



She Walks in Beauty: A Woman's Journey Through Poems

Caroline Kennedy (Collector, Introduction)

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In She Walks in Beauty, Caroline Kennedy has once again marshaled the gifts of our greatest poets to pay a very personal tribute to the human experience, this time to the complex and fascinating subject of womanhood. Inspired by her own reflections on more than fifty years of life as a young girl, a woman, a wife, and a mother, She Walks in Beauty draws on poetry's eloquent wisdom to ponder the many joys and challenges of being a woman. Kennedy has divided the collection into sections that signify to her the most notable milestones, passages, and universal experiences in a woman's life, and she begins each of these sections with an introduction in which she explores and celebrates the most important elements of life's journey.

The collection includes works by Elizabeth Bishop, Sharon Olds, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Mary Oliver, Pablo Neruda, W. H. Auden, Adrienne Rich, Sandra Cisneros, Anne Sexton, W. S. Merwin, Dorothy Parker, Queen Elizabeth I, Lucille Clifton, Naomi Shihab Nye, and W.

B. Yeats. Whether it's falling in love, breaking up, friendship, marriage, motherhood, or growing old, She Walks in Beauty is a priceless resource for anyone, male or female, who wants a deeper understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a woman.

She walks in beauty
George Gordon, Lord Byron

I She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies; And all that's best of dark and bright

Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

II One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

III And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

She Walks in Beauty: A Woman's Journey Through Poems Details

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Sara says

Really enjoyed this collection of poems selected by Caroline Kennedy. Liked her insights she shares in the prefaces to each section. This is a great book to give as a gift to friends and family!

Kathleen says

I would have given this book one and a half stars, but just before the end, I found "Love" by Roy Croft included in the poems. My husband and I had Croft's poem read at our wedding, along with "The Love Chapter in Corinthians" which is also in this book. Croft's "Love" is the single best description of the way two people in love should feel about each other. Every time I read "Love" I am reminded of that old adage about marriage, "Be friends first." It is so true!

Kennedy compiled poems that she believes represent women. I love poetry. I love all forms of literature. But I think it's possible to find literature that just doesn't speak to us. Literature is an art form. I think it's similar to the way we can love music, but hate listening to gospel singers, or death metal. Art is subjective. To that end, Kennedy's book just didn't speak to me the way I thought it would. There are a few poems sprinkled in among those "silent" ones that did resound in me: "Love", and "The Love Chapter in Corinthians" which I mentioned, but also, "Survivor" by Roger McGough, "The Summer Day" by Mary Oliver, and "A Word to Husbands" by Ogden Nash. For the most part though, the best parts of Kennedy's book aren't the poems, but the chapter intros. It is in these that we get to hear Kennedy's voice, her experiences, and her thoughts on the poems. In some ways, each introduction is a poem in itself.

Judith says

I love good poetry and I just forgot to add it to my daily life. This is a lovely collection subtitled "A Woman's Journey Through Poems" and it's edited by Caroline Kennedy who selected the poems and wrote an intro to each of the sections. She chose beautifully a mixture of old and new, serious and light-hearted alike. I first read some of these poems when I was a child and they are like old friends revisiting me again. Comforting and delightful. Some of them were new to me and it's always such a treat to find words that express a thought that's been mulling around in your head looking for the right words. Like this little charmer called "Survivor" by Roger McGough:

"Everyday
I think about dying.
About disease, starvation,
violence, terrorism, war,
the end of the world.
It helps
keep my mind off things."

DW says

I had no idea the author was the daughter of JFK (the bio inside the back cover doesn't mention it at all) until I saw one brief mention that "my mother wore it at my father's Inaugural Ball." Not many fathers have Inaugural Balls.

Some poems I liked:

Unfortunate Coincidence by Dorothy Parker (oh, so cynical)

may i feel said he by e. e. cummings (evokes a lot in so few words, though I don't understand his use of parentheses)

Bra Shopping by Parmeshia Jones (so accurate)

Vietnam by Wislawa Szymborska (woman claims not to know anything, except that those are her children)

lumpectomy eve by Lucille Clifton ("one breast comforting the other")

Don't Quit by unknown ("it's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit")

I also like the famous "What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why" by Edna St. Vincent Millay and the title poem by Lord Byron, though I tend to be too impatient to slow down enough to read them properly.

