

To Be a Person  
by Jane Hirshfield

To be a person is an untenable proposition.

Odd of proportion,  
upright,  
unbalanced of body, feeling, and mind.

Two predators' eyes  
face forward,  
yet seem always to be trying to look back.

Unhooved, untaloned fingers  
seem to grasp mostly grief and pain.  
To create, too often, mostly grief and pain.

Some take,  
in witnessed suffering, pleasure.  
Some make, of witnessed suffering, beauty.

On the other side—  
a creature capable of blushing,  
who chooses to spin until dizzy,  
likes what is shiny,  
demands to stay awake even when sleepy.

Learns what is basic, what acid,  
what are stomata, nuclei, jokes,  
which birds are flightless.  
Learns to play four-handed piano.  
To play, when it is needed, one-handed piano.

Hums. Feeds strays.  
Says, "All together now, on three."

To be a person may be possible then, after all.

Or the question may be considered still at least open—  
an unused drawer, a pair of waiting work-boots.