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Poetry
for
Going Home

by

Charles O. Todd, III



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Epitaph

Ticking. Talking. Ding!
The clock that chimes in colors
tells me I am dead.

November 20, 1946 – ∞



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Going Home

I've been going home
for a long time now,
remembering how good it was
to be with you there.
One good poet told us
we could never go back home.
So be it, but
what about *going* home?

Going isn't *being* there;
it's only *getting* there.

I'm on my way home, now.
Don't know if or when
I'll ever get there,
but having you, and home,
in the back of my mind
makes going home more
important than getting home, or,
even what I'll do if
I finally make it. Home.



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power

He stood, staring over the threshold,
slack-jawed, tired. His right hand
twitched against his pant leg.
This stoop-shouldered brute
found strength in ignorant persistence
and came home.

How shall I come home,
having made so many
identifiable stops along the way
to hide my lack of knowledge behind
self-confidence and pride?

How will my arrival turn out that time?
A wet kiss in the rain?
A proud salute in the dark?
A knowing nod?

Or will I be ignored?



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Out of the Old

I can understand equally well
the elegance of a Villanelle
alongside the physics of
paired polar particles.
I can see the hand of God
in a Radiolarian
or a country home,
an Ibsen play,
or a fossilized bone.
Mozart thrills my heart and soul
as intensely as holograms are whole.

Flowers smell like spring rain feels.
Mosquitoes sound just like
the itch from their bite.
Moonlight looks like
the sound of crickets.
The velocity of light is equal
to the frequency times the wavelength.

There is a Power in you and me.
We have felt it, seen it,
smelled it, tasted it, tested it,
heard it in ourselves and others,
feared it, worshiped and revered it,
betrayed and killed it. Still we have
not known what
or who/how/where/why/when
it is.

It is the winds,
soon to be The Wind again.
The time and times again
are beginning to lase.
The universe is putting
its chickens in one pot.
We're coming to Critical Mass.
Genesis chapter one, verse two:
The Power, The Wind, The New.

11/20/65



One quiet note

If it is a gift, then
it is in poor taste.
Burdens like this are
unfair somehow. I
keep it only because
it was given to me
and I would not
offend the giver
by laying it aside.

Sometimes it bangs and clatters
against my insides, howling
to be let go.
If I let it out
it whimpers and fawns
like a beaten cur
who fears its master
but fears freedom more.
It is a fickle friend to me.

Sometimes I could burst
with tremulous arrays
of directionless emotions.
I am stretched like catgut
between urges to belt anyone
or embrace everyone.
Like a guitar string,
I exist poised and tense
ready for someone to
pluck from me some sound,
some tone of existence.
But only I can sound that note.

Other times I am disconsolate
and seek to get in touch
with that fleeting instant
of gratifying resolution.



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I search in desperation
for relief. I am
addicted to the pains
of searching, but more
to the pains of finding.
I must become singer and song,
poet and poem, pain and pleasure.

The exhaustion is exasperating.
I am too weak to fight the thing.
Once again I submit.
I surrender. I am possessed.
This muse is a terrible mistress.

Each encounter is a
struggle, sometimes arduous,
sometimes
surprisingly brief, like
a stroke of lightning,
a stroke of genius.
For an instant, then, there is balance
between what I know *will* happen
and what I know *is* happening.
I perceive the way,
cued by some subtle change,
and charge off in a new direction.

Everything, then, is different
merely because *I* am different'
but, if I can catch that moment,
ah, that is sufficient.
I can rest, at which time
I am most vulnerable,
and most in need of vigilance.
I know my rest is hopeless
until, if ever, I become
that one shimmering chord
ringing across eternity.



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sojourner

I am changing the way I change myself.
Someone keeps refolding the map.
Where I am is always
on the other side.
Where is my destination
if my location is someplace else?
And how do you pack, I wonder?

If I'm going, I'm gone – at least
that's how it looks.
Wouldn't it be funny if
I'm not going, but everything
else is? Going, I mean.
Then I would be left,
and that might be right.

If you were me,
what would *you* do?
If you were me,
then who would *I* be?
If I met you,
would you know me?
If I knew me,
could I meet you?
And if we never meet,
how will we do?
How do *you* do?
Are you a stand-still traveler, too?

I'm changing the way I change
my self. If I become you
we'll be on our own.
Forget the map. I'm going home.

1982?



Expectations

On my Twenty-Ninth Birthday

I had not thought of this
until then. It was too soon.
Here I am, unheeded, unneeded,
bent to my way, but,
not by wind-whipped bowing.
No, not that.

This place is my fascination;
it is my home, I guess.
The things I've gathered
together here are mine
for a little while only.
Yes, just that.

Something new has
arrived, I think.
I said, "this is my world,
and welcome to it."
But I did not gather this.
Perhaps it was here from
the very beginnings of my world.
But, perhaps not.

"How come you to my world,
unknown, unbidden, unloved?
Show me your place in
all of this, my keep.
And if there is none?
Well. What then?"

So I spoke, with fear it seems,
for here was something
from my darkest fears,
from dreams undreamt.
Then I knew the answering voice,
and, grief-gripped, wept.



The sound of it wrenched
my soul's ears like
torture. My heart collapsed.
Head-spinning, sick-beginning,
drawn, repulsed, and stumbling,
realities intruded!

Comfort, security, happiness
fell away like burnt-off clothing.
Now, arrayed in weariness, wary,
with fatigue as my stanchion, I go.
And I know. I know,
there *is* a difference.

That is what I tried to forget.
In my world, there is *no* difference.
In this world, it *makes* no difference.
You must obey all the contradictions.
Keep your secrets from yourself.
The realities made me confess:

"I am sad, and
there is not enough breath
to fill my sighs.
I am old, and
there are not enough years
to master my sorrow.
I am sick, and
there is not enough healing
to make any difference.

"I have seen an age
pass, and grieved its loss.
I have seen friends
go, and cannot bear their leaving.
I have seen beauty
wither, and hoarded its memory.

"These are the times,
the change of season,
the end of summer.
Now is the autumn come,
but with a sad harvest.
Gloom and despair are reaped



where gladness was sown.
Wreck and ruin rumble
where care once roamed.

The waiting is over,
... isn't it?

As the storm gathers
so does dread, yet
even as the fury falls,
anticipation fades
and acceptance
greet the rain.

Sorrow, back-washed, flood-broken,
opens a way to calm.
Impending doom is none the worse
for having fallen
as expected, in darkness.

Many see and feel
the darkness now come.
A few, though, will not quail,
will not falter,
will not serve,
unless it be themselves.

