



THE POLYMORPHIC 2

A BOOK OF POETRY

2

HAMID ATIYYAH

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By Hamid Atiyyah

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2 is a rope dangling
From a high mountain peak.
Winter shall bring its icicles
To make the necklace complete.

2 is a garrote,
The weapon of choice
For those thrilled
By the dying voice.

2 is a mirage
Staged on the sand.
Palms performed a daring walk
On a rope made from water.

2 is a finished painting.
The artist steps back from the easel
While his eyes search
For movements in the still life.

The 2nd page in any fairy tale
Is not far from where Alice's mind
Was lifted by the whirlwind
Of imagination.

2 is almost a question mark,
A gift presented to every newborn
To awaken the gray cells
Between birth and death.

2 is a wilted flower
Suffocating in the dark.
Its stem can no longer open
Its colorful shutters to admit the light.

2 is a robed Bedouin
Sitting on a hand-woven rug.
He is grim and serious
To offset the uplifting force.

2 is a listless feather in a field
Waiting for a child
To fulfil its wish
For a breath of air.

2 looks like one of Picasso's models.
Of course, she was a woman.
Even his bulls possess
Some feminine grace.

2, the farmer dreamily observed,
Looks like a sickle
That harvests the wheat
Without expecting a share of the bread.

2 is a stag's antler on a wall
It looks like a dead tree
Whose roots have fed
On fear and blood.

2 is the body of a drowned man.
The grimace on his withered face
Was a last-minute compromise
Between rigor mortis and his final breath.

2 open arms are inviting.
But Brutus or Judas
May seize the chance
To thrust a dagger or a kiss.

Are 2 horns a curse
On bulls?
Or is it man, the brute,
Who seeks a fight?

2 looks like the gallows
From which death throws a line,
to rescue a wretch
From a lynching mob.

2 is a picture of the letter S
The photographer has keen eyes
Which recognize the better side
And what the ego wants to hide.

2 is a mother waving goodbye
Whether smiling or in tears
Her heart is always looking
From the windows of her face.

2 is a victory sign,
Arm is raised
And heels are clicking
Dripping blood, gore and mud.

2 is a stroke of lightning
Ripping a long tear
From head to toe
In the black silken fabric.

2 is a leather belt.
Fathers who use it on their brats
Unleash the unspent wrath
Of a slaughtered animal.

It was a familiar twice-told tale
That happened once upon a time
And we endured the boring details
Just to hear they lived happily ever after.

The 2-way mirror was a silent pool
But things in my room liked to chatter
Just now the padded walls told me
That they thoroughly disapprove.

The 2-timing man was never exposed
Because he had a disciplined tongue
And it was his heart
That kept on slipping.

2 is a shoreline on a map
The ocean refuses to ratify
Because it remembers the times
When there was nothing but water.

2 is a hand holding a lamp.
His eyes see the light
But his mind is in total darkness.
Perhaps the lamp should hold his hand.

Was it really second sight?
I did see it coming.
But I have always been a pessimist
And begged my luck not to differ.

2 is a shepherd's staff.
Kings and bishops corrupted it
To turn free men
Into the common herd.

2 looks like a whistling kettle spout
Casting a shadow of a smile
On the woman's face as distant
Memories arrive at the station.

2 is a rearing cobra
Playing her musical tongue.
You need a charming tune
To calm your fears.

2 looks like a kneeling Scheherazade
Who has just seen in Shahriar's eyes
The sword's addiction
To headless pleasures.

2 is a hangman's noose
Used by tyrants
To cut off supplies
From daring minds.

2 was their number in Eden.
Rioting began
After Satan came
And they became a crowd.

2 is a kite scribbling across the sky
A child's colorful thoughts.
The illiterate wind is envious
And tears it up.

2 makes a marriage
But to form a happy union
The sum must always be
Wiser than the parts.

2 is a curious child
Contemplating grains of sand.
He cries when his thoughts
Are interrupted by the tide.

2 looks like a shoe shiner's footrest
It will remain idle until the rain stops
And the sun comes out again
To inspect the vain troops.

2 is a finger on a trigger.
A murderer is naive
To trust a digit that points
And leaves telltale prints behind.

2 is a wedding gown.
It is heavily embroidered
With a long train behind
To keep the bride's dreams earthbound.

The **2** balls are in mid-air
And the juggler is anxious
But he relies on gravity
To lend its invisible hand.

On the double-exposed photo
Wildflowers rose from vases of clouds
And my face was superimposed
On a surrealistic hot-air balloon.

He has a double personality.
The second one came uninvited.
One day he woke up
To find it under his skin.

