

# When I Am Asked

By Lisel Mueller

When I am asked  
how I began writing poems,  
I talk about the indifference of nature.

It was soon after my mother died,  
a brilliant June day,  
everything blooming.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
in a lovingly planted garden,  
but the day lilies were as deaf  
as the ears of drunken sleepers  
and the roses curved inward.  
Nothing was black or broken  
and not a leaf fell  
and the sun blared endless commercials  
for summer holidays.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
ringed with the ingenue faces  
of pink and white impatiens  
and placed my grief  
in the mouth of language,  
the only thing that would grieve with me.

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