

Prisoners

By Denise Levertov


Though the road turn at last
to death's ordinary door,
and we knock there, ready
to enter and it opens
easily for us,
 yet
all the long journey
we shall have gone in chains,
fed on knowledge-apples
acid and riddled with grubs.

We taste other food that life,
like a charitable farm-girl,
holds out to us as we pass—
but our mouths are puckered,
a taint of ash on the tongue.

It's not joy that we've lost—
wildfire, it flares
in dark or shine as it will.
What's gone
is common happiness,
plain bread we could eat
with the old apple of knowledge.

That old one—it griped us sometimes,
but it was firm, tart,
sometimes delectable ...

The ashen apple of these days
grew from poisoned soil. We are prisoners
and must eat
our ration. All the long road
in chains, even if, after all,
we come to
death's ordinary door, with time
smiling its ordinary
long-ago smile.



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