

# With

BOOKS BY ROD McKUEN

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And Autumn Came  
Listen to the Warm  
Stanyan Street and Other Sorrows  
Lonesome Cities  
Twelve Years of Christmas  
In Someone's Shadow  
New Ballads  
Caught in the Quiet  
Fields of Wonder  
With Love...

# Love...

by ROD McKUEN



STANYAN BOOKS

RANDOM HOUSE



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**For Mary**

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**With Love...**

## SCHOOL

Before the Palmer method  
taught me how  
to write my name,  
I'd learned to read love  
in the salesman's face.

And so  
without the aid of Dick and Jane,  
by myself I've come  
unadorned and plain  
to offer you without condition  
a life just past  
and just beginning.



## WOOD SMOKE

The geese above the pond  
already call out winter  
and wood smoke comes  
from all the houses  
in the town.

We'll move together then  
and share the year's last  
warmness  
swallowing the rain like brandy.

## ATLAS

Don't be afraid  
to fall asleep with gypsies  
                    or run with leopards.  
As travelers or highwaymen  
we should employ  
whatever kind of wheels it takes  
to make our lives  
                    go smoothly down the road.

And if you love somebody  
                    tell them.  
Love's a better roadmap  
for trucking down the years  
than Rand McNally ever made.

## **DECLARATION**

Your mouth  
is my undoing.  
So it is and so it should be.

Closed or open,  
private or in public places  
I covet your mouth,  
often hearing not a word  
that issues from it  
but knowing every sound  
by heart.

Love, I do  
and it's a new release  
I should have come upon  
a dozen years ago.  
I did.  
It's only that you didn't know.

## TO PAUSE

I've run the corridors  
and highways of the heart  
for so long now  
I find it difficult to pause,  
let alone to stop.

But a pause is just  
another kind of stop.

I glance both ways though,  
(I wouldn't take a chance  
on missing love  
wherever she may lurk.)

## BOXING LESSONS

Wiser by a half a year  
I enter into your brown body  
like a blind man sure of every step.  
So assured  
sometimes I feel embarrassed.

So delighted that I wonder  
how I earned the privilege  
of your light limbs around my **back**.

If indeed I've earned  
your body and your love  
then I'll return  
                    undefeated.  
A lover who by accident  
                    or even by design

stumbled into something  
so unusual yet real  
he comes back blushing  
from every new encounter  
with your touch.

## **THE PRIZE**

After each new meeting with you  
I carry home  
so much love  
that I must have set  
a brand new mark in selfishness.

I've won all the races,  
all the prizes never offered.

If I tell you this  
and make it work for me  
I might be beautiful enough  
to even have your love.



## TOWARD SECURITY

June is for juggling  
getting rid of spring  
and moving into summertime.  
The beach is but a back rest waiting  
to fold down into August.

In love,  
we walk a tight-rope  
as new brides dash  
from Cincinnati churches  
and rejects sling their rings  
into the Reno river.

When the sand starts singing  
nobody else will hear but us.

## THE DISTANCE TO MONTEREY

Silence is a better means  
for telegraphing thought  
than any Morse code yet made.  
I wonder if you know  
how many conversations  
we've had so far  
with no words passed?  
I often think our silence  
has energy to get us  
all the way to Monterey and back.

## THE MEANING OF GIFTS

Before befriending butterflies  
you have to meet with midnight moths.  
Perspective comes when poles  
are far enough apart  
to have horizons at both ends.

So trampling through the night together  
lying close with moonlight faces  
will never be enough.  
We'll have to beat each other down  
by daylight  
to understand why love is love  
and why it's come to us in March  
three months ahead of summer.

## **TEARING DOWN WALLS**

No wall can stop the coming of love  
no clock can bring it back,

yet letters are still sent on missions  
armies couldn't win, for love or country.

## **RUNNER**

I have no time to hate,  
I'm in a hurry.

But I've got all the hours  
in the days still left to me  
to waste on love.

And what a waste  
of God's free time  
to not love readily  
and straight ahead.

## **IN PASSING**

Yesterday,  
did you remember how we met?

Today,  
do you remember what I said?

Tomorrow,  
will you remember how I tasted?  
Some have said I taste like almonds.

## FOOTPRINTS

Not content to fly to Cedar Falls  
I'd like to track the footprints on the moon  
and come back home with bouquets of spare junk.  
Since there's so little mystery left  
                    in moonlight through the window  
I'd like to bring you one handful  
to decorate your dressing table.

Women want the near impossible.  
Knowing that,  
the wise man stays ready.

We ask the difficult ourselves.  
                    Love us.  
                    For ourselves.

## **WE THOUGHT PERHAPS**

We know the clocks are changing  
but we've come prepared.

The three of us have run all day  
and all the season too.

You might expect us to be tired.  
No.

It's just that after thumbing  
beach to beach  
we thought perhaps  
that somewhere in our travels  
going from the sand  
or coming from the water  
we might have accidentally come by you.



A loss.

But totaling this summer's gains  
would not be fair.

And anyway how do you write down secrets  
and make them not so secret any more?