I found it weird that there were separate sections in the book for Falling in Love, Making Love, Breaking Up, Marriage, and Love Itself. Five sections, just for love, out of thirteen.

Lisa N says

A collection of poems compiled by Caroline Kennedy based on the stages of a woman's life. I liked the layout of this book. She begins each section with some personal reflections that I really enjoyed. This is a very diverse collection with classics from Shakespeare, the Bible, etc., as well as many contemporary selections.

Kennedy started this project around the time she turned 50. She said, "Reading poems can help bring clarity and insight to emotions that can be confusing or contradictory." Being at the cusp of middle-age myself, this anthology particularly resonated with me. I came unglued when I read "*High School Senior*," a mother's reflections on her 17-year-old daughter's last year at home before college. As Kennedy says, "the personal is universal."

I enjoyed the majority of these poems.

From the humorous and dysfunctional—

Jamesian

Their relationship consisted
In discussing if it existed.

From Summer with Monika

Away from you

I feel a great emptiness
a gnawing loneliness

With you
I get that reassuring feeling
Of wanting to escape.

To the indulgent—

Chocolate

By Rita Dove

Velvet fruit, exquisite square
I hold up to sniff
Between finger and thumb—
How you numb me
With your rich attentions!
If I don't eat you quickly,
You'll melt in my palm.
Pleasure seeker, if I let you
You'd liquefy everywhere.
Knotted smoke, dark punch
Of earth and night and leaf,
For a taste of you
Any woman would gladly
Crumble to ruin.
Enough chatter: I am ready
To fall in love!

To the wise and profound--

From Emerson From a Letter to His Daughter: "Finish every day and be done with it."

From Dickinson: "Parting is all we know of heaven, And all we need of hell."

And my all-time favorite love poems/verses—

1 Corinthians 13

William Shakespeare--*Sonnet 116*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning—*Sonnet XLIII: How Do I Love Thee?*

Emily Dickinson—*Wild Nights—Wild Nights!*

To My Dear and Loving Husband by Anne Bradstreet

Love by Roy Croft

Judy says

I first heard about this book when I watched Caroline Kennedy mix it up, poetry-wise, with Stephen Colbert on The Colbert Report. Intrigued, I was glad to see the book appear on the new book shelves at my local library. Checked it out and loved it. Caroline Kennedy edited this book and wrote the introductions for each of the sections of poems. Included in this volume are poems about the various phases of women's lives-- Falling in Love, Breaking Up, Marriage, Work, Motherhood, Friendship, Growing Up and Growing Old--to name just a few. What I loved best about this book is that it includes some of my favorite poems and has introduced me to some fabulous poets. While I have to return this book to the library this week, I will be stopping by a book store and picking up a copy for my personal library.

Carmen says

This is a collection of poems from Caroline Kennedy. Each 'chapter' includes an introduction by her, and then a smattering of poems covering a single topic. They are: Falling in Love; Making Love; Breaking Up; Marriage; Love Itself; Work; Beauty, Clothes and Things of This World; Motherhood; Silence and Solitude; Growing Up and Growing Old; Death and Grief; Friendship; and How to Live. It was a very good collection of poems. Some were familiar classics, and some I had never heard before. All were pleasing. Just because this book is called 'A Woman's Journey Through Poems' does not mean a man could not enjoy it, although it is geared towards women. The poems are written by both men and women, and there is old poetry and new. I was disappointed she did not include a chapter on education. It seemed neglectful. Also, Ms. Kennedy has a somewhat traditional outlook on the world and the lives of women, and that comes through here. I was hoping for at least one or two poems that were 'edgy' or more non-conformist. Overall, an enchanting collection, and one I would highly recommend.

Liz Lemeshevski says

I loved that the poetry selections were for women at all stages of life. It's feminism at its core that women are different than men and that women are just as varied and three dimensional as men.

I listened to the Audible version of the book and loved the performances of the poems. Caroline Kennedy's voice is not of 'voice over' quality but I respect who she is and her life's journey.

There's nothing like an excellent poem to connect me to my spirit and emotions. And this book is full of them.

Mary Scott says

What a treat to read poetry again!! A nicely curated (um, edited?) collection - I really enjoyed that the poems are arranged thematically and they were from multiple time-periods. A nice book to flip through occasionally for a little reflective me-time.

