I have a poem for you. This poem is about three of us. The first is a twelve-year-old girl, one of the boat people crossing the Gulf of Siam. She was raped by a sea pirate, and after that she threw herself into the sea. The second person is the sea pirate, who was born in a remote village in Thailand. And the third person is me. I was very angry, of course. But I could not take sides against the sea pirate. If I could have, it would have been easier, but I couldn’t. I realized that if I had been born in his village and had lived a similar life-economic, educational, and so on-it is likely that I would now be that sea pirate. So it is not easy to take sides. Out of suffering, I wrote this poem. It is called “Please Call Me by My True Names,” because I have many names, and when you call me by any of them, I have to say, “Yes.”

Don’t say that I will depart tomorrow—even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving to be a bud on a Spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, to fear and to hope.

The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that is alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river. And I am the bird that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond.

And I am the grass-snake that silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as Bamboo sticks. And I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate. And I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands. And I am the man who has to pay his “debt of blood” to my people dying slowly in a forced-labor camp.

My joy is like Spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth. My pain is like a river of tears, so vast it fills the four oceans.
Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.