2 can play that game, my friend said
And in the tense silence that followed
A bridge soundlessly tumbled
Into the bottom of a gorge.

2 is a shackled prisoner
Listening to the noise
Of the chains and curses
And will soon find a matching tune.

As a duo their voices were like
Two streams merging into a river,
But when they discussed their marriage
The roaring of rapids filled the air.

In a double-decker bus,
In the front seat
Right above the driver's cabin
A child discovered a simple thrill.

I now wear second-hand clothes.
It was not easy at first
But poverty is an excellent tamer
That uses neither whips nor chairs.

Near the end of the 20th century
I built my first ark
But before that, cancer took me
To the brink of death and back.

2 is a sad lonely figure
Pacing his hotel room
Staining the walls with shadows
And sapping the day's warmth.

2 is the neck of a solemn giraffe.
Sounds must climb to exit
But are sometimes pulled back
By the gravity of second thoughts.

2 is a tired boxer whose face
Is a pulp and his vision is blurred
But will continue to punch
As long as the cheers last.

2 is a discarded length of wire
That must wait millions of years before
It is pure again and can return
To the bosom of the earth.

2 is an eel hiding in the sand.
Its camouflage will soon be exposed
By the tide erasing its mask
Few grains at a time.

2 was a condemned man.
As the sharp axe was raised
Breaths were held but he alone
Never came up to the surface.

2 is a plastic toy duck
Floating in a bathtub.
The child squints and waits
For it to peck the suds.

2 looks like my intravenous stand.
It came equipped with alarm bells
That rang in the scary nights
And cried help on my behalf.

2 is asleep
He has abandoned his cocoon
And is now wandering weightless
In the realm of make-belief.

2 is a palm tree
Thrashed by a wintry storm.
The blind wind thought
It was another umbrella.

2 pairs of proud smiling eyes
Belong to a man and his shotgun
Standing side by side in a photo
Hung below their stuffed trophy.

2 is a flower at night
Its petals are closed
To hide its share of sunlight
From the thieving moon.

2 is a whip and somewhere near
There is a rack
And a torturer who smiles
While cracking your ribs into twos.

2 is a yawn
The crossbow is drawn
And though the arrow is flaccid
The message still strikes home.

2 is the early shape of a child's Z
As interpreted by his free-thinking hand
The mathematically-minded English teacher
Marked it down with a deep frown.

2 is a twisted nail
After it pierced flesh and bone
The executioner stood back to watch
The body rehearsing its final pose.

2 is a boomerang flying away
But you can rely
On the animal's last throes
To send it back.

2 is a broken necklace
It is cheap but the young girl's sadness
Is keen enough to cut the thread
That ties her mother's tears together.

2 has a mind of its own
It resisted the tradition of drawing
A circle that takes it back
To its point of origin.

2 is a healthy mane.
The howling gale
Is moved by envy
To pull a tuft of hair.

2 is a ship's bow
Rubbing salt has worn thin its wood
And seasoned the sailors' wounds
For the long vigils on deck.

2 is an Arabic numeral
It was originally a tent
In which a generous host
Entertained his guest.

2 resembles a garden hose
Lying in a patch of grass.
When I turned on the water,
It became possessed by a serpent's ghost.

2 is an elephant's trunk
Trumpeting in anger,
But the outcome
Will most likely be a truce.

2 is a third-world goose that travels north
To scrounge a living and will always
Sing for justice and equality
On its return journeys.

2 is an earthworm
Listening to the earth's pulse
Before it announces its diagnosis
And administers a tunic.

2 swans on a lake
Came close together and long enough
For the romantic ashore
To imagine a symmetrical heart.

2 is an actor taking a bow
He needs all his self-confidence
And much public acclaim
To continue his ongoing charade.

2 is a deadly curve on the road.
Who held the hand
That drew the slippery line?
Was it geography or a contractor's greed?

2 coins covering a dead man's eyes
Came from the small change
He kept in his pocket
For the bus fare on rainy days.

When the 2 rivals finally met
It was like air and terra firma
Conducting a transaction
Inside a hurricane.

2 is a scarf delivered by the wind.
It was perfumed
And still warm
Like a nice dream in winter.

2 eyes were glowing
In my dark room.
I wanted to scream
But my voice was hiding.

2 children playing in a garden
Is reminiscent of paradise
Before someone came out
With a bowl of fruit to share.

The blast cut him in two.
All he needed were a thousand stitches,
His mother's prayers and God's hand
To make him whole again.

As simple as putting 2 and 2 together
Or that's what I was told
But the equations in my child's mind
Were too advanced for my arithmetic.