The three of us  
(the dogs and me)  
are maybe tired after all.

But we still hope to see you  
one more time  
coming down the beach.

## **APPLES**

If you like apples  
I'll carry home an orchard.  
If sky is to your liking  
I'll bundle up the skies  
                    of summer  
so you'll never need to know  
the winter evening any more.

I like the fire  
and so I wait for winter nights.  
Apples I can take or leave.

Your body  
like your mind  
has need of going over,  
and I intend to be  
a journeyman of your soft skin  
for years.

## LATE OCTOBER

Always, then,  
and ever afterward  
the head against  
    the shoulder  
when the thunder comes.

It will be so  
as night is for the nightingales  
so love will last for me.

Welcome is the thunder,  
if you go or stay.

## **FURROWS**

Often I feel  
the furrows on your forehead  
are deep enough  
to make a proper trench—  
and then you grin.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

The air was bearable to me  
only just because I had to breathe  
but then you must have known that.

I don't think  
I could have stood  
the green of green trees  
too much longer on my own  
—even though I had no way  
of knowing what I'd missed  
by not sharing  
    until you stood my bail  
    by being here.

## KEEPING WITH TRADITION

If I can walk with April people  
all year long  
I ought to do as well in April.

So as one whose Aprils have been many  
I'll hunt for lilacs once again  
and hope that spring's  
as good to me this year as last.  
Without those friends  
I've found the fourth month in  
I haven't any friends at all.

With Katie gone  
and Kelly growing more sophisticated  
day by day  
my life should have some lilacs  
at the very least.

April then and always when?



## **CYCLE**

Only lonely men know freedom.  
Love,  
as lovely as it is,  
still ensnares.

Is it better then  
to be on the outside,  
in the dark and free,  
or caged contentedly  
but still looking  
out beyond the bars.

## OLD HOUSES

I love old houses  
                    for their smells,  
their must and dust and mildew  
and for what they've been  
to people I will never know.

The character  
of calked-up cracks  
means more to me  
than plastered walls and pretty paper,  
walls that play the neighbors' music  
when the radio I love  
                    has gone to sleep.

The faces of the old  
are like old houses  
every line's a highway  
from the past.

And so I love old houses  
and the faces that sit rocking  
on their sagging porches.

## THE ADVENTURES OF CLARK KENT

Your body lying easy in the August day  
is not a challenge but an invitation.

Being lazy too

I leave it to the sun to ravage.

Night—always more dependable than sunshine  
has a way of coming 'round on time  
and I'm a patient man.

Don't think I haven't noticed  
those intrepid hikers of the summer beach  
who in the guise of Sunshine Supermen  
live out the tail ends of the afternoons  
behind half Venetian blinds  
with what they've staked out on mid-mornings.

Notice though  
the rope I've tied about your ankle.  
No Latin sun can steal my mistress  
for more than just one single afternoon.

## **CLOSE**

Forward or back  
September is the turning time.  
Ask the man whose livelihood is apples  
or the man who lives for love.

So spreading our arms wide  
we gather in September,  
as a cold man searching after firewood  
before the snow blots out the world.

## **WATER MUSIC**

There are rivers  
that I'll never see.  
That never worried me  
till now.

But as a soldier of the heart  
I've this year  
come to fear,  
that on some battlefield  
not yet near,  
upon the final stream  
I'll fall.

With that in mind  
I ford each river  
as I would the last  
and take each lover  
as I would  
    that final  
        fatal one.



## **TELL ME HOW THE WIND BLOWS**

Tell me how the wind blows,  
and what it takes to find  
new waves rolling  
down new beaches  
and different drummers  
    drumming somewhere—  
        if they do.

Tell me lies,  
and if your honesty's a badge  
then wear it out of sight.

Especially if you intend  
to disavow your love for me.

**WITH LOVE...**

I do what I do with love.

Criticize you might.

But I'll match you sleep for sleep  
night for night.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ROD MCKUEN was born in Oakland, California, in 1933, and grew up in California, Nevada, Washington and Oregon. He has traveled extensively, both as a concert artist and as a writer. In the past three years his books of poetry have sold in excess of three million copies in hardcover, making him the best-selling poet not only of this age but probably of every other era as well. In addition, he is the composer of more than a thousand popular songs and several film scores, including The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (for which his song received an Academy Award nomination). Artists such as Frank Sinatra, Petula Clark, Glenn Yarbrough, Rock Hudson, Claudette Colbert and Don Costa have devoted entire albums to his compositions.

His major classical works, Symphony #1, Concerto for 4 Harpsichords and Orchestra and Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra, have been performed by leading American symphony orchestras as well as those in foreign capitals of the world.

Before becoming a best-selling author and composer, Mr. McKuen worked as a laborer, radio disc jockey and newspaper columnist, and as a psychological-warfare scriptwriter during the Korean War.

He is currently writing screenplays based on his first two books of poetry and is about to make his debut as a film director.

When not traveling, he lives at home in California in a rambling Spanish house with a menagerie of sheepdogs, cats and a turtle named Wade.