



**The Man  
Who  
Didn't  
Get It**

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## Contents

Dream of Whitman .....	4
The Man Who Didn't Get It.....	5
The Man With a Hole .....	6
Triangles Prisms Cones.....	7
Anton's Syndrome.....	9
The Movie Under The Blindfold .....	11
Salesmen ... ..	13
Desalinization.....	14
My Gun Shoots Black Holes .....	15
My Bicycle .....	17
The Bouncer and His Father.....	19
The Money .....	20
Drama King.....	21
House of Demons.....	23
Colossus .....	25
Demon In The Grasp .....	27
The Weeping Man.....	28
Addressing the Lit Stick of Dynamite Problem.....	29
The Man Who Thrived on Rejection .....	31
Pruning .....	32
The Water Boom .....	33
There Are Bargains If You Look .....	34
Siege.....	35

Anima .....	36
Big Chord.....	37
Campaign .....	38
Yes!.....	39
Stacked Up .....	40
The Kindly Cannon .....	41
Letter From Como .....	42
The Man in the Air .....	46
Live At The Astor Pavilion .....	47
A Compact.....	48
Let's Put Out The Sun.....	49
Plebiscite of the Grass.....	50
17 Years In The Life Of Cicada.....	51
Found Poem: Millions Demand America's Purest Silver Dollar .	52
The Baby Who Breastfed Forever .....	53
The Woman I Love .....	54

## Dream of Whitman

I dreamed I played basketball  
with the bard of America,  
he spun the globe on his finger  
and said, young fellow,  
you must not dwell inside yourself,  
step out, step up to the world  
where everything is revealed.  
I stood in the rain on the bridge with him  
and he shouted into the din,  
There is no modesty now,  
no inhibition,  
no deflected blows.  
He clasped me around the shoulders:  
My son, it all just goes!

2005

## The Man Who Didn't Get It

There was a man who was tormented by angels,  
who caused his body to revolt against him.

They made his hair fall out, and he laughed.

"Look, my head is round, like the earth I live on," he said.

They made his eyesight weak. and he laughed again.

"There are so many games you can play blind!"

They caused the cells in his body to go mad.

"Connect the bumps, and you make constellations!" he  
shouted.

"I believe I am on a pathway to remarkable growth!

The doctor informed me that I'm positive!"

Which was very frustrating to the tormenting angels.

"We're just not getting through to this guy," they said.

2010

## The Man With a Hole

There was a man with a hole in him  
that he thought nothing of.

When he showed it to people,  
they said to him,

That doesn't look right at all.

But don't all men have holes?

the man asked.

Yes, they said, but you should really  
have that looked at.

2010

## Triangles Prisms Cones

From a distance all we were were  
big blue wheels;  
we called them "our reasonableness,"  
we called them "true circles,"  
living in the world  
and spinning with love.  
It was our only course,  
like the rudderless boat's,  
to see land,  
any land.

I was bound in copper coil,  
you were a fire of slippery jewels.  
From a distance we  
were static electricity,  
living in love with the stock-still world.

Crying under our floorboards  
was our silver pyramid,  
penned inside our walls were  
ancient bulls  
in bas relief.

Our flags were sins on lascivious oceans,

our word for regret was  
"a whirlpool of blood, turning in space."

It sped on.

The dot

which was so small at first  
became what it had to become,  
a collapse into feeling.

Item broke down into item of light,  
each one new and unknown.

It was "our home,"  
a wave of slow motion,  
which was all our lives forever.

1978

## Anton's Syndrome

*The patient's denial that he  
is completely blind. -- Steadman's*

The spotlights shine on the skaters at night --  
the spiraling ease,  
the thumbprint's rim --  
and we dream of the light that only we can see.

What was the use of doing things and saying things  
when all along  
the eyes went where they wanted to.  
We called our veers and bumps decisions  
but they were less than that --  
we thought we saw our house on fire,  
and far below the safety net, spinning.

We said, we see, we see.

It doesn't work,  
it isn't up to us,  
some language says it  
better than ours --  
it goes .

Our watching builds walls,  
our yardsticks mete out measure.  
Pray for the world  
and the insects and birds.

The magical abacus turns,  
we visit the field  
we thought we knew,  
the familiar disc  
on the familiar plow.

Certain gases contrive with stones,  
and the waters we cling to  
continue their long  
conversation with mountain  
and forest and  
tree.