Suicide often involves **2** or more
Even if the note does not mention
How many legs stepped out of the darkness
To kick off the chair from under his feet.

The **2**-faced man
Visits his mother regularly
To get a peck
On each of his four cheeks.

2 a penny, she said.
To think that I had to toil
Through a **2**-shift life
To earn her scorn.

On the two-way road
My mind is behind the wheel
And my heart sits beside me
Nagging me to distraction.

Twice the missionaries showed up at my door
To offer me a morsel of their faith
But my skepticism was ravenous
And turned them away empty-handed every time.

They no longer sleep in their twin bed.
After staging a successful coup,
General Familiarity laid down a plan
For a war of mutual contempt between the two.

“He is twice the man you’re”.
His mind walked out
But his manhood stayed back
To pick a kitchen knife.

The second deadly sin
Is stuffed, riddled with moth
And hanging behind the psychoanalyst's couch
Between Freud and his diplomas.

He is the second-born child
By the time he stepped out
For a breath of air
The winner was years ahead.

The Gemini patiently flashed
A coded message to Pisces.
Millions of years later
They are still waiting for a reply.

Double or quits, he said
Puffing rings of smoke
And the street's neon lights
Splashed his face with warrior's paints.

He fired his double-barreled scorn
Shattering my untested wings.
Since then I have not taken off
From my father's cold lap.

I linger to double-check the doors
And sniff the air for gas
Before shaking off the stubborn anxiety
Clinging to my legs like a bunch of children.

My mother's hugs were like double-breasted jackets.
If she was not dead
She would be standing in front of me
Straightening my necktie.

The words in his double talk
Are as certain as absolute monarchs
Even the wise refuse to see
The naked truth behind the rosy flesh.

2 looks like my key chain,
After it broke, losing my keys
And locking me out in the street
With my incurable agoraphobia.

2 horses in a field watched me go by.
I was in a hurry
And had to decline the invitation
In their begging eyes.

Neither men nor horses like to be second best
Only because at the finish line
Women and trainers
Are anxiously waiting.

You are second to none
I kept telling myself
Until the Goebbels inside me
Finally approved.

2 acts like a ghost
It no longer fears death
But cries and moans
Whenever it encounters the living.

When the Two Thousand Arabian Nights is written
Genies would probably live in oil wells
But there would be no thrills
Without evil magicians and greedy viziers.

2 is a climbing vine.
I lift my head
To see where
My fear of height blooms.

2 is an army's attack plan.
Every pin on the map stands for a battalion.
And while the general's staff debated tactics
The wall behind was wet with blood and tears.

On the second day of school
Tears did not flow
But the house was eerily
Quiet and depressing.

2 is a telegraph machine
Tapping in a frenzy
Somewhere out in the ocean
Wet feet are frozen with fear.

The number 2 man is camped
Where the Sherpas have left him
And is determined to weather it out
Until he hoists his flag.

2 is an idol.
Bees built a hive
Inside his open mouth,
And gave him a commanding voice.

2 is a lonely cyclist
Speeding on an empty road
The wind dashes in his path
To test his balance and resolve.

2 is an ill person.
Cushions have been placed around him
Because he sounds as fragile
As a pane of glass.

2 is an abstract sculpture
Showing absolutely no traces
Of the wind's trained chisels
Or the water's muddy hands.

Two headlights in the distance.
It must be the night coming
Wearing its soiree jacket
Studded with buttons of silver.

It was 2:00 a.m.
When I fell off the deck of sleep
And the night ship sailed on
Leaving me marooned in the small hours.

2 is a mysterious figure sitting in my chair
By the window where the darkness
Is as dense as a black hole
Sucking my eyesight out.

2 is a maze complete
With twists, turns and blind alleys.
When I finally found my way out.
It was daylight and nowhere to go.

2 is a fake snake
Its fangs are rubbery
And its tongue is lifeless
But the eyes are an open question.

2 is a tsunami
That reminds me of a camel
Rising to its feet and I am a child
Terrified of the groaning beast.

2 is Caesar's hand
Raised to command.
His tame subjects jump
Before the eagle lands.

2 is the number of clear opposites
Day and night, or black and white
But the world is partial
To the gray and not so bright.

You will stay after school, the teacher said
To write it down two hundred times.
And the student in turn programmed his hand
While his mind went out to play.

The second millennium is now over
Leaving fewer empty spaces under the rug.
Cleaning can wait, she thought,
Watching her favorite soap opera.

2 is an ostrich fleeing a lion
Both are praying for a patch of sand
Where she can hide her head
And he can finally have his dinner.

