

## **A Maxim**

*Carl Dennis*

To live each day as if it might be the last  
Is an injunction that Marcus Aurelius  
Inscribes in his journal to remind himself  
That he, too, however privileged, is mortal,  
That whatever bounty is destined to reach him                   5  
Has reached him already, many times.  
But if you take his maxim too literally  
And devote your mornings to tinkering with your will,  
Your afternoons and evenings to saying farewell  
To friends and family, you'll come to regret it.                   10  
Soon your lawyer won't fit you into his schedule.  
Soon your dear ones will hide in a closet  
When they hear your heavy step on the porch.  
And then your house will slide into disrepair.  
If this is my last day, you'll say to yourself,                   15  
Why waste time sealing drafts in the window frames  
Or cleaning gutters or patching the driveway?  
If you don't want your heirs to curse the day  
You first opened Marcus's journals,  
Take him simply to mean you should find an hour                   20  
Each day to pay a debt or forgive one,  
Or write a letter of thanks or apology.  
No shame in leaving behind some evidence  
You were hoping to live beyond the moment.  
No shame in a ticket to a concert seven months off,                   25  
Or, better yet, two tickets, as if you were hoping  
To meet by then someone who'd love to join you,  
Two seats near the front so you catch each note.