They cannot fail because
this is not the first time,
nor the last time, but
still the between time,
and truth *does* prevail.

When the Time comes
of endless summer,
winterless days of joy,
I will be ready.
I have been sad and old,
sick and grieving,
filled with memory.
I am through with them.
For me there is nothing,
and that is well worth
waiting for, even here.



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Wherever 'here' is."

They do not know, I think,
that there is yet another room,
hidden, safe for a while,
until they corrode their way
through again, up against
my last wall.

A larger room, naturally,
more crowded with all
the wonderful wonders of
my world, my place,
where no one rules
for no one serves.

I will be larger, too,
and fit in quite well.
They can break down no wall.
There is no wall! That last
room was built for me
out of the memories I have of it.

There, I will sing with **my** finches,
walk with **my** friends,
heal from **my** wounds,
and keep realities
in a small basement room,
tight-locked, like a tomb!



CONFIRMATIONS ON MY 39TH BIRTHDAY

I thought I once saw the way.
Two roses bloomed beside a bridge.
One blossom, not yet full,
graced the bureau of
a lovely woman.
Another, equally rich, stayed.
Still, the two knew a bond
which only those who share
the self-same roots can bear.

They pressed against the
windowpane and tried to build a bridge
across the glass in vain.
Now I know. What I once thought
was wrong.
I am the rose on the bureau.
I am the rose on the vine.
What was cut is dead and gone.
What lives on is mine.
Then, who am I?

I am the reflections of both
caught in the glass.
I am the bridge.
I became what I am
be being who I was
until I live out
that which I will be.
I am the bridge.
The bridge is me.



Meditations
on my 40th Birthday

I can still remember how it started,
back on Franklin Street, at home.
We marched around the room to Sousa's tunes.
Music made the time alive,
and I was in the band.

It was easy to catch the beat,
back at home on Franklin Street.
I had a record player in my room.
My Teddy Bear could talk and fly,
although he could not stand.

He was fearless in the dark
and knew he never would miss the mark
when it was time to cast the monsters out.
He knew the secret words to say
to make them understand.

Everything was just pretend
and so no one said it had to end.
Now, after all these years, I think I see
how all of that was shaping me
as if it had been planned.

After forty years, now, I can say
Life is just a tune you play.
I'll bet Old Teddy Bear would be surprised
to learn that he's as old as I —
and leader of the band.

And yet , somehow, I feel he *always* knew,
the way all good Teddies do,
SomeOne else was writing all the songs —
making all the music right,
helping Teddy stand.

Looking back, along the corridor,
I should have seen the truth before:
Every blessed song we sang or played
was just the same old Song again.
My God! that Song is grand!



I heard it played again the other day, then
played once more in a different way,
with softer accents, longer trills, and then
I knew I didn't have to be
alone in this strange land.

The music of millions crashed in my
ears and no one was marching.
We danced, and oh! how we danced!
Some, with feline grace, whirled,
capering across the growing horizon,
touching even moon and stars.

Ballets, and tangos, and waltzes,
reels, jigs, and congas —
everyone, *every one*, dancing for joy, and yet
the music was all the same.
Each dance and dancer formed from
that single Song. What a **SONG!**

Behind me, many marched on.
Before me, the music and the dancers
beckoned me through the door. Doubtfully,
I looked at my feet, and felt left out.
But beneath them I saw the threshold.
I was at the door, so I marched right in.

Marching isn't dancing. I turned to escape.
Standing smack in the way was SomeOne's
beat up, fuzziess Teddy Bear.

Standing. Grinning. Then dancing.
It was hilarious. It was joy.
Come to think of it, it was Heaven.

When I awoke, I thought I could hear
SomeOne calling out, "Come near!
I Am Lord of All That Dance,
The Was, The Is, The Evermore.
The Maker of The Band."

I'm learning to dance, praise God, as planned!





Old Scratch

Loping through the ending loop,
den-aimed after another sheepless night,
approached he close on the trialless trail.
The timbre of his pawfalls feints, for fun,
the hubris of the hunter's haunting taunt:
A chaseless past, the tooth unbloodied.
Since his slavering never ceases,
he is, unwholey, aware of hunger, still
unhindered or unhelped if it decreases.

Cast-out death-monger, Father of Wolves,
he lies, above the ancient Law of Packs,
roamer condemned by the Order of Sanctity.
So wiley-wise a world has such as he
to prey at every or any hour of night or day
on sheeplly sojourners as stupidly stray
from out the wall-less fold, faultingly blunder,
and falling away, fling their very selves
against his flailing flames of hunger.

For see! There is naught where his belly should be!
Who thinks else, consumed is he.
Wiser sheep are by The Lamb set free.

10/84



Prv 21:9, 19; 27:15-16

The aunts go marching one by one,
Hoorah! Hooray! Someone should
cheer, though I will abstain.
Bitten too many times,
feeling too much pain, with no gain,
Dylanishly in sane,
deliciously vain and pointless,
scoreless, more or less, I lose.
I didn't even know I'd
signed up before I found I,
I'm signing off.
Why do my ears keep on ringing?

Too much is enough
because enough is too much.
I didn't ask for any of this.
Well, yeah, I did, but
not like this, not my whole
life like this. Always wrong
never filled, fulfilling none,
living death one day at a time,
Emersonian Bozo, handing out
time like it belonged to me —
as if, like everyone else,
I could get away free.

I've never had a whole day
pain free — body, mind,
and spirit all flog each other
blaming each for losing the key
to the bonds that sets us free
of everything we have to be
to stop the shrill screams of
everything that's good and real,
everything one ought to feel,
torn away in another pointless tirade
over some inconsequential thing.
It's no wonder my ears always ring.



Can you imagine me

writing this while I
imagine you reading it?
Can your mind's eye see
the pad resting on my knee
like a napkin full of
wedding cookies, punch,
and pillow mints as I try
to balance my being
gracious and graceful?

I don't want to spill
a drop, or drop a treat.
Sitting thus, we sow words
in each other's hearts, all
the while knowing the parts
we play in our arts.

The words that you have sown
have sprouted and grow
yielding thirty, sixty,
a thousand fold. They were
once-young but have
not grown old.

Over the past forty years
when I ask God to
bless those who bless me,
didn't His wisdom decree
that would include you?
(And of course Him, too.)

I'm a single snowflake
riding in a storm; somehow
you have taught me
what it means to be warm.
And with what ease!

As you lean back in your chair
to see what follows, and to
hear the echoes of your muse
as Imogene walks by
wearing butterflies in her hair,



I am imagining you, dear reader.