2 was a fire-breathing dragon
So full of anger and hate
That he brought upon himself
An early death by self-combustion.

2 is a straw picked up
By a bird to build an ordinary nest
Because power among birds
Lies in claws and feathers.

2 is a drug addict leaning against a wall,
A mere ten minute walk from home
If they would only lower down
The drawbridges between pavements.

2 is a scarecrow in an empty field.
A small voice talked me into
Borrowing its hat and taking its place
To have a taste of power.

2 is an old, frail scholar
Who blames his failing eyesight
And other ailments on the hypothetical parasite
That infected him with the love of books.

2 looks like a fetus
Whose parents are delighted
That he or she is kicking and
Ready for the outside world.

2 is a prairie dog
Standing on its hind legs.
Its twitching nose is pestering
The wind for news.

2 illustrates my abridged life's story.
Childhood was a short ride
On a roller coaster and then adulthood
Came too soon to escort me home.

2 must be the minimum social number
Because a friendless child will invent one
And a desperate adult may even exchange
His mind for a small friendly voice.

2 jaws opened wide enough
To reveal the razor-shaped teeth
And the narrow darkness beyond
Where hope disappeared with the first bite.

2 is an escalator on a tarmac.
It reminded me of a tearful child
Sitting on a branch and hoping for two firm hands
That would lower him down to earth.

2 is a child whispering
In my ear fuzzy words
That flutter away leaving behind
The tickling of tiny breaths.

2 is an old man kneeling in prayer.
He has given up on all his wishes
Except for a pair of new legs
To take him as far as the park and back.

2 is staring at a mirror
To please the vanity demon
Who puts seven-year curses
On those who offend him.

2 is a tiny organism
Deprived of a voice
And the freedom of movement
It is bound to be a deadly virus.

2 is a belly dancer
Her eyes are on the spectators
To savor their admiration
Of her forced contortions.

2 is a man steering a boat
With a pole that sometimes
Lingers in the muddy river
And utters loud sighs.

A gunfighter brandishes two guns.
At first, he had just one
But it was just a matter of time
Before the other hand became corrupted.

2 is a microphone
Which sings the praise
Of tyrants and war criminals
But escapes their ugly fate.

Having a twin can be insufferable
On days when nothing seems right
And you feel a persistent urge
To scream at your reflection in the mirror.

2 looks like a dog's tail.
It was probably straight and dignified
Before dogs and men
Became friends.

2 is an open treasure chest in a Pharaoh's tomb
In which a spider built its webs
Proving that fear of a curse
Never stopped the greedy and adventurous.

2 is a judge's mallet
Raised in the air
Before coming down to force
A crooked life into a hole.

2 is a side-lamp
Whose light pushes back the darkness
In front of the letters speeding
On the rolling gray roads of the mind.

2 looked like a wishbone.
All the guests ignored it
Because their stomachs were full
And their bodies were warm.

2 noblemen on horseback
Killed foxes and boars
To instill fear
In the hearts of their vassals.

2 is a seahorse
Which bemoans its terrestrial namesake
Becoming tame
And the taste of metal.

2 is a hen pecking at the dirt.
When hunger strikes,
A farmer will not hesitate
To dig up the fallen seeds.

The young boy had only two limbs
His only arm pushed away the wheelchair
While his leg crawled on the grass
To where his brother was playing.

Legends claim that the number 2 was coined
By a money-lending priest who preached
That gold multiplies and every one of his coins
Must return holding another in its arms.

2 is a broken toy
First its spring was jammed
Then it became silent
And the child finally pronounced it dead.

2 is an iceberg floating in the ocean.
The waves are waiting for a gale
To lift their tropical lapping tongues
To the snow-topped peaks.

2 is a circling eagle
Casting its shadows across the field
To chase animals from under the shades
Into the hunting areas of daylight.

If 2 looks like a clothes hanger
Then my wardrobe is a Yemeni hamlet
Crammed with emaciated children
Hanging to life by their thumbs.

2 is a man sitting on a stool
In a noisy, dark, smoke-filled room
He goes there every night
Attracted by the gloom.

2 is a hut demolished by a hurricane
The villagers must outrun their fears
And cross the swamps of superstition
To salvage the concept of home.

2 is a hook-arm
When a man took it off
A nearby woman flinched
Like a fish pulled out of water.

2 reminds me of a fishing line which my mother
Let me try once while she watched close by
With my drowned brother beside her
Warning me of the snapping jaws of water.

2 is a rose bud
Putting on its make-up
While an impatient bee is at the door
Buoyant with expectations.

