

THE JOURNEY

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting their bad advice –
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life !”
each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen branches and stones.
But little by little
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as our own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper

into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do –
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Mary Oliver
from Dream Work in "New and Selected Poems", Beacon Press, Boston, 1992.