

Certain Things

by A.L. Kennedy

On a day like many others
Or almost like many others...
There certainly was one morning when
We cut adrift our small, unwieldy country
And raised newspaper sails up into nowhere
Watched the punching skies betray them
Saw rains bleed the ink of their promises into their threats.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as these people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

There were shouts like many others
Or almost like many others...
There certainly first was screaming quite
Inaudible in civilised locations
And drowned at once by life pursued as usual
Drowned by a determined silence
Sweet fear and denial and warm laziness holding our tongues.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as some people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

In our land like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly have this land in which
We cannot voyage forth, we're not a vessel
But still we try to row out with our legends
Swear we have the best provisions
Trained crew and commanders and a journey that we can survive.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as those people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

In our ship like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly have no charts, no course
But we'll be entertained while we are starving
Unless we are no longer necessary
Then the salt and dark must eat us
Like bread and like roses and truth able to move in our souls.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as your people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?
And our clowns are like many others
Or almost like many others...

They certainly have flags and more flags
And cultivate our rage and isolation
They offer us despair and choiceless choices
And the dying keep on dying.
We think in hints and whispers and become our own secret police.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as our people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our pains are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly embrace our tortures
Hope suffering and loss will only kiss us
Nudge others in the path of mutilation
Pray the dying keep on dying
Keep bleeding if they have to and *please let the harm never reach us.*

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as shamed people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our fears are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly avoid our beds now

And sleepless dreams of funerals and grieving
And always we seem near the point of screaming
But we still just hold our silence
We strike and march, we struggle with no anchor to hold us in place.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as weak people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our laws are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly enshrine our hatreds
And dreams of wild supremacy and purges
Our captains cultivate an empire's vices
But they have no empire future
No Africa to steal, they conquer and occupy us instead.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as mad people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our minds are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly insist on madness
Avoid our personalities and mirrors

Since we cannot stop the lying
We're chest deep in this fiction and must smile as it sweeps us away.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as maimed people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our homes are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly insist on staying
There is no leaving here unless in shackles
While the refugee boats founder
We're refugees at home fleeing eviction, cold hearths and dimmed lights.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as lost people
Who may be strangers
Are we passing and sharing and passing the same silences?

And our camps are like many others
Or almost like many others...
We certainly don't talk about them.
We do not count the graves of all the outcasts
Of the fragile and the useless
We rush to be alone among our gravestones, one breath then we're done.

And there are certain things,
These things which are certain but go unsaid
And how do we know
That we are unsaying the same things as most people
Who may be strangers
But are passing and sharing and passing the same silences?
But one breath, only one breath and we're begun
We can say that we love our children, love all children
Ache for their safety and their years ahead.
We can say that we love our parents, all kinds of parents,
Grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts,
That our families may not work, but we love what we can of them,
Build what we can of them,
Keep what we can of them,
That we love our friends and at certain moments,
Clear, high moments, we love and we welcome the strangers
Who may be angels in our midst.
And this is all love –
This is the hard and complicated and troubling practice of love
And without it we are drowning,
Suddenly, gradually, stupidly, we are drowning.
And no one deserves to drown.
No person is just a transaction, an inventory of parts.
No person can live without love's protection
No person should live beyond love's restraints.
The true and the merciful, difficult love
Which is all that will save us, save our sinking world.
No person can be wise without the knowledge that one day, in one breath,
They will be harmed
By chance and time and nature, quite by accident
They will not survive without the mercy of the world and strangers,
Without love.

Those who live without love
Legislate without love
Dominate without love
Rule, plan, predate without love
Build and make and profit without love –
They certainly have a shallow type of force,
They certainly have a simplicity which can impress.
But they must never be followed
Never obeyed
Never be allowed to steal our beauty.
It is so very hard to win beauty back.

The day we say these things, these certain things
The day we take one breath and speak,
Keep speaking
Shout
Fill the air with what we are, which is love expressed as form,
As a funny little clumsy species,
That day, our small unwieldy country
Will swing about.
That day, we will begin the voyage home to find ourselves.
The journey will be very long
Not all of us will see it's end,
But we will know we are on our way.
We will stand on deck and face the sun
We will breathe free air and feel it light us.
Yes, we will be certain we are on our way.