

# Making Love

By Rebecca McClanahan, from The Best American Poetry series

Why *make*? I used to wonder.  
Is it something you have to keep on  
making, like beds or dinner, stir it up  
or smooth it down? Sex, I understood,  
an easy creaking on the upholstered  
springs of a man you meet in passing.  
You *have* sex, you don't have to make it,  
it makes *you*--rise and fall and rise again,  
each time, each man, new. But love?  
It could be the name of a faraway  
city, end of a tired journey you take  
with some husband, your bodies chugging  
their way up the mountain, glimpsing  
the city lights and thinking, If we can  
keep it up, we'll make Love by morning.  
*I guess it was fun for somebody*,  
my grandmother once said. By then  
I was safely married and had earned  
the right to ask, there in the kitchen  
beside the nodding aunts. Her answer  
made me sad. In her time, love meant making  
babies, and if I had borne twelve  
and buried three, I might see my husband  
as a gun shooting off inside me, each bullet  
another year gone. But sex wasn't my question.  
Love was the ghost whose shape kept  
shifting. For us, it did not mean babies,  
those plump incarnations the minister  
had promised--flesh of our flesh,  
our *increase*. Without them, and twenty years  
gone, what have we to show  
for the planing and hammering, bone  
against bone, chisel and wedge,  
the tedious sanding of night  
into morning--when we rise, stretch,  
shake out the years, lean back,

and see what we've made: no ghost,  
it's a house. Sunlight through the window  
glazing our faces, patina of dust  
on our arms. At every axis, mortise  
and tenon couple and hold. Doors  
swing heavy on their hinges.