

# Alligator Poem

I knelt down  
at the edge of the water,  
and if the white birds standing  
in the tops of the trees whistled any warning  
I didn't understand,  
I drank up to the very moment it came  
crashing toward me,  
its tail flailing  
like a bundle of swords,  
slashing the grass,  
and the inside of its cradle-shaped mouth  
gaping,  
and rimmed with teeth—  
and that's how I almost died  
of foolishness  
in beautiful Florida.  
But I didn't.  
I leaped aside, and fell,  
and it streamed past me, crushing everything in its path  
as it swept down to the water  
and threw itself in,  
and, in the end,  
this isn't a poem about foolishness  
but about how I rose from the ground  
and saw the world as if for the second time,  
the way it really is.  
The water, that circle of shattered glass,  
healed itself with a slow whisper  
and lay back  
with the back-lit light of polished steel,  
and the birds, in the endless waterfalls of the trees,  
shook open the snowy pleats of their wings, and drifted away,  
while, for a keepsake, and to steady myself,  
I reached out,  
I picked the wild flowers from the grass around me—  
blue stars  
and blood-red trumpets  
on long green stems—  
for hours in my trembling hands they glittered  
like fire.

~ *Mary Oliver*