

**Maybe**  
by Mary Oliver

Sweet Jesus, talking  
his melancholy madness,  
stood up in the boat  
and the sea lay down,  
silky and sorry.  
So everybody was saved  
that night.

But you know how it is

when something  
different crosses  
the threshold -- the uncles  
mutter together,

the women walk away,  
the young brother begins  
to sharpen his knife.

Nobody knows what the soul is.

It comes and goes  
like the wind over the water --  
sometimes, for days,  
you don't think of it.

Maybe, after the sermon,  
after the multitude was fed,  
one or two of them felt  
the soul slip forth  
like a tremor of pure sunlight  
before exhaustion,  
that wants to swallow everything,  
gripped their bones and left them

miserable and sleepy,  
as they are now, forgetting  
how the wind tore at the sails  
before he rose and talked to it --

tender and luminous and demanding  
as he always was --  
a thousand times more frightening  
than the killer storm.