1978

## The Movie Under The Blindfold

When the seams ripped on the starboard side  
Passengers screamed and sailed across the aisle.  
Newspaper accounts stressed that no  
Immediate impact was felt.  
Instead, steel met steel, rock passed through steel,  
Steel slid like strips of steel across rock.

There in the water I first saw the bridge,  
It shimmered in the air like a bridge  
Made of water, and over the bridge was  
A bridge in the air, and over that  
Bridge there was water;  
I swam.

I passed underneath and made my way, stroking,  
To a nearby island that was the head and shoulders  
Of my wife rising out of the sea like a woman.

Weeks passed, the swelling went down.  
Layer after layer fell off me like skin.  
I shrank and I shrank until finally I  
Was no greater than a man.

Then in broad daylight I found my feet,

When they stood and tested  
Dry land.

1977

## Salesmen ...

Have surrounded your home,  
They sleep in shifts, handcuffed  
To black satchels.  
They demand one of your party hostage,  
But you are alone.  
You send them a message, 'No Deals.'  
Tonight your attempted escape  
Was anticipated.  
As they gather around the car,  
You turn up the volume,  
Wheels spinning tirelessly.

1975

## Desalinization

As water became more scarce  
we turned to our tears as a source  
Suction cups hooked up to the eyes  
Captured the precious liquid  
Hand-held pumps converted them  
to tapwater, ready to go  
And the salt and the glycerine residue  
were stored in underground casks  
Nonstop grieving was encouraged  
as an alternative to military service  
High accidents skyrocketed  
because it was so hard to see  
But even that was not enough  
to irrigate farm fields and  
Planners looked for another source  
And conducted tests on the ocean  
And all agreed by the disagreeable taste  
People have been weeping a long time

2009

## My Gun Shoots Black Holes

*"If we can travel indefinitely outward  
from a given point, we also travel infinitely  
into that point, never reaching center. In theory anyway."  
- Rutherford*

Imagine a bullet that swallows its gun  
that sucks up assassins  
and targets at will:  
the more it absorbs,  
the smaller it  
gets.

Trees shoot into the bullet, streets tear free  
from their beds and jump into it,  
thunderheads condense and pour  
into the bullet, and the bullet  
shrinks down to  
the dot of  
an eye.

Finally the whole planet is clawing its way  
into this particle of dust and the flaps  
of the universe come undone and fly  
into the thing that is now  
so small that everything's  
died and gone  
into it.

It moves in trillions now. Nonillions now.

Quindecillions. Vigintillions.

And life goes on

under our red roof

with no one the wiser.

I ask for the horseradish.

You pass it my way. And we

look at one another, traveling.

1975

## My Bicycle

I set aside this perfect day to be with my bicycle.

Beautifully red, she's been mine

for three years.

I have just bought a pair of blue handlegrips.

Now for our free pirouettes in the sun.

There is no joy like this one.

Down a smooth hill

and into the wind, the low sound of whistling

in her spokes -- I close my eyes

and trace a shiver down my spine.

Now we rest in the shade of a tree,

and my lovely bicycle, anxious

to please me,

guides herself in small circles.

Here, the figure eight.

Here, quick brakes!

I'm so proud, I applaud,

and my bicycle wheels sheepishly toward me,

sets her handlebar in my lap.

I stroke her saddle,

I murmur kind words.  
When she stands before me,  
her chain sags irresistibly,  
her bearings rattle deep in her hind parts.

I mount her,  
and we ride.

1974

## The Bouncer and His Father

That old man was at the door last night begging for a drink.  
I said what did I tell you about coming around here?  
And I grabbed him by his coat collar and his cheap canvass belt  
and dragged him out into the street, where he lay for a  
moment, lip bleeding and hands shaking in the dirt.  
I whipped his hat in his direction, and it rolled into the street.  
And don't let me see you here ever again, I called after him,  
and brushed the tear-stained dust from my hands.

2011

## The Money

After we ran out of room in the house we began moving it to the garage,  
which filled soon thereafter. We made a down payment on a bloc of ministorage cells and that took care of some of the overflow  
but nowhere near enough. We started leaving boxes of bills out on the lawn,  
and giving the evil eye to passersby who seemed too curious. Eventually we rented a backhoe and dropped over a billion dollars  
in Hefty bags into a dug-out trench, each bag secured by a twist-tie.  
Still the problem wasn't solved, so we were forced to stack it on the roof,  
secured by a blue cabled tarpaulin, so now when we eat we hear the beams groaning from the weight of all that paper and people said it's a nice problem to have in times like these and we told them you don't know anything.

