

Word Count: 431 words

The Power of Youth

To many an adult, power is an austere and bitter word, swallowed with the grim knowledge of its misuse. The word is like a foreign delicacy, both tantalizing and repulsive, smacking of possibility but laced with regret. It is a word to chew on, thick as a peanut butter that sticks to a pristine set of teeth. It is a word to scrub away with toothbrush and mirror, peering at the humble face reflected in the glass.

Children do not eat so carefully. Youth plays with its food, tossing such cynicism around with its fork, faces smeared with innocence. The adult sighs at loaves of hard, stale reality and extracts a dry slice to pop in the toaster, filling the morning with the dull din of complaint. Children have not acquired such a burdensome vocabulary. They want to replant the grains in the bread, sowing tender morsels of hope.

So much of the world is parched. They read the newspaper, flipping past stories of violence and cruelty, dry colorless pages in helpless hands. They read history, and overwhelmed by the repetition of horrors, leave heavy tomes of indifference on their own doorsteps, unable to carry away so ponderous a package. They shut the door and forget what it means to stand out in the rain, until children emerge in a downpour of wet newness. They are drenched in relief, feeling the water slap gently against their stunned limbs, teasing them for who they were.

But the power of youth is not only about dancing in the cascade of burbling joy. It is also about the capacity to feel fear, the fear that is forgotten in the peril of routine. People acquaint themselves with the neon exits leading out of boisterous rooms of discussion; they forget what is to fear lightning, to fear night, to fear monsters. Those horrific hulks of bygone dreams no longer haunt them: they have grown accustomed to avoiding terror. One cannot live permanently

haunted. But youth cannot stand to see their own nightmarish visions reflected in television screens and newspaper headlines. Their heart stirs their vocal chords, and a thousand young voices rise in indignation.

We are accustomed to hearing that youth is outstanding because of what it can become, but youth is most extraordinary in what it is today. This power lives in the natural instinct to scold a ruthless world, not out of resentment or anger, but because youth believes. Youth do not slay the world's dragons; they raise their own wings of indignant love and breathe the white-hot breath of the future, igniting hope.