

## How divine is forgiveness?

It's a nice concept  
but what's under the sculptured draperies?  
We forgive when we don't really care  
because what was done to us brought unexpected  
harvest, as I always try to explain  
to the peach trees as I prune them hard;  
to the cats when I shove pills against  
the Gothic vaults of their mouths

We forgive those who betrayed us  
years later because memory has rotted  
through like something left out in the weather  
battered clean then littered dirty  
in the rain, chewed by mice and beetles,  
frozen and baked and stripped by the wind  
till it is unrecognizable, corpse  
or broken machine, something long useless.

We forgive those whom their own machinations  
have sufficiently tangled, enshrouded,  
the fly who bit us to draw blood and who  
hangs now a gutted trophy in a spider's  
airy larder; more exactly, the friend  
whose habit of lying has immobilized him  
at last like a dog trapped in a cocoon  
of fishing line and barbed hooks.

We forgive those we firmly love  
because anger hurts, a coal that burns  
and smolders still scorching the tissues  
inside, blistering wherever it touches  
so that finally it is to ease our own pain  
that we bury the hot clinkers in a mound  
of caring, suffocate the sparks with promises,  
drown them in tears, reconciling.

We forgive mostly not from strength  
but through imperfections, for memory  
wears transparent as glass with the pattern  
washed off, till we stare past what injured us.  
We forgive because we too have done  
the same to others easy as a mudslide;  
or because anger is a fire that must be fed  
and we are too tired to rise and haul a log.

Marge Piercy, from Available Light