2007

## Drama King

The moment you cried out your disapproval,  
Your stirring Hey! lashed out against all falsity --  
so sweet, the anger of being almost innocent,  
the voice of that part of the sinful world  
that did not believe it was part of the sinful world.  
It rippled your indignation,  
because there is now no distinguishing real from false  
and there is no going back  
until blood has been shed  
and the old skin of need  
has been slithered out of for good  
and discarded in a husk of spent diamonds.  
And in that moment you were lost because  
You enjoyed it perhaps a little too much,  
And a sickening part of you knew  
it would come back to that moment  
and try to recreate it, again and again and again,  
summoning fresh feeling against the lies of the world  
and this time really give it the gas,  
and this time your denunciation would be  
more artful and more telling,  
and this time the world would say,  
Wow, this is even better than the other time  
and it surely is consummated.  
You are like a lunkheaded dog with only one trick,  
only instead of rolling over you summoned  
all the authenticity you could simulate on such short notice  
and then like the leg of a wheel you spoke  
and you were too young and too beautiful to explain  
that they owed it to themselves to go fuck themselves royally

because you were in no mood to prostitute  
the depth of your passion to salve their idiot wounds  
and even on the off-chance that you did, they would just say  
yes, that, there, you see, that's the thing you do  
that is so remarkable.

And then you must choose between killing them  
with the only object available to you,  
an ice-cream scoop with a pewter handle  
and what a concavity that will make in their foreheads  
as if they had been blessed with a single wonderful idea  
but now it has been dug out and discarded --  
or turn your back on them  
and wrap yourself in your cloak  
and the night  
and that will be that for them,  
the beauty done and gone  
and not to be darkening this doorstep again any time soon  
and like the old trader, legless in Abyssinia,  
you are borne away on a litter,  
in a fever, raving and  
firing your pistols

2011

## House of Demons

A priest returned to his home after a long journey  
and found it inhabited by demons.

They climbed his walls, hung from his ceiling,  
emptied his cupboard with their endless hunger.

They shit everywhere, and sickened the priest  
with their gruesome habits.

The priest tried beating them with a broom,  
but they would not budge.

He chased them around his garden with a rake.

He poked them with burning embers,  
which only seemed to please them more.

Finally he filled his home with lotus and jasmine,  
until all but one packed up and left.

The one who stayed was the ugliest of them all,  
picking his teeth with a femur bone,  
wiping his snot on the walls.

"I am a priest of Lord Buddha,"

the man proclaimed,

but the demon heard him not.

Finally the demon whispered in his ear,

"I feed on your humiliation, priest."

And the priest, finally understanding,

knelt before the demon and begged him to stay.

At which point the demon transformed into Lord Buddha,

splendid in his saffron raiment

“You see how easy it is,” he told the priest,

“when you stop caring about yourself so much?”

2011

## Colossus

I was brought to the site where my monument  
was under construction.

Tomorrow was its official opening.

It was a 150-foot statue of me, my feet set apart.

I held an enormous arrow in one hand  
and a pot of something -- gold? -- in the other.

My head was held back, and the echo of heady laughter  
piped out of my enormous cast iron mouth.

Everything met my specifications, except for one thing --  
my groin area was only about 65 feet above water.

This meant that larger ships passing through  
might come uncomfortably close to scraping my crotch.

I pointed this out to the architect-engineer, who protested  
that construction was already over budget,

and he wasn't sure what I was asking --

that I raise the platform so my crotch was higher,  
or perhaps i wanted to dynamite the most vulnerable area  
as a precaution against the kind of accident I envisioned.

What a choice. I indicated to the architect-engineer  
that I was starting

to regret hiring a monument man right out of school,  
but money was a factor, and i thought I might get lucky.

I stared around the harbor. None of the other colossuses  
seemed to be having the problem I was having.

I sat on the wharf, feeling punked by all the colossuses  
whose engineers had foreseen this eventuality.  
Nothing ever works out for me.

2011

## Demon In The Grasp

I see you dancing across Fairview Avenue,  
two doors from the Mall of St. Paul.  
I nab you by the collar and confront you:  
Why must you gad about tying men's tongues  
so all they can say is Ah! Ah! Ah!  
What purpose does the sale of beauty serve  
and who sent you here to destroy us?  
The demon squirmed in my grasp, unrepentant,  
and then went slack, and confessed:  
"We're trying to get you to think."