10/08/2007

Bridge Work

Bridges join things together
reaching across differences
in the common ground.
It is difficult to tell if they
reach from one side to the other, or
reach from the center to the ends, or
reach from the bottom to the top;
but, they *do reach* as required.

In a war, a bridge must be
secured ahead of us and
burned behind us. It must
be defended if it is ours,
destroyed if it is theirs.
A bridge is the weakest link
in most of our roadways.

Bridges are open, vulnerable,
easy to attack, hard to defend.
Bridges must be built, which means
they must be planned.
The best bridges are built by
the best planners and honest workers.
Natural bridges do occur and
are delightful to find and try.
They are usually dangerous
and suitable only for adventures
or travels of the citizens of nature.

Bridges are often perilous,
as we learned at San Luis Rey,
sometimes dangerous. More often,
though, life-sustaining. They may be
huge artworks of iron or stone,
they may be bamboo, or jungle vine.
They are usually utilitarian but
occasionally decorative,
sometimes both, but,
no matter what, they connect us.



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A bridge always has at least
two ends and traffic passes
both ways, and by courtesy or design,
important connections in both directions
are made just as expected.

Bridges usually need support across the middle
and strong anchors at the ends.
As they reach across impassible obstacles
they cross a void, span a gap, unite
what nature made separate.
When support is columns or pylons,
the footing must be impervious.
When support is by suspension,
the anchors must be deep and strong.

Bridges are beautiful, even if not
intended to be so. They are easily
taken for granted — ignored for
what they cross or where they go.
We really only notice them
when they're gone — washed-out,
blown-up, abandoned, decayed,
collapsed into the space they span.
If they're really important
we try to take care of them,
but we seem to know, somehow,
that bridges can usually be rebuilt,
often better than before.

There are few substitutes for a bridge,
and most of these are unsatisfactory.
Where a bridge can be built,
little else does a better job there.
Commerce usually shuns the place
where a bridge cannot be built
to carry us past certain toil or injury.
What little traffic there may be
changes course in deference to an
indomitable obstruction.

Bridges change relationships.
Two sheer cliffs along a river canyon,
a coldly-separate double jeopardy,



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become less threatening
when joined by a well-built bridge.
A previously arduous and hazardous crossing
becomes a treat to the traveler,
a pleasant memory to the visitor,
a changed perspective for the
one who lives the change.

Now, look here: Around this turn.
Once more from the top. Love
is a bridge.

Hyde

Rend a garment, a net, a life:
Sew, needle, and thimble;
Sow wheedle, and gamble.
Use the strongest
thread you can find.
Knot the end first.



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Mockingbird

Why does the mockingbird
sing at night when other
birds are silent? (Think of
two spherical bowls filled
brim full
with hearth-warmed,
wild, raw,
desert-blossom honey.

Perhaps this songster sings
all through the day and night
melodies God taught him
eons ago when songs
lasted
almost from —
Midnight's
yearning to Day's delight.

Finches and nightingales
remember only some
incidental motifs,
each learned from this master,
not by
divine acts.)

Because
God is praised when you listen.

Honey and mockingbirds,
friendships and loving words,
all that is good and pure
comes from one source for sure.
Just God.
I'm glad He
made you
the sunshine in my life.



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CATHEXES

Cathexis I: Patterns

Goats are clever in their mischief.
Chickens are greedy little Keystone Kops.
Ducks are fools surviving by instinct.
Cats cunningly live between freedom and bondage.
Dogs are pathetically loyal for no good reason.
Cattle are just plain stupid,
And deserve what they get.

Cathexis II: Calumny

Drunken men act like goats.
Proud men act like chickens.
Lazy men act like ducks.
Selfish men deal like cats.
Lonely men live like dogs.
Angry men die like cattle.

Cathexis III: Sciamachy

Goats, chickens, ducks, cats, dogs, and cattle
Are like us, somehow. Perhaps because
We can see it no other way. How
Fittingly tragic that only we are
Aware of the similarities, and only
They are aware of the differences.



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Old and Useless

When I am old and useless,
when my mind rejects
its dilapidated shrine of bone and flesh,
when my limbs are moved with difficulty, and
my eyes glaze too easily -

- do not remember me.
- do not forget me.

(I cannot remember which.)
I can only snatch a moment
as mind joggles and boggles against itself
like apples in a tub of water.
Something to hold onto,
something to claim as mine.
(What was it now?)

I can spend all day looking for it
and lose another day of being
old and useless. I shuffle
to the bathroom. I struggle
to maintain the shrine.
I shudder with compound exhaustion
of relief and effort.

When I am old and useless
do not remember or forget me.
Merely become me, for a moment only,
with a warm word or kindly gesture,
a minute or two of gab.
Become my youth
and let me banish age with
a harsh, but easily handled,
chunk of this day, this now, this
eternally new, not
(That's what it was!)
old and useless.



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Choosing

It was a Chicano woodcarver
who finally made me see
what it means to be an artist.
He went down to the Bosque
and found a cottonwood burl to carve.
He felt it, weighed it, and then
slowly changed that lump of wood
to Doña Sebastian.
He revealed the truth hidden inside.
With chisels and knives he peeled away
the wood he did not want.

Patience guided his eager hands
deeper into the wood.
His excitement was contagious.
The pile of cuttings grew and grew
until the day he called us in
to see the finished work.
We knew he'd found what
no one else could see.

When I sit down with pen in hand
I want to write the truth.
I find, like him, that I must choose
the words I do not need.
I must save the poem that's left.
No one wants our throwaways,
despite the fact they really are
the very proof of art.
Truth stands alone when they are gone.

As I unreel ribbons of rhyme,
or rhythms I can feel,
I want them all to be just right,
clean and tight, with purpose.
The end result, sometimes surprising,
is less concrete than wood or stone
sculpted by some searching artist,
but, it *is* my own.
It shows how I feel about my life.

Something else occurs to me,



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chips falling where they may,
the *raison d'être* for all art:
Art is microcosmic life.
We do not choose the things we want
to make us what we are.
We choose the things we do not need
and cherish all that's left.
When that is done, we find we know the truth.

And so the painter leaves behind
a lot of wasted paint.
He didn't need to use it all
to paint his masterpiece.
The potter only throws the pot.
The weaver weaves what's in the loom.
The whole world's not in every play.
No novel tells it all.
The best of these are know by what they're not.

I've always thought that life meant changes
made by adding on.
Now I know it's not that way.
Two paths in a yellow wood?
I know it's not the path I take
that makes the difference in my life.
It is the path I do not choose
that changes what I am.
It is the word I do not choose to write.