Stephanie says

Book #14 of the 2016 Reading Challenge. Theme: A poetry book.

Although this was a beautifully written book, I still will never enjoy reading poetry. It was hard to get through a lot of the poems. The introduction to each grouping of poems was beautifully written by the author and that was actually my favorite portion of the book.

"When I was younger, I thought my task was to forge ahead and succeed as an individual. But growing older has helped me realize that our success lies in our relationships—with the family we are born into, the friends we make, the people we fall in love with, and the children we have. Sometimes we struggle, sometimes we adapt, and at other times we set a course for others to follow. We are all leaders and followers in our lives. We are constantly learning from and teaching one another. We learn, too, that the most important work is not done by those who seem the most important, but by those who care the most."

"Falling in love is a series of moments in which the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Those moments are not continuous, but the sense of union with another person is just about the best thing there is."

"In the past thirty years, women have become defined by what we do, as well as by whom we love."

"Our mothers are our first teachers, and we teach others the same lessons we learn from them. As a child, when your mother believes in you, you believe in yourself, and when that happens, there is nothing you can't do. As a mother, that is the greatest gift we can give to a child."

"The people who are happy being alone are often the people everyone wants to be around"

"One of the most important qualities in a friendship is that it makes each of us into a better person."

"The lifers who, even seven states away, are the porches where we land"

Barbara P says

I have always been intrigued with Jacqueline Kennedy, the wife of President Jack Kennedy and mother of Caroline Kennedy (author of this book). In this book Kennedy draws on poetry's eloquent wisdom to ponder the many joys and challenges of being a woman. The chapters are about love, falling in love, growing old, friendships, family, work, etc.

Reading these poems brought me to a reflective and contemplative place to simply take in the beauty of these poems, the thoughts, the laughter and sadness, the joy, the eloquence and the timeliness of life.

Emily says

I'll admit that I felt sheepish buying this book. I mean, I saw it in an Anthropologie store; it's subtitled, "A

woman's journey through poems" (does it get more mawkish than that?); and the art design is just gorgeous throughout (beautiful paper, images, etc). Everything about this book was designed to appeal to me, like a flower does to a bee, and although my stubborn instinct was to resist, I could tell there was something of substance inside.

SO--I'm proud to say that at the age of 32, I finally GET poetry. I sooo get it. Turns out an anthology is the perfect entry into a genre. Cheryl Strayed, in her EXCELLENT book Dear Sugar, advises her younger self to read more poetry, and her advice, turns out, is everywhere exactly right. Poetry distills an experience into the most potent, profound emotions. Maybe you have to be in the right frame of mind. If so, I am. I loved this.

A short one for you:

"Don't try to rush things" by Antonio Machado

Don't try to rush things:

for the cup to run over,
it must first be filled.

Joseph Zilvinskis says

Nice collection

Lacey Louwagie says

I listened to this one as part of my immersion in poetry in April. The subtitle of the anthology is, "A woman's journey through poems," which made me think that it was going to be a collection of women poet's giving voice to women's lives. Instead, it has at least as many male poets writing ABOUT women as women speaking to their own experiences, and many of these poems fall prey to romanticizing womanhood, seeing women once more through "the male gaze." As such, it contained a lot more platitudes and cliches than authentic representations of a woman's journey.

The Modern Scholar "Understanding Poetry" collection I also listened to in April talked about how poetry is "meant" to be read aloud. But I don't think an audiobook is the best way to experience poetry, nonetheless. I found myself not paying attention to the poems that didn't grab me, and then wishing I had a printed version so I could savor the few that did. I do want to find a printed copy of the anthology so I can read a particular poem about friendship that really spoke to me, but other than that, the poetry here doesn't seem particularly worth revisiting.

Emily Casella says

I was gifted this book for graduation last year by a nice man who works at the library named Mr. Yancy, (he even signed it). I don't like poetry too much, but I thought I would give a whirl, because Bethany said I would never read it haha. But overall the author uses other people's poetry from a collection of time periods and locations and women and men writers. She puts them into sections where she gives a brief description of her life at a certain time. It can be very cliched and cringy sweet at times and I don't think I was going to

make it through the romance and marriage but luckily it moved on to friendship and death. There was seven poems out of 316 pages worth that I liked and found interesting and different. There was even one with reference to Nude Descending Stair Case. Which I'm only assuming is reference to the Marcel Duchamp painting.