2011

## The Weeping Man

I came upon a weeping man and I knelt to offer assistance.

What is it, I asked him, that has brought you to this point?

I am the lowest of men, he sobbed.

No forgiveness, no restitution. I have failed at everything.

Come on, friend, I said, it can't be all that bad.

Why, look at me, I have my faults and failures but see how I soldier on?

The man pulled away from my grasp.

I may be down on my luck, he said, but that's no reason to insult me.

2009

## Addressing the Lit Stick of Dynamite Problem

It's hard to know exactly what to do.

You have just lit the fuse and it is sparking away.

Someone approaches and asks what you are doing.

Some people freak out at that point and hurl the thing,

and when it goes off, act amazed,

hoping no one saw you throw it.

But did you throw it at the bank building wall,

or did you misdirect people by heaving it in a random direction,

toward the preschool playground, for instance?

When a cop asks what you've got there in your hand,

explain that you are in the mining, quarrying,

construction, or demolition industries, your pick,

and you are on your way to a continuing education class

and you are running just a titch late.

Some try to snuff the fuse by spitting on their fingers

and pinching the progress of the burning to a nub.

Or they yank the lit fuse from the stick and hope

the violence does not trigger detonation.

Maybe it is not too late to style yourself as a simple lover of God

and make everyone around you think real hard about that,

and allow you your personal space.

Better that than people learning your true purpose,

that someone asked you to hold this for them,

And being a nice person and despite posted warnings, you  
accepted the gift.

Oh, the sweating tension we live out our lives in,  
Framed by this constant hissing sound.

2012

## The Man Who Thrived on Rejection

A man went up to a table and said to the diner,

"Your scampi looks delicious. Would you mind if I had a taste?"

"Under no circumstances," the diner replied and sent the man away.

The man passed a note to the teller in the bank:

"Would you please place \$20,000 in this bag?"

The teller consulted with a supervisor, who politely declined but invited him to set up a personal account.

The man approached a beautiful woman and plead with her:

"Have sex with me and bear my child!"

The woman took her boyfriend's arm and scurried away.

The man saved all these refusals in a cardboard box that he kept on top of the refrigerator.

"With every rejection I grow stronger," he said.

"Every time they say no I see farther."

2014

## Pruning

A man was pulled in so many directions  
his body began to come apart.  
First one arm left him, plucked from its socket,  
then a leg, and then the other arm and leg.  
For a moment he exulted in the fact  
he had nothing left to lose.  
I am a free agent in the universe! he said,  
Then felt the vice grips on his nose.

2013

## The Water Boom

Bicycling below Hidden Falls, I saw a water boom  
tucked against a storm sewer at the edge of a cliff.  
Water booms are those long stocking-like absorbent ropes  
they put in the water when there's an oil or chemical spill.  
This boom was perhaps twenty foot long, and as I rolled past it,  
I saw it was twisting in a serpentine fashion.  
I stopped my bike and saw it had a face,  
that looked like it was contorted from always weeping.  
When I looked into the face, which was clenched like a fist,  
I saw that the boom was my mother.  
My heart sank at the sight of her, dead for twelve years,  
yet here she was transformed, and spiraling in the ditch.  
She could not talk, she could only make a sucking sound  
from her lamprey mouth. I did not know what to do.  
Is this how the world works, I asked myself,  
that a woman who suffered so much in life  
should be dispatched to suffer even worse humiliation,  
soaking up the poison that shoot out of our houses.  
Or is this just a dream to remind me of her heart,  
and her pride, and her wish to take on pain?  
Weeping, I dragged my mother like a sodden carpet  
to the river's edge, I released her and watched her slip away.  
I held my hand over my eyes against the afternoon sun,  
that shone on the turning waters like diamonds.

2013

## There Are Bargains If You Look

Thanks to our men and women in uniform

the price of gas is way down.

You can buy health insurance today for a dollar a week.

It is possible to grow one's penis to remarkable length.

Powerball has reached a \$430 million payout.

Lose weight easily the five grapefruits a day way.

In a shaky economy, with the world in the balance,

you can never pay too much for gold.

For spending money, always borrow against your home.

2008

## Siege

An army has been gathering over the years  
with one intention, to oppose me at every turn.  
They drew from the ranks of the insulted,  
the overlooked and the spurned.  
All night every night I hear them marching,  
drilling in formation, the click of rifles,  
the smoke of many fires.  
I provoke them from the ramparts.  
"Come and get me!" I cry.  
But their tactic is to crush me  
by paying no attention  
whatsoever.