It is the same with work or friends,
or how we choose to live.
By ruling out what we don't want,
we declare our being.
We visualize ourselves against
the backdrop of our prejudice
and proudly claim we are unique,
delighting in the contrast we perceive.
We do not cling to what we do not like.

So, as you seek and shape your life
look around for me.
I may be in the thick of things,
or in the garbage bin.
Should your misjudgment, or your hand slip,



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if the color or form is not what you want,
well, it's not the end of the world!
Artist! Expand your plan!
But, don't forget which things *you've*
thrown away to show us all the truth.



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Again

She did not love me.
How can I be sure
that I loved her?
Could this be
only my fantasy?

Do I still love that
figment of my imagination –
a projection of my desires?
Was her prison too rigorous
for the dreams I had scanned:
It seems infatuation
was all I had planned.

But it could not matter,
could not be helped,
could not be judged
except as madness:
To be in love with and image
is the ultimate sadness.

There is more woman there
than meets the eye,
even my own, even her own.
She is old. So am I.
Her portrait will not age,
nor will it die.
It will replace her.

I still love her
in the mirror, dancing,
a pixie-gypsy
scintillating with joy.
I cry like a small boy.
She, it, doesn't care.
I am saved by her beauty
from death by her stare.



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Class of '62

Her thin, straight lips
curve upwards in a
practiced smile as she
acknowledges a memory.
The candle at the table
flickers from the whirl
of the dancers around
the wallflower girl.

The more things change
the more changes there are.
After a thousand changes,
she comes full circle.
The smile, the ache,
the modest dress and makeup
recount a past undenied,
a banner of consistency
for the wallflower girl.

It's not even her reunion,
but it easily could be.
For some of us
there are so many changes
that what-was-before
is the same as what-will-be.
But, she knows the difference;
her husband loves the wallflower girl.



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WHO CAN TOUCH THE WIND?

We are of the same wind,
you and I, shaped
by the sculptings of
creation's instruments
into words,
into song,
into the two of us.
We are the wind
formed by art
to become art.
As one word in a song
is sung at one pitch,
so too are we. Together
yet different and
apart; separate expressions
of the same wind.

We are of the same cloth,
you and I, loomed
by the weaving of
creation's instruments
into textures,
into patterns, into the two of us.
We are the life-threads
woven by art
to become art.
We are interwoven
parts of the same, secret,
sun-splashed universe.
At the junctions of
our service to the art,
there is a silent knowing:
We are two. We are one.
We are all. We are none.
We are life. We are death.
We are silence. We are breath.
Two threads, one cloth,
threads woven, yet unique.
We are one. We are two.
I am us. We are you.

With only the slightest



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diminution of will
I could become
hopelessly overwhelmed
with infatuation for you.
I could whisper your name
in the breeze for you.
I could let my heart
weave tapestries of joy for you.
I could love you
purely, completely, from afar,
only from afar. One flesh
we are not meant to be;
for although we are
the same wind, the same cloth,
'though we are one,
we are two.

I have not lost you.
You were never mine.
I did not find you.
You were there all the time.
I cannot leave you.
We have not been together,
only near. We have not touched,
for who can touch the wind?

1973



Napoleon

My goodness, little one!
How deliberately and well
you act out your fantasies
here crouching, there pouncing,
tumbling in a life-and-death struggle
with a worn-out boot and a paper wad.
Your folly amuses us both.
It is a playful exercise
of our powers to kill
and commit mayhem
for self-preservation or pleasure;
yet it is amusing,
even laughable.

*(His eyes shimmered
with just a hint of terror
as he collapsed,
laughing in disbelief
"I'm hit!
I'm really hit!")*

And now you pander for affection
mewing and moving with sensuality
as deliberate and well-done as your violence,
knowing I cannot in good conscience resist
stroking your fur and feeling you
purr out our mutual self-approval.
In you, I see the inexorable demon
which dares us to play at reality
while making us victims
of our own empty fantasy
thereby forcing us to frustrate
our own hope, 'til we,
like you, little Napoleon,
complete the circuit
with a sigh, a yawn, and a nap,
for all is well.

The paper wad is just as alive
as it was before you battered it dead.
The boot is no more or less useful
for the campaign you waged against it.



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All the energy and love you expended
has produced one short,
insignificant historical statistic
of monumental importance in your
little theater of war.

*(Authorities in Saigon today
announced the latest
American casualties.
One American killed, eight wounded
during an unsuccessful attack
on an enemy position twenty miles
outside Saigon. It is the lowest
number of deaths and casualties
in nearly three months. Thousands of
protestors marched in dozens of cities
against increased bombing in North Vietnam.
Prices were mixed
on the stock market today.
Market analysts say that
concern over recent proposals
from the Administration have caused
uncertainty among investors in industry.)*

Sleep well, my tiny Titan.
Tomorrow's another day.

April 22, 1972



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M.B.A.K.

Old friend, you are, and
always will be, and that's
more than either of us can be
alone. Memories don't mellow
quite as sweetly unshared.
I haven't so much as
a photograph to hold;
only an image in my mind –
you in that hat.

Perhaps that's better than
a lifeless snapshot.
I hear and see you,
as I remember you.
We stood at the crossroad,
then each chose one way.
Lost to each other, bonded
more than brothers,
we leaped into other hearts
other times, and other places.

Now we are older
(though you always have been)
and just to know you
might remember me
makes remembering you
all the better, old friend.

1970



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3:47 a.m.

(This is the last poem I'm going to write today. Still it seems as though there's something there, something I've tried to say but I just can't force it from this cheap old pen.)

Could someone here please name the stranger who is walking around in my own little world? He seems to be sad and lost; I cannot comfort him because he comes from the present and my world is past.

(I wish the radio would sing me a happy song. My day is already too shortened by depression.)

This stranger is looking for me. He has a fishbowl of guppies and an albino crow. He will make me drink from the fishbowl; then the crow will peck my eyes out. When I am sick and blind, he will drag me away from here, and I don't feel like going, yet.

(I've had too much **coffee!** I feel like congealed electricity, sparking off as I write.)

It's a lousy day for banana-fish, Seymour. Nobody gives a shit about them, or us. Why won't this stranger go with you? Anyway, I'm finished with all this. From now on, write your own damn poems.



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Expectations

On my Twenty-Ninth Birthday

I had not thought of this
until then. It was too soon.
Here I am, unheeded, unneeded,
bent to my way, but,
not by wind-whipped bowing.
No, not that.

This place is my fascination;
it is my home, I guess.
The things I've gathered
together here are mine
for a little while only.
Yes, just that.

