

The Beautiful, Striped Sparrow

In the afternoons,
in the almost empty fields,
I hum the hymns
I used to sing

in church.
They could not tame me,
so they would not keep me,
alas,

and how that feels,
the weight of it,
I will not tell
any of you,

not ever.
Still, as they promised,
God, once he is in your heart,
is everywhere --

so even here
among the weeds
and the brisk trees.
How long does it take

to hum a hymn? Strolling
one or two acres
of the sweetness
of the world,

not counting
a lapse, now and again,
of sheer emptiness.
Once a deer

stood quietly at my side.
And sometimes the wind
has touched my cheek
like a spirit.

Am I lonely?
The beautiful, striped sparrow,
serenely, on the tallest weed in his kingdom,
also sings without words.

-Mary Oliver