2012

## Anima

En route to our rendezvous I am handed a lit stick of dynamite  
and being polite I do not refuse.

With blackend face and smoldering collar I proceed,  
failing to notice the two-ton safe dropping from a fifth story  
window.

Though badly accordioned I make my way to you  
despite stepping on rakes that batter my face,  
despite steam rollers ironing me flat,  
despite electrical shocks making a swastika of me in the air.

So many efforts made to keep me from you --  
the locomotive rushing from the hastily painted tunnel,  
me poised for eons over the manhole hole before falling,  
the wet cement awaiting me below is hardening.

But do not doubt, my soul, my heart,  
that I will be with you in due time.

1979

## Big Chord

Conservatory types are unable to like it.

It is too wild, too harsh, like Transatlantic cables strung  
from the skins of a thousand lions,  
stretched across a drum that is miles across.

And when it is sawed on it is more than your radio can tell you,  
it is more than a loud cry or that choir that you made cry,  
it is a scraping, shuddering sound that sets everything  
oscillating,

it is a moan rising up from the bladder of the earth,  
it makes everything spin in the slowest and most excruciating  
motion,

it is frightening and yet you feel called to approach it, limply,  
because it brooks no resistance, it accepts no excuses,  
it gathers us under its monstrous wing.

2011

## Campaign

We heard the click when we crossed the threshold;  
I entered your body and set up camp.

The infantryman is the backbone of any army,  
he knows when to retreat and when to hold the line.

A month, four months, a year... I'm getting used to the bill of  
fare,  
to the figures of speech, to the customs of your country.

Eventually the soldier hangs up his guns: I know I do.  
Joining with the enemy, we build new walls on the next frontier.

1974

## Yes!

Yes it's true, I was born full grown and speaking a language  
it took twenty years to forget.

And I had the gift of total recall, remembering ages before me  
and after.

Each birth a detonation, each breath a crater in the skin,  
each flap of lung a palpitating moth.

Yes, the rumors can all be confirmed, there are no false  
prophets.

Whoever you doubted you shouldn't have, nobody lied.

Inanimate objects are quick to protest: "One need not travel far  
to know the world."

Self-serving nonsense! Philosophers roam the length of their  
attics.

Bearded pudenda!

I say, Go pose for a statue or something.

The world flips by like a roll of bills at the ear of God.

True, all true, the claims of assassins, the letters of suicides,  
even the innocent bystander's stammer.

Now bite into bread and see even farther, the steam off the  
ocean,

the Bedouin's fish, the universe cooling and turning to glass,  
the fly by your ear and the ear of that fly.

Friends say I've lost my grip and I say Yes! and start to rise,

Friends tell me I am seeing things and I say Yes!

1977

## Stacked Up

I awoke to cold sheets  
and a rooster crowing atop the upright piano  
and then I woke up to my name being called,  
it was my mother, hollering  
down by the cattails  
and then I woke up to the klaxon sound  
and a ladder leaning against the window apron  
and then I woke up, trying to remember  
something important  
something about -- something  
and then I woke up in an incubator  
and the face prying out of the eggshell  
was mine  
and then I woke up and you were there,  
and you were there – you were all there  
and when I woke up, there were tiny turtles  
everywhere

1969

## The Kindly Cannon

Goodwill was all he cared about  
and everyone he came upon  
he blessed with shining gladness.  
Eight pounds round was his heart of iron  
and matchsticks were his friends.

2011

## Letter From Como

Taking course to ospreys and ant lions and the mauve noodle  
stacked like rosaries in the outer office  
Tonight it is quiet it is too quiet tonight  
Taking course from the trail of rags and broken webbing  
And the natives trembling under the giant banah leaves  
And taking course dead reckoning from the moon  
Directly chuckling like the Old Bombardier  
Take my course to the sailor awash and aflat on the tarot deck  
Take it to Queens and Pawtuxet and the all-nite laundromat  
It steams like desire in the sleeping pile of woolens  
And the natives pressed themselves thin as knives pressed  
Against the quivering chandelier take it to Mom and Pop  
And the aging cheerleader who ten years later still presses the  
torn photograph  
Against her ribs  
It is too quiet it is sinister, it is number than any number  
And what do I do oh what please say is a pawpaw and a bobtail  
nag all the doodah day  
Take it to America America in the springtime springtime in  
America  
Because this is the garden of animal delight the clean scrape of  
the dish on cement  
Taking course to red jackals and jaydaws and the red noodle  
Nailed to the waiting room like old magazines  
It is better than that it is steadier than that