2 is a person deep in thought
Who like a pregnant woman
Has just discovered that creation
Can be orbited with one hand.

2 is a contemplating Sufi
Living in the desert on bread and water
But expects any day to dine in a fine restaurant
Which offers absolute truths on its menu.

2 is a locked door,
We are all waiting
For our turn to enter
After Pandora opens the door.

He saw the two hands raised in surrender
But his spine was pricked like a porcupine
And only a thin red line stopped him
From thrusting his blood-thirsty bayonet.

The two men fired, and the duel was over.
The snow later fell blotting out the bloodstains
Before the children came out
To practice with snowballs.

2 dyes flew in the air
Like trapeze artists performing a triple somersault.
They wagered all their money on the applause
And left out the safety net to improve the odds.

A child drove the toy car in his living room
He shut his eyes, played his mouth
Like an engine and a horn, and floored the air
Under his foot pumping it up with imagination.

2 is a shell-shocked soldier walking out of battle
His body is intact but his mind
Is back there trying to find his way out
Of the maze of human intestines.

2 is an athlete at the starting line
When the gun is fired
His lungs, eager as a hound, will jump
To catch the wounded air.

The two words, 'I do', escaped
Their mouths like two butterflies.
Time stopped by to give them a gift:
A wedding picture for their winters of discontent.

The Second Coming is at hand, the man shouted
But the small crowd at Hyde Park's corner
Laughed at the frantic man who cried "Lamb"
To frighten all the wolves in London.

2 is a scimitar which was originally a ploughshare
Before war was declared and the farmers' son enlisted
For the sake of a medal, but the stubborn scimitar clung
To the mud and was left to rust.

2 is a cat climbing our fence
Its tail, substituting for a hand,
Could be sketching an abstract painting
Or conducting the orchestra on the neighbor's radio.

2 looks like a horseshoe hanging
Above a door. A vine loitered around
Its nails for a month before jumping
To a window ledge lined up with pots.

2 looks like a telephone receiver
Which gives my mouth
The freedom to speak its mind
Without heeding the censoring eyes.

2 is a rusty piece of metal
Lying in a pool of water. The sun
Sent down its daylight
For a relaxing session of watercolor painting.

2 is a computer screen
Inside it there is a horde
Of mighty gigabytes ready
To conquer your mind.

2 is a jockey riding a racehorse.
The horse is galloping toward the finish line
But the jockey is furlongs ahead
Receiving the wreaths and taps on shoulders.

One hand knocks twice on the door,
The other hand carries a bouquet of flowers.
He has thoroughly rehearsed his part but stage fright
Will nevertheless usher him in after the third knock.

2 looks like my slingshot.
At the final manhood test
Of breaking the tiny neck my hand
Was as listless as the bird's eyes.

2 is a mysterious shape
Drawn in the sandy beach
Which crabs come out to explore
Followed by the curious ocean.

2 is a broken slave's chain
Forensic experts lifted from it
Traces of skin, nail, teeth
Unfinished prayers and infinite curses.

A pair of gloves used to be an imperative
For officers. Before that there was the gauntlet.
But now it is the fashion
To flaunt blood stains and gore.

2 is a boat sailing
In the standing room of the ocean,
And reaching for the sturdy hand of the wind
To guide it through the waves.

2 is a skydiver tumbling
Toward the earth like a prodigal son
Torn between sailing the open spaces
And leading a dreary life ashore.

I knew he was double-dealing
When his hands moved like a mirage
And his eyes were full of sand
Shifting all the way to the watering hole.

2 is a sleepy person.
The body is swaying
And the next night tremor
May knock the daylight out.

2 is a teacher looking over my shoulder.
I had no early warning
And only two clumsy hands
To erase the shame off my face.

Let his punishment be twofold
As a lesson to all of you, the jailer said
But our minds were flooded with fear
Leaving no room for anything else.

2 is an even number
She said and we agreed
Because our minds were trained to believe
Her rod tapping on the blackboard.

Second thoughts kept her
For hours in front of the mirror.
They could chatter all night long
Without showing their faces.

2 is a broken spring
Protruding from an old sofa
Like an undecided amphibian
Floating on water.

When 2 flew like a bat
The child in me cringed
Worried over its nestling spaces
On my neck and the rodent's addiction to blood.

2 was a dangling earring
And the lustful fish in me
Was blinded by its instincts
As it leapt to the luring bait.

2 is a burglar's crowbar
That forced open the door
And shattered the glass
Of the owner's crystal nights.

2 is an oriental woman with shrunken feet.
She must suppress her pain
So that her clownish face can fake
A loving smile at her tormentor.