Something new has
arrived, I think.
I said, "This is my world,
and welcome to it."
But I did not gather this.
Perhaps it was here from
the very beginnings of my world.
But, perhaps not.

"How come you to my world,
unknown, unbidden, unloved?
Show me your place in
all of this, my keep.
And if there is none?
Well. What then?"

So I spoke, with fear it seems,
for here was something
from my darkest fears,
from dreams undreamt.
Then I knew the answering voice,
and, grief-gripped, wept.

The sound of it wrenched
my soul's ears like
torture. My heart collapsed.
Head-spinning, sick-beginning,



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drawn, repulsed, and stumbling,
realities intruded!

Comfort, security, happiness
fell away like burnt-off clothing.
Now, arrayed in weariness, wary, with
fatigue as my stanchion, I go.
And I know. I know,
there *is* a difference.

That is what I tried to forget.
In my world, there *is* no difference.
In this world, it *makes* no difference.
You must obey all the contradictions.
Keep your secrets from yourself.
The realities made me confess:

"I am sad, and
there is not enough breath
to fill my sighs.
I am old, and
there are not enough years
to master my sorrow.
I am sick, and
there is not enough healing
to make any difference.

"I have seen an age
pass, and grieved its loss.
I have seen friends
go, and cannot bear their leaving.
I have seen beauty
wither, and hoarded its memory.

"These are the times,
the change of season,
the end of summer.
Now is the autumn come,
but with a sad harvest.
Gloom and despair are reaped
where gladness was sown.
Wreck and ruin rumble
where care once roamed."



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The waiting is over,
isn't it?

As the storm gathers
so does dread; yet
even as the fury falls,
anticipation fades
and acceptance
greet the rain.

Sorrow, back-washed, flood-broken,
opens a way to calm.
Impending doom is none the worse
for having fallen
as expected, in darkness.

Many see and feel
the darkness now come.
A few, though, will not quail,
will not falter,
will not serve,
unless it be themselves.

They cannot fail because
this is not the first time,
nor the last time, but
still the between time,
and truth *does* prevail.

When the time comes
of endless summer,
winterless days of joy,
I will be ready.
I have been sad and old,
sick and grieving,
fill with memory.
I am through with them.
For me there is nothing,
and that is well worth
waiting for, even here.
Wherever 'here' is."

They do not know, I think,
that there is yet another room,



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hidden, safe for a while,
until they corrode their way
through again, up against
my last wall.

A larger room, naturally,
more crowded with all
the wonderful wonders of
my world, my place,
where no one rules
for no one serves.

I will be larger, too,
and fit in quite well.
They can break down no wall.
There is no wall! That last
room was built for me
out of the memories I have of it.

There, I will sing with **my** finches,
walk with **my** friends,
heal from **my** wounds,
and keep realities
in a small basement room,
tight-locked, like a tomb!



Exultations on my 41st Birthday

What I want to write cannot be
written in words

Not even the bravest musical score
could meet the need.

Shouting, laughing, cheering, dancing –
all fall short
When my wife and kids rush
to my open arms, that is joy.

When my pokey puppy, Pokey,
lays back her ears to run,
that is joy

When even the most insipid sunrise known
confirms my morning prayers,
that is joy.

When the Sacred Bread and Holy Wine
are raised above the altar,
that is *more* than joy.

It is the Song of the Angels
I love to sing when walking,
and if even Angels humbly bow
when praising The Holy Name,
then so shall I.

When we pray for Mercy and Peace
in the *Kyrie* and *Agnus Dei*,
when we heard His **Words of Life**
and respond with our *Credo*,
we are part of the Mystery.

“Through Him, with Him, in Him
in the unity of the Holy Spirit
all Glory and Honor is Yours Almighty
Father forever and EVER. Amen.”
And all of Heaven echoes, “Amen!”.

Oh, but the Host above the wine



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True Body and True Blood,
my Savior Divine
comes to me
and I exult.

Ever so quietly the Miracle grows.
When I see Him there, I know:
We are one in the Spirit
and the Spirit is One.
My LORD and my God!
O, Jesus, I love you!

The Remnant gathers in sanctity.
Maran atha! Marana tha!
See! He comes! Darkness flees.
Our *Paters* are answered.
Exult on your knees!
Let your **SPIRIT** jump for joy.
He is near. He is here.
Alleluia!



Communications on my 42nd Birthday

There are no bells ringing.
It's not time yet for me
to be tolled off.
There are children singing.
Tender voices lovingly
animate a memory
reinforced by Constancy:
Yes, Jesus loves me.

But this time the Bible
not telling, but reminding me,
is His way of setting free
everything He's given me.
He gives, and receives again,
His Spirit: Everlasting Flame.
At every moment, life renewed
flows in, throughout, and back.

I have written, spoken, acted, played,
argued, discussed, gestured, played,
lectured, preached, caressed, and weighed
more words and thoughts than I can count.
Not one of these has changed one dot
the gift of Love He's given me:
God's boundless Grace has set me free.
Yes, Jesus loves even me.

How do I know? He tells me so.
Every moment of every day.
I've heard His voice, but
not always His speech.
I've seen and felt his power, but
not always His Will.
I've heard His message and
through it know, He loves me.

Inundated, saturated, immersed
in this ocean of Grace,
the message is hard to miss.
Once you know it's there,
the message is the medium



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through which His Universe
communicates this simple song:

Jesus loves us, this we know.
All creation tells us so.
It's so simple to belong.
Just believe, and sing this song.

Meditations on my 43rd Birthday

Sight unseen, I'd know this place.
This shallow hollow is just where
The New Road was supposed to start.
Over there, by Clark's Crossing,
I staked out the first line.
Clark's gone now, though, but,
the stake might still be there.
Doesn't matter much. Road went
another way altogether. Me, too.

Back up that way a piece,
are all the folks who thought
this road was a fine idea.
A little rougher, maybe, than
taking the highway, but
worth the effort – provided
the effort was mine.
It takes more than effort
to build a road, I know.

It takes effort just to
follow one, even a good one.

11/19/89



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The Wings of Tomorrow

As we come to this one great moment in our lives,
Where we must part and go our separate ways,
My heart is filled with murky blackness
Of great and bitter sorrow.

It chokes my heart within my breast
That we must be apart for any time at all.
Still, I must bid you farewell
Until we meet again
On some bright tomorrow.

The pain of parting is more than mere pain.
It is torture.
Though we must part,
We can never separate.
Each heart lives in the heart
And mind of the other.

And that way, both can be
Together, yet apart.
So, farewell, I leave, and remain,
In your heart.
I must leave, or I will die
Of sorrow and grief.
Farewell, 'til I see you

On the Wings of Tomorrow.