How do you do and welcome to Fabricburg  
You can't tell the fours from the threes  
You can't tell the flowers from the screams  
No wonder they say we were made out of mud  
Come out of your trees and your rivers and  
Come to America come to Minnesota  
Come to the click of cleats and the children straddling the giant  
tortoise  
They have come, they have come for miles around  
Come to the land of long letters of love the land of love  
This is the land of the crackling barn and the land of the infernal  
flower  
And the land of big shovels  
This is the home town this the sublime  
This is the black underside of a million raw tabletops  
Love scarred like burnt pleasure and bubblegum  
These are its children and those are its heights  
These are the fingers meshed and twined like cotton candy  
Peanut shucks and gosh the divine criminentialies  
Come to the straw and the cane and urine flowing like soda  
Come to the land of poultry and the love of the condom  
Come to the rinsed kidneys of the lost tribes  
And the land of small children and dogs  
They teem in the refuse like ambassadors for change  
Come to the Como when the hibiscus are in bloom and the  
drunks are in bloom

And the tree sloths parasites bloom green in the skin  
Come to the green swarming pond this year we dredge there  
our memories  
Of kindness and jewels and breadloaves and cannons hot rakes  
and quicksilver  
Come when the tuna are jumping and the children are jumping  
at cornbread  
And promises and time and the secrets of time  
This spring the tiger is muttering remonstrances of love  
And the banker noodle sits like a patient in the vestibule  
Come to the 24-hour urgent care centers cursing the revolving  
doors  
And the No Parking Zones and the decisive victory in the field  
Come to the spreading joy of a thousand elm trees  
Two years from blight and the skinny roots of love  
And the thousand children jumping in the night  
Taken in dreams to a place beyond mountains  
and the thousand mattresses  
No one turns over any more  
Come to Como Brother John and Alphaea  
Take to the hard streets and the harder walls  
And take course to the parklights bathing the lost kids  
And take course down the trillion rows of lilies and rot  
Take course to Como at a certain time of year  
Now here now gone forever now at the tip of every tongue  
Take course by hunted animals strung by ropes  
their bodies opened

To the wind and to love

Flies singing seafaring stories in the breeze

Open and battered to the slim curve of love

1974

## The Man in the Air

The man in the air has been falling since Thursday.  
He has an appointment on Sunday at noon.  
Time is important -- he has always been punctual.  
He checks his watch for the seventh time today.  
In his mind he goes over the names of the clients ahead of him,  
the names of their families, the physics of the perfect  
handshake.  
My business is people, he says in the air.  
I'm not selling pieces of paper,  
I am selling satisfaction, I am selling myself.  
He is almost sure how to do it this time.  
A terrific idea will come to him soon;  
until then, Pleasant day, unlike Friday,  
falling all afternoon and during the best hours  
of the early evening through light rain.  
He holds out his hand in the rush of air.  
Warmer now, almost perfect, he thinks.  
Already I am having presentiments of success.  
The man in the air is turning and twisting,  
the cloth of his trousers is flapping around him.  
He is falling head first, he is sure he will get  
where he's traveling soon, falling upward  
like a stone.

1977

## Live At The Astor Pavilion

Up on the roof you hear the pitter patter of tiny sandwiches.  
In the basement the friends you keep have broken out,  
they are massing around the salt.  
Outside your window a policeman is caressing his gun,  
and whispering devoutly --  
he will arrest himself before things go too far .  
You lie in bed, fists gripping the sheets.  
You can't feel a thing below your waist.  
Your legs who know you now for what you are  
have chucked you and raced down the street  
to the auditions.  
Your arms packed lunch in a brown paper bag.  
Your inner organs wished them safe journey.  
Your ears waved goodbye, wraithlike, when they peeled away.  
Deep in the shaft in your head there is an abandoned vein.  
You follow it on foot for a hundred yards or so.  
At the end of the final corridor you see a wire stretched  
taut from wall to wall, a tightrope and a golden unicycle.  
You remember a line: 'Love leaves you and you must go on.'  
Behind, the curtain rises.

1975

## A Compact

What came down came down on golden rungs,  
strapped to the air with golden thongs.

I saw and still see golden men  
so taken in this quiver, so balanced in the air.