Sidna says

What a delightful book! I'm not into poetry and would never have chosen to read this book if my book discussion group had not selected it. I almost always buy our book club selections, but I didn't want to spend \$25 for this one so I got it a few days ago from the public library. I thought I would read Caroline's comments and read a few of the poems, but I read the entire book in almost one sitting.

For people of a certain age, Caroline seems like one of our children. I was in high school when her father was elected President and in college when he was assassinated. Even though I was not a Democrat, like everyone else, I was fascinated by our handsome, young President and his growing family. I watched every minute of the funeral proceedings on tv and my heart broke for his widow and young children. I considered Caroline's brother John to be our Prince William.

For someone who has been famous almost from the minute she was born, Caroline has managed to keep a low profile. She divided this book into 12 different topics and writes about her own life at the beginning of each topic and discusses some of the poems in each section. Reading this book, I am proud of the woman she has become. She tells some funny stories about growing up, talks about her own marriage, and discusses issues she has faced in raising her children, and other things that have happened in her life that are common to all women. She mentions her parents, but she doesn't need to tell us a lot about them since we already know them. Even though she has money to buy anything she wants, she seems like a very down-to-earth person. She gives you the impression that you could discuss anything with her over a cup of coffee.

Our discussion leader for the book has selected one poem we are going to discuss in depth and has already told us what it is so we can be prepared. She also asks that those of us who want to discuss our favorite poems from the book. To my surprise I found 5 or 6 poems I really enjoyed.

I definitely recommend this book, even if you just read Caroline's comments and don't read the poems.

Judy Croome says

I nearly did not buy this collection of poems - I have issues with publisher's exploiting celebrity names to sell books (and the Kennedy name is about as "celebrity" as you can get, even to a non-American!), but I'm glad I did! While at times the introductory notes were too maudlin (and, at times, slipped into condescension), this ended up being a wonderful collection of poetry to relax with.

From the short, deeply profound words of Rumi & Lao Tzu, to the magnificent "The Summer Day" by Mary Oliver; from old favourites (How do I love thee?) to new discoveries (Letter from my Wife), this beautiful collection has something for every mood. It also held some surprises - who knew Elizabeth 1 wrote poetry?!

Particularly appealing was the well-constructed lay-out, consisting of sections each containing a variety of poetic voices speaking about different times/events in a woman's life (love, marriage, death, grief and so on).

A volume of poetry that can be dipped into again and again.

Carol says

Poems about love and life. Not many familiar to me in the newer poets. Probably because I don't read much poetry. I do like 'Madam and Her Madam' by Langston Hughes.

Sections of the book:

Falling in Love, Making Love (some rather steamy), Breaking Up, Marriage, Work, Beauty, Clothing, Things of the World, Silence and Solitude, Growing Up and Growing Old, Friendship, How to Live.

Jacqueline says

possibly my favorite book passage ever:

"When I was younger, I thought my task was to forge ahead and succeed as an individual. But growing older has helped me realize that our success lies in our relationships - with the family we are born into, the friends we make, the people we fall in love with, and the children we have. Sometimes we struggle, sometimes we adapt, and at other times we set a course for others to follow. We are all leaders and followers in our lives. We are constantly learning from and teaching one another. We learn, too, that the most important work is not done by those who seem the most important, but by those who care the most."

Abby Lyn says

This collection of poems celebrating womanhood has surprised me, since I am not particularly enamoured of either the Kennedys or of the artform of poetry in general. This is a lovely balance of Biblical, classic and modern poems, of lines that are familiar ("I love you, not only for what you are, but for what I am when I am with you") and those that were not but struck me all the same ("Are those your children? Yes."). It has poems after my own heart, from an ode to the sexy red dress, to a tribute to a girl's most faithful friend: her dog. Although I have not loved all of the poems I have worked my way through here, they have all made me pause, and ponder. Because this anthology is organized according to the major milestones of a woman's life (marriage, friendship, motherhood, aging), this would be the perfect gift for a woman in transition, whether it is a new mom or especially a woman approaching middle age. 4.5 stars.
