

*from The Book of Poverty and Death ·
Stanley Plumly*

after Rilke

There is the poverty of children shy with child—
the girl who will not say what is already part
of her breath, like a second wind, another mouth.
And there is the poverty of rain, in spring,
clean on the streets, the small roofs of the city.
And poverty of desire in prison hallways, cell by cell . . .

And poverty of the wheelchair and the deathbed
and the blind who tow them where they're told.
Or flowers along the railway or the river,
poorer with every passage.

You should look
into your hands right now—they'll hold
the poverty of grief until you let it go.

You should look into the light—it is the dust made whole.

The poverty of the bird that flies in the window
or the yard-dog tied to the ground—rooms with doors
locked on the dumb who talk to themselves . . .
These are the stones that will shine.

For the poor own the houses you will not visit;
they own the trees that are dead all day.
They own the table and the chair and the glass of water.

And they let their children go hungry who will eat all the bread.
And they let their children go cold who will take what is warm.

You should look around you how the dark is poor.