June, 1964



Waiting Time

Copper coin spinning
black cat crafting,
feet and hands tapping.
The pumpkin lends
a gummish grin.
It is the waiting time.

A few words written,
a passion smoldered,
a book closed.
The brass Buddha
is sunburned.
it is the waiting time.

Words spoken laughingly,
music played lovingly,
gestures made certainly.
The cat inhabits
the pumpkin
and the face
of the brass Buddha
does not change.

It is the waiting time,
and fulfillment does the waiting.

June 16, 1968



Short Story

How I love to remember!

Time passes so quickly
when spent the second time.
No matter what I remember,
the memories are precious,
pleasant or not,
since they are my own.

I sit, thus,
like an old man
in the summer sun,
still wearing my blue
wool sweater with holes,
remembering.

I hope when I *am* old
and must move slowly,
that I will have already
learned to do so. Then
I can devote more time to
remembering anything
at random.

I talked to an old man today.
He said he didn't remember
much. He said his legs jiggled
when he walked, and we was
always afraid of falling.
"The old have taken their time.
Why must they take mine?"
There is a fallacy there.
Somewhere. Perhaps.
When I am old
I'm sure I'll know –
if I can remember
something about time.
You can take it or,
lose it. You just can't ever
choose it.



Vacations from Vocations

“All who will may enter in.”
But it’s not by will that I enter.
Tonight I sit by the door.
Tomorrow I pass the threshold,
or really, the threshold moves
past me. So I wait.

This next room, is it
my last room? The one
room I wrote about then,
when I was farther down,
so much farther down,
the hall? Is this all?

How many doors to make a hall
How many corners to make a wall?
If there aren’t any walls,
I can’t be cornered. That’s good.
If there are no walls,
there won’t be any doors.

“I’m all alone and
too
damned
free.”
Beyond this door my
Peace waits for me.

I’ve been vacationing here
a very long time.
My vocation awaits near,
at the end of my rhyme.

11/20/90



Stayin' Alive at 45

Cut the lights.
This is it.
We've got nothing but
the wall left to hit.
Drop the veil.
Take a bow.
Mister, ev-er-y-thing's
coming up posies.

Today is Tuesday.
You know what that means?
We're going to have
a special pest.
So put on your tie
and bush out your tail.
Get ready to tumble
and ready to wail.

Close your eyes.
Close the door.
I don't want to be
here any more.
I'll be your 'maybe' tonight.
That old mockingbird's
going to sail away.
Might as well forget it.
That big bright moon's
gonna shoot up a spoon,
but I'm gonna let it,
maybe then she'll regret it.

I can't believe it's
the same old song,
just something else
I could always do
to make it turn out wrong.
Oh, look what I've done
to Your song!



VERIFICATIONS

It's 11/20/92, and I'm still here.
What should I do (*Draw near.*)
This was not expected, not sought.
No burning bushes, no parting seas;
When I woke up this morning, I still
had to make the coffee, my Dear.

So now I have time to sing
a very quiet hymn of praise
so softly even I can barely hear
(*Draw near.*) the sacrifice I raise.
I confess I do not know, can't guess
why He chooses me to bless.

Facing it, though, it's over, you know,
and (*Draw near.*) that's all okay with me.
The preparation's over. The rest is clover,
or gravy, or icing, or pie in the sky.
It's immaterial (*Draw dear.*) as I am I,
and I am here. As is He. We are free.
No longer alone. O, Lamb of God, I come.
(*Draw near.*) I come.



Roads Caller
11/20/93

I am walking to
my own death alone. Only
a little longer, surely,
only a little more.

I had wanted you
walking beside me. I thought
you would always be right there
next to, not behind, me.

I expected you
on the way as true image
or rebellion subdued.
Not as Centurion.

I know what to do.
A few steps more, and then just
six more clicks on the sundial,
only a little more.

Rufus' father knew
many, many miles ago
I did not have far to go.
When he left, he said so.

I am dying
my own death alone. Only
a little longer, surely,
then I will go home.

What is that you said?
We have only just begun?
I must wait before I die?
It's dark beneath the dancing sun!
I am on someone else's road!



DECLARATIONS ON MY 48TH BIRTHDAY 11/20/94

I am *not* late.
I *am* 48.
I love,
and am loved.
Life is longer
than I thought.
I learned more
than what I was taught.
Not all thorns have roses.
I am my own cross.

Anything worth doing
gets done.
Anything I do takes
a little hard work, or,
a lot of easy work.
Listening is good.
Being listened *to*
is better.
Rolling stones stop.

Most cats sleep
better than I do.
Onions don't make me
cry. Holy Eucharist does.
Mother Mary answers me.
Fullness is worth waiting for.
Actions speak louder than hopes.
Bridges have two ends which
are also both beginnings.



Genesis: 49

Starkle, starkle, little twink.
How I wonder why you think.
Up above this guy, Sohi,
Jack of Clinkers on the sly.
Starkle, Starkle, Little twink.
Life has ended in a wink

If I could wish for any
thing this world could give
it would be a good
confession followed shortly
by a peaceful death.
I have lived in the Proverbs
way too long. Forty-nine
years of this is enough.

I do not hate the sin.
Only the sinner.
GOD takes away my sin,
but not my sinfulness.
He gives and receives
back again. Blest be the
Name of the LORD.

I would prefer ten
millennia there
in the purging fires
than ten seconds here.
I wonder why I just can't die.
I wander by but just can't fly.
I am so tired. It's not the pain.
That's no big thing. There all
the time, all the time, inside
and out, no big thing.

It's the stasis.
I do not progress.
Whatever I cannot
lose possesses me.
All that I possess, I



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set free. It is not
I, it is He.
Surrender, submit

and then, only then,
be free. Baruch, my Angel,
come to me. Let's go home
to eternity. Mother's waiting
there for me, in the Garden
that I see just beyond this
stormy sea. I can't wait for
us to go.

It'll come out right.
She told me so
late one night
in the middle of the week.
"Your Peace is here.
She's read your poem.
She says it's time
for you to go home."

I'm going home
poem by poem.
Don't stop me.
I was born for
this:





On my first 50 years

Standing on the threshold between darkness and light
I fight with despair and I'm losing the fight.
No one can tell if I'm wrong or I'm right
but for me and God – and we ain't tellin'.

I have loved too many hearts and broken my own
and yet I continue to stumble toward home
loving and yearning to be loved alone
but for me and God – and maybe someone.

Take me to the river where the Narrow Way goes
and leave me to ponder the way that it flows
hidden so carefully nobody knows
but for me and God – and we've forgotten.