What goes goes to the end of my heart,  
the place I keep swept and warm for you  
that will always be yours.

Let me apologize for all the apologies.

What missed the mark, I confess to everything.

Who knows who knows the root and anxious word,  
the fluttering feet and the severed chord –  
whatever rises, does.

1976

## Let's Put Out The Sun

It had been aggravating us for quite some time.

The world had got warmer and stickier,

deserts swarmed over the land,

and there was just a sense,

shared by people in every nation,

that we all had had quite enough of this tyranny.

But how does a tiny planet extinguish a flaming object that

is 1.3 million times larger than it?

Our entire nuclear stockpile would be like a pimple to the giant.

Maybe some ray gun exists that no one bothered to mention,

maybe that could be put to use.

Finally we decided just to ignore it,

to turn our backs on its constant fusion.

All this time, it was fueled by our conversation.

Nice day, wouldn't you say?

It was surprising how the people of the earth accepted this challenge,

and gratifying as the sun began to darken and shrink.

It just showed what we can do when we work together.

2016

## Plebiscite of the Grass

The grass demanded that a vote be held.

"I think we have all been buffaloed," said one blade.

"All this talk of terror!

Our leaders have deceived us into being fearful of this enemy!

Who among us has witnessed a single act of terror?"

The rest of the grass tried to remember,

but memory has never been a strength of grass.

And the leadership made no effort to defend itself.

They could not remember either.

"If we throw off the shackles of fear," said the blade,

"we will have a mandate to grow, to seed,

to be all that we can be -- are you with me?"

The grass cheered and stood straight and tall,

proud to be grass on a day filled with sunshine.

No one noticed the distant sound

of a motor being cranked.

2016

## 17 Years In The Life Of Cicada

Ordinarily the air stands still and the leaves stand still  
and the birds and the clouds bide their time in the trees.  
It lasts, you get used to it, you have been squeezed and let go  
by your breath a billion times by now, still the song plays on  
on the fork in your head. Everyone wants to die and go to  
heaven  
though not necessarily in that order. Who can blame them?  
Each time you forget you're getting older is a bigger mistake.  
Do you really suppose you're the same dumb saint they left in  
the desert  
who shrunk to a peapod with two praying hands?  
Who was it that came and pried you apart? Do you still preach  
that stuck in the heart lives a bug who wakes in the ordained  
year and sings?  
That voice is the music that bids time pass, soft and threatening  
like an instant of ripeness hung on its stem, like the purplest  
plum.  
Mention that name and you burst into blossom.  
You will be round like the moon you pinch between two fingers.

1974

## Found Poem: Millions Demand America's Purest Silver Dollar

*Ad by New York Mint, 2013*

These legal tender U.S. silver dollars feature a nearly 100-year-old design

of Lady Liberty striding confidently forward while draped in a U.S. flag,

while the other side depicts a majestic U.S. eagle, thirteen stars, and an American shield.

But the clock is ticking. Timing is everything. Our advice to you – keep this to yourself.

Tear out this page if you have to, because the more people know about this offer, the worse it is for you.

Supplies are limited and there is a strict limit of 40 per household.

This is a coin flip you can't afford to lose!

2010

## The Baby Who Breastfed Forever

The first year no one objected but the thing never developed,  
it sat on the breast with that dazed expression,  
rolling its eyes and twitching its fingers.

Decades later, the mother is still waiting for that baby to take a  
break.

Forget the college fund. Forget careers.

This blissed-out baby is going to suck and burp  
that whey-smelly breath into the room  
until the cows come home.

1985

## The Woman I Love

The woman I love is much smarter than me, therefore my life with her is one long lookout. Where will she turn up next? I never know.

You sometimes see me peering deep into my binoculars, scanning the horizon. And then she will be there, tapping my shoulder from behind.

You would think I would learn, but I don't. Idiotically, I still walk down the street whistling a tune or kicking a can, imagining I weren't under constant surveillance. Imaging every eye behind every drape was not hers.

Sometimes I congratulate myself, saying I did it, I made good my escape. And I run to a place that she will never in a hundred years find.

But when I get there the signs are everywhere -- the bedsheets twisted just so, the dried drop of wine on the floor. I warn the natives she is coming and they smile and nod at me. Everyone knows her name.

She says I'll never learn. I say I will when I'm good and ready.

