerie.
The animals are not making a sound.
No matter, listen to their silence, they are your teeth.
You still own your tongue, you always have.
Tilt your face upward, feel the sun on your cheek.
Where it was wet, it is no more.

Brush the salt from your face
onto your palm. Save this
for bland days when your teeth
lie sleeping. Save this for days
when the sun hides ashamed.
Save this for days when you have
security-barred your heart, and
your lungs can't be contained
in your chest. Save this for days
when your hands float carelessly away.

on these days Remember the cobwebs.
these days Remember the salt.
on these days Remember the rungs.
Remember your hands.
They were built for grasping
They were built to hold on.



Aaron Gardner (Ojai, California) is a poet, educator, and father of two phenomenal children. He has been heavily involved in the spoken word scene since 1999, and was the Oakland Grand Slam Champion in 2010. He has been published in journals and online publications such as *Ibid*, *Rivertalk*, *Cult 456*, and *Poetry Super Highway*. Aaron continues his work locally with young poets to help them discover their voices and the power contained therein.