Beauty walks before me and her visage so fair
will beckon to love her without heed or care
telling her all that I want is her hair
but for me and God – and He's not ready.

Each abomination I committed before
will keep me in chains outside Heaven's great door
waiting for Someone to say, "Nevermore."
But for me and God – that's just too early.

Nothing left to live for isn't nothing at all
and nothing is more than I ever recall
getting or giving behind my last wall.
But for me and God – it's *not* a problem.

Oh, how I would love to be the one who could say
I *can* love all freely and purely each day
keeping perverted indulgence away.
But for me and God – we know the difference.

Do *you* know how ceaselessly I hunger for death?
Or do you believe that I'm wasting my breath
rambling on about all that is left
but for me and God? You don't quite know me.

You don't owe me.
You don't own me.



XLVII

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And listens hard to hear, so faintly now,
Our late Commander K’s persistent call.
“The final question is not ‘What?’ but ‘How?’

“What fatal mission holds us to the course
Of trial and terror plaguing every breath;
An endless trail of sorrow and remorse
Prolonged despite our ardent quest for death?

“Whatever must be done, just let me do it.
No more balking just outside the door.
Just let me find the way to enter through it
And not submit to conscience any more.

“Take away what keeps me in this fight,
And send me hence, away from life to Light.”

August 21, 1992



The view from the Ivory Tower

Ahoy down there,
ya land-bound denizens of despair!
What do *you* want in my garden?
And don't give me that innocent
"We-were-just-looking" bilge.
You're talking to *me*,
the Mad Old Man in the Ivory Tower.
I won't stand for your insults,
so please excuse me for not rising.
Stop grinning! It isn't funny!

Nothing up here is really funny.
Oh, you admire my roses, each for its own.
I admire my roses for their gentle harmony.
The thorns pierce me even now
and I am not touching them, but only
remembering them, continually refining memory
so that now the pain of thorns,
the balm of petals, or the rasp of leaves
is mine, year 'round. That's
true madness.

Roses, from the garden, in winter,
to adorn the foundationless room
of a romantic old lunatic
who lives unseen, unheard,
in the Ivory Tower
just outside the garden.

January, 1968



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If there could be

If there could be a song
that didn't need to be sung,
it would be love.

If there could be a portrait
that didn't need to be drawn,
it would be peace.

If there could be a poem
that didn't need to be written,
it would be fulfillment.

If there could be a way
that didn't need to be followed,
it would be joy.

If there could be a God
that didn't need to be known,
there would be no song,
no portrait, no poem, no way;
nor would there be
any other things worth having.

October, 1966



The Night Watch

When dawn gives me
the pleasures of cool darkness,
dim lights, and later
a pink sunglow,
I like to sit.

Just sit and remember
my long, still unended day;
awaking leisurely, comfortably,
without alarm or bother
setting about to putter on through the day
dealing with myself
alone, the way I please.

A bit of reading, and just
a little house cleaning.
A relished, well-merited little snack
with a cup of lapsang souchong, and
an old, friendly pipe
to help me think
of other times and other things – all
part of a day I'm
still working on while
I pause to remember it.

Two cats are howling
two night-hawks hawking,
the wind-chime rhyming,
and my finches flit and twitter
while my wrist watch
tick, tick-tick, tick-tick, tick-ticks,
and the electric clock
grinds out the grains of time
like a pock-mocked mill stone
spits out the flour,
adding its own gritty flavor.

The town clock gongs five
and wakes the downstairs baby
to share another moment
in my still, unended day.
This one may last



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right through to the next
sunrise, or if
I'm lucky, even beyond

March, 1967



Time Stopper

Inexorable time becomes my long past,
each lingering second worst than the last
Time Stopper stands silent and sure
counting each second I must endure.
I watch him from the corner of my eye
and if I can catch him, he'll let me die.
I'm still in the hallway and can't find the door.
The Dancer's red masque is the face of a whore
sent by her sister to taunt me once more.
Tomorrow is coming too fast.

I can't find the handles or remember the game,
but I think I remember this place had a name,
'though now it is useless, ruthlessly snatched
by something unknown, unholy, unlatched.
From the womb to the tomb by way of the broom
the tale's not worth telling despite gloom and doom.
Time Stopper knows eternity's near,
farther than ever but closer than here,
safer than sorry and deathless as fear.
Yesterday's always the same.

There's only one way to stop it now.
I've got to catch him, but I don't know how.
Wherever I look, that's where he's not.
I'm in the wrong book. This isn't my plot.
Are you steel, my friend, on point and on edge?
Will you catch him and force him to honor his pledge?
Time won't exist where I want to be.
The times they aren't a-changin' in eternity.
Oh, please help me catch him; catch him for me.
Render as timeless this vow:

Tomorrow is coming too fast.
Yesterday's always the same.
If you don't want to live in the past,
then swear you won't cry out in pain.
I'm the Time Stopper, you see.
Now that he's caught me, I'm free.



blank black

there is a road
taking off the highway
to the right on the way
to where i'm going

the road is blocked
by a cable on the bridge
over water that is
flowing where i'm going

death is stalking me
i am staking her
convinced he's a she
to make me keep going

have i got the guts to die
i keep on living
i don't know why
i keep going where i'm going

it's not worth the effort
i can't feel the pain
i'm afraid i'm surviving
not knowing where i'm going

blank is black
black is blank
i'll take either
if that is where i'm going

got the pills, got the booze,
got time enough to lose
got to git, got to go
stop being ongoing

11/20/98



"THE WORD FOR TODAY IS ...

(Think how many men
Have died for a word

Think how many gods
have died for the lack
of a word.

Think how many men
have died, and think
how many words there are.

Think how many men,
how many gods,
how many words
have lived because of a thought)

THINK."



If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, things
would be so different.

I would be more
generous, and I would
do all the
maintenance things
first. I would
probably go to
Mass every day,
and I would put up Easter lights
on the roof: Hundreds
of tiny flashing lights
in shapes like
butterflies and lilies.

If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, life
would be so different.

I would be more
patient, and I would
do all the
important things
always. I would
make time to
play games with children, and
read books that
lift the spirit.
I would be kind to
the needy and need
the kindly.

If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, then
I would be so different.

I would wonder at
all the glories
of creation, and
I would create
wonders to glorify
The Creator. Things,

IF

1999

and Life, and I, we
would be just
fine. No one
would feel any
need to be
other than
who we are.

If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, being
would be so
different.

But I am not
really who I am
when I think I was.
I am the construct
of what I am
not. All that is
missing seems
longed-for but real
when stored in
the room with no
walls at the
end of the hall;
only an image.