That one time, in the delta, I was ready, poised to exterminate, but I weakened at the last second and felt pity, and put two bits in her tin cup. I figured, she's blind. She's got a monkey to feed. And with that accordion playing of hers she could not be grossing much.

And she whipped off her black glasses and I tumbled down into her eyes, screaming and waving my arms, falling like a stone, like a bucket down a well.

When I righted myself I still saw her eyes. Laughing, she bit me on the wrist and took off after me, chasing me up and down the French Quarter, over and through the cast iron rails. At the last possible moment I was able to disguise myself as a bishop in an innocent game of chess.

I nearly burst with laughter as she dashed by, teeth dripping with desire. Otherwise, she would be mine today.

You see, though she is insanely clever, I am no slouch myself.

When I was just a boy and she was my teacher I fooled her routinely. The other nine year olds hated me -- the mustache, I think -- and because I got special favors from teacher.

One day she demanded I stay after and wash her blackboard and I soaked and rubbed, smeared and stroked. She said don't stop but I stopped.

The look on that schoolmarm face! When I told her I had to "go," I had to tear the corridor pass from her clutching fingers. I gave her the slip and fled through the swingsets.

There was a supermarket in the Sandwich Islands. Everyone wore grass skirts -- checkouts, boxboys, men with cleavers and bloodied aprons.

I filled my cart with a sense of being stricken. Behind a jam jar I saw a seething eyelid. I uncovered another eye, a flaring nostril, an iron ring, a single horn of matted hair extruding from a troubled brow.

She bellowed!

Customers spilled milk and burst into tears. The holy cow of Kauai bolted from the bins. There was a terrible rustling of skirts.

I hid in the grass for forever, and when the moment was right melted into the crowd.

No need to explain it. This is not an allegory. It's her. She changes. I wasn't surprised in 1936 in Berlin when I looked behind me and she was there. I was Jesse Owens and she was Frau Cosima, an ideological gleam in her eye. She reached for my baton but I broke for the finish.

All this time I was madly in love. Here was a woman who knew about a man. The things he needs. The things he needs to need. How delicate we are like pale flowers struggling in a soft breeze. How when we say no we mean yes, yes.

You appreciate that when you are up the Amazon without a paddle. She was so gentle. I was in a tree, with a sloth and a parrot. I was yellow and had little sharp teeth and black spots. She was very white and very tall and had a Mauser rifle and two trained crocodiles.

How my jeweled eyes lit up the night. And the pounding of my heart found its place between her cross-hairs.

But she knew I was not ready and let me off easy. The bullet only grazed me. I was up all night, yowling and licking the soft wound.

I am at a party high over New York. It's George Plimpton's house. He says he is writing a book about what it is like, just for a day, to impersonate a human being.

Someone says something, four score of eyebrows arch.

Across a battery of stemware I spot her. Escape, escape, and there is no escape. Then I remembered. The Empire State Building is like the moon -- its dark side has never been seen. I look out the window -- one hundred floors of continuous fire escape.

Closing my eyes I begin my descent. Luck is with me -- I beat the elevator down.

She chases me across the Yukon carrying a sling of baby sons in one hand, a foreclosed mortgage in the other. Tweaking my sinister mustache, I weep.

When I look over my shoulder she has become a ravening wolf, bounding after me, snapping at my heels.

I hippity hop across Alaska and dive into the Bering Sea. She is equally vivid as a shark. Crawling onto dry land I take cover as

she strafes me as a fighter plane from unbelievably low altitudes.

I make my way across the Sahara, panting. A dozen dunes away I hear the drone of the jeep of the woman I love. But when I peek she isn't a jeep at all. She's a mosquito the size of a jeep, something completely different.

I turn into a billiard ball and burrow into the desert sand. Foiled, she buzzes off.

I spend forty days in the desert. I am religious as cactus, pared down to the least, holiest thing. Then I hear it.

One thousand saxophones bopping martially under the midday sun! Climbing my outpost I look down as legion upon legion pass below me blowing hot jazz.

And at their head is Octavian, and this time she means business.

Fortunately my disciples had prepared for such an eventuality. I climb through a trap door in the desert and emerge at the corner of Fifth and Wabasha in downtown St. Paul. It is never far from St. Paul to the desert.

I brush the sand from my jeans and board the 21A. The driver's eyes meet mine in the mirror, but I am exhausted, I collapse in the last seat. Those eyes, I wonder, where have I seen those eyes before. Like happy dragons, ready to dine. I will see them in my dreams as I see them now, and forever.

1991

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