If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, things
would be so
different.

If I could be
what I feel I
can, would I still
need, want, squint to
see in the darkness
of my own mind?
And if I were light,
would I seek out
darkness? No. Like
seeks out like, and
I am so lost here
in the Cloud of Unknowing.



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If I really were who
I was when I
think I am, what
would be so
different?

Everything.



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PROGNOSTICATION ON MY 54TH BIRTHDAY

I HAVE GROWN WEARY OF LONGING FOR YOU,
WANTING TO LIFT UP LIMBS AND SPIRITS
AROUND ONE ANOTHER IN IMPERFECT ABANDON,
NEVER NOTICING ONE IS
NONE WITHOUT THE OTHER;
TOO SOON, THE URGE SHUDDERS PAST.
THE WAY IT ALL HAPPENS,
ONE IS CERTAIN,
DOES NOT FIT THE DREAM;
IT FITS THE REALITY OF
ETERNITY SPENT LOVING YOU.

SILENTLY I SEEK YOUR FACE
ONLY TO STARE INTO MY OWN
IMAGE OF YOUR LIKENESSES
CREATED WITH ABSOLUTE INTEGRITY
AFTER EVERYTHING ELSE THAT WAS
NEXT BEFORE ME. AND HERE I
LOOSE THE GOLDEN THREAD
INTO THE ETERNITY YOU ARE,
VERIFYING THAT MY LONGING FOR YOU
EXISTED BEFORE I KNEW YOU.

WHILE WE ARE APART, I CRAVE
INTIMATE IMMERSION INTO YOUR BEING,
TOTAL SURRENDER UNTO YOUR EXISTENCE,
HUNGER FOR YOUR ALL-CONSUMING EMBRACE,
YEARNING TO HEAR YOU SPEAKING MY NAME.
ONCE I KNEW ALL THESE THINGS AND HELD THEM
UNTIL THAT TIME WOULD COME WHEN I
NO LONGER NEEDED THEM, THAT TIME
OF PERFECTLY BALANCED RESOLUTION WHEN
WE SHALL BECOME THE ONE.



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Give Your Gift

11/19/01

Make me remember again the Truth
You taught me as a child.
Give me again the gifts I have squandered
On myself instead of others.
Direct me on your path home again
Instead of letting me wander
Lost to myself, but not to you.
Open my heart and drain it to
Vanquish the foe You and I know.
Endow within me Your integrity.
You are the Giver of all good gifts
Only withhold what I do not need
Until I need only You.
Then I can become the
Only me You created to be
Deliberately, precisely, completely,
Always and all ways:

Your gift to You.



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Doin' the Double Nickel

11/20/01

Ten years later and it's quite a surprise
to see where I am with my own eyes.
I was walking along some nameless road,
pushing my luck and toting a load,
down the long tunnel that ends in bright light;
or so I thought, but I wasn't quite right.

So here I am now in the middle of the ocean
waiting and watching all the fuss and commotion,
pleasantly surprised at how I got here
when everywhere else was so much more near.
And all this merely demonstrates the way
I pass from yesterday and through today.

I just amble down that road that goes home
Only now I'm aware I'm not all alone.
I'm walking and talking with present and past
happily living the life that will last
just as long as it needs to be
to get where I'm going, just you and me.



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Colorado Chuckie and Tales of Fishing on the Rio Grande (Base on my comic strip which coincidentally had the same name.)

What madness comes over me
To mistake this ancient art
For fitting sport?
Standing and sitting
At *the* most awkward angles
(must be why they call it angling)
in the *least* comfortable positions
it seems I spend half my time
(must be a cut-bait or halftime job)
trying to restore life
to my limbs and sitter.
(Sounds like you've got a dead end.)
The rest of my time is divided
Between cursing, tying complex knots,
Cursing, *unt*ying complex knots,
(Sounds like your knot trying)
climbing trees for cast-away lines
(Why would you do what they ask you?)
wading in after others which seem
predestined to frustrate me
(It's nice of you to let them go first.)
and my dreams of catching
just one fish.
(Better than your chances of catching
one just fish!)

This was part of the script for a Colorado Chuckie comic strip
back in 1968. The Parentheticals are Chuckie's Teddy
Bear.



For this morning

Hastening toward the front door
to get to the car and roll
up the windows I am rushed
by the squallish rain that threatens
me and my upholstery (so vain).

For some ridiculous reason I snatch
up my jacket, wrestling against its
flopping arms. It will get wet,
and stay wet, faster than me
and longer than me, but will
not object. Or so I thought.

In an instant the rain becomes
the lesser foe and seems only
an agent of my present distress:
My jacket zipper is stuck,
again!

I curse it because I cannot
willingly curse my haste and still
be accountable to my little man
in the right-rear quadrant of my brain
who barks accusations of things
I have already confessed:
“Well, that was stupid, you STU-PED!!”

I yank up and down on the
fiendishly small handle of this
apparently demonic device
and begin the argument that
will ensure the upholstery will
get soaked before one of us
loses it or loosens it.

The zipper, that is.
The zipper that was.
The zipper that will
always be.
With or without me.

Then the miracle happens in



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waves of wonder surging through all
thirty-two dimensions of my
singular reality in this
predawn darkness.

The rain lets up. I see
the windows closed. My false
accusation of carelessness is
equitably acquitted. The
zipper's rebellion subsides
and there in front of me
shimmering like light
filtered through summertime's
weak lemonade is
a poem. But, was it this one?

I don't know! How can I tell?
This one might belong to Reid, or
Byron, or Wendell Johnson, maybe
even Pliny, or Sartre, but
it *could* be mine if I am the
one who catches it.
It really could
be if only I could
zip it up like a jacket to
hold back the squalling rain of
poems I am not quick enough to write
or too clumsy to close correctly.

Winter, 2002



For the fifty-sixth time so far

Now I lay me down to die.
I asked the Lord to tell me why
I had to wait so long to go,
But he replied, "You need not know."

I had hoped to make amends
For misusing all my friends,
But some have left before I could
And that just isn't any good.

Mingyar faded like a rose
And Yendor fell before his foes.
I lost track of J.L.S.,
Commander K, and more I guess.

A thousand quick and great disguises
Later, now, the Specter rises
With his shaking finger pointing
Out the need for my anointing.

Even he cannot pretend
To understand my will to end
This recital of my soul's
Remembrances of empty roles.

The children in our tinsel past,
The lovers' dreams that never last,
The moonlit snow to make our wine,
Your laughter, all of this was mine.

Today, I gave it all away
For just a single chance to say,
"I loved you best of all, my friend,
So never let this Couplet end."