

29

Poems

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5 Lines from America
by Simon and Garfunkel

I've
got
some
real
estate
here
in
my
bag

It
took
me
f
o
u
r
days
to
hitchhike
from
Saginaw

I
said
"Be
careful
his
bowtie
is
really
a
camera"

"We
smoked
the
last
one
an
hour
ago"

Counting
the
cars
on
the
New
Jersey
Turnpike

All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter

by J.R.R. Tolkein

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.

Afraid So

by Jeanne Marie Beaumont

Is it starting to rain?

Did the check bounce?

Are we out of coffee?

Is this going to hurt?

Could you lose your job?

Did the glass break?

Was the baggage misrouted?

Will this go on my record?

Are you missing much money?

Was anyone injured?

Is the traffic heavy?

Do I have to remove my clothes?

Will it leave a scar?

Must you go?

Will this be in the papers?

Is my time up already?

Are we seeing the understudy?

Will it affect my eyesight?

Did all the books burn?

Are you still smoking?

Is the bone broken?

Will I have to put him to sleep?

Was the car totaled?

Am I responsible for these charges?

Are you contagious?

Will we have to wait long?

Is the runway icy?

Was the gun loaded?

Could this cause side effects?

Do you know who betrayed you?

Is the wound infected?

Are we lost?

Can it get any worse?

(Emerson Takes on the Universe)

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Who is he that shall control me?
Why may not I act and speak and write
and think with entire freedom?
What am I to the universe, or, the universe,
what is it to me?
Who hath forged the chains of wrong and right,
of Opinion and Custom? And must I wear them?

I say to the universe, Mighty One! thou art not
my mother.
Return to chaos if thou wilt. I shall still exist.
I live.
If I owe my being, it is to a destiny greater than thine.
Star by star, world by world
system by system shall be crushed, -
but I shall live.

Even the Nails in the Sheet Rock Missed Her

by Cheryl Gatling

When she entered a room, the room paid attention.

When she entered his house,
the leather couches plumped up and shone,
the hardwood floors were giddy with tapping
against the soles of her small black shoes,
the books on the shelves jostled each other
for a better view of the waves of her hair.

When she didn't come, the walls held their breath,
straining to hear her voice, her laugh.

When she still didn't come, that crying noise wasn't him.

The white gauze curtains hung keening,
as they remembered the stroke of her fingers.

And at night, when he turned and turned,
it was only because the bed prodded him continually,
as the pillows pleaded in his ear, "Bring her back."

And when he sat up, his hand on his chest,
how could he breathe,
when all the air had gone out into the street
calling her name?

Fun

by Patricia Fargnoli

Of course, when I think about fun,
I think of a man in a short buckskin skirt,
shirtless, walking down the street
of the Bridge of Flowers
with a cross-bow, a quiver of arrows on his back.
About fifty, an ordinary man
I wouldn't have noticed
but for the crossbow and his half-nakedness-
in other words, his way of sticking out
in the crowd of tourists going by.
He was just walking, a man in a suit
walking beside him, both of them
with a sense of purpose,
both obviously on the way to somewhere.
The street slanted up a little and they bent forward
to accommodate it. That must have been
their mission that day-onward and upward.
The bow rattled on his back,
the arrows quivered.
His hair was white-if that helps.
The problem with such fun
is that nobody explains it. It enters stage left
and goes off stage right into the wings.
Then for years, it keeps going off in your mind
like flashbulbs. It takes on weight, metaphor:
Father Death, Creative Spirit.
Gosh, I wish I'd known the whole story-
I could put the puzzle to bed then-
if only I knew the meaning of it all.

Grass In My Hair

by Bruce McRae

I was arguing
with the scarecrow.
His voice
was like a wall
of sand coming
closer and closer.
He had corn
on his breath
but no mouth
to speak of.
His mind
was a straw stalk
in the wind,
all the colours
of a golden
rainbow, there,
but not there,
even his pinstripes
soil-scented.
And I was saying
to the scarecrow,
“We end,
we begin.”
I was telling him
the true names
of all the dead.
I was asking
a stupid question:
“Where’s the crow
inside my head?”
Which he thought
quite funny,

a perpetual grin
on his dried lips,
his eyes seeing
into the far distance,
a tear forming
in the new silence
that summer, and he
impeccably dressed.

Green Canoe

by Jeffrey Harrison

I don't often get the chance any longer
to go out alone in the green canoe
and, lying in the bottom of the boat,
just drift where the breeze takes me,
down to the other end of the lake
or into some cove without my knowing
because I can't see anything over
the gunwales but sky as I lie there,
feeling the ribs of the boat as my own,
this floating pod with a body inside it...

also a mind, that drifts among clouds
and the sounds that carry over water—
a flutter of birdsong, a screen door
slamming shut—as well as the usual stuff
that clutters it, but slowed down, opened up,
like the fluff of milkweed tugged
from its husk and floating over the lake,
to be mistaken for mayflies at dusk
by feeding trout, or be carried away
to a place where the seeds might sprout.

Halfway Down

by A.A. Milne

Halfway down the stairs

is a stair

where i sit.

there isn't any

other stair

quite like

it.

i'm not at the bottom,

i'm not at the top;

so this is the stair

where

I always

stop.

Hey, nonny nonny (from Much Ado Without Nothing)
by William Shakespeare

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no more,
Of dumps so dull and heavy;
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leafy:
Then sigh not so, but let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny,
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into Hey nonny, nonny.

(from Act II scene iii)

I Could Take

by Hayden Carruth

I could take
two leaves
and give you one.
Would that not be
a kind of
perfection?

But I prefer
one leaf
torn to give you half
showing (after all these years)
love's complexity
in an act,

the tearing,
the unique edges -
one leaf
from two imperfections
that match.

I Didn't Go to Church Today

by Ogden Nash

I didn't go to church today,
I trust the Lord to understand.
The surf was swirling blue and white,
The children swirling on the sand.
He knows, He knows how brief my stay,
How brief this spell of summer weather,
He knows when I am said and done
We'll have plenty of time together.

In Early Drafts, Robert Frost Relied Heavily on the Thesaurus
by Jeff Vande Zande

Whose copse this is I speculate I get.
His domicile is in the township, yet;
He won't monitor me refraining here
To observe his pines congesting with wet.

My petite steed must reckon it bizarre
To knock off with the next shanty so far
Flanked by boscaje and glaciated loch
The blackest eve of Earth's loop around star.

He gives his tackle's carillon a flap
As though he's inquiring, "What the crap?"
The single other racket is the zoom
Of cozy zephyr and pubescent scrap.

The thicket is cute, sooty and abstruse.
But I've contracts that I don't want to lose,
And 5,280 feet more until I snooze,
And 5,280 feet more until I snooze.

Just Now

by W.S. Merwin

In the morning as the storm begins to blow away
the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me
that there has been something simpler than I could ever believe
simpler than I could have begun to find words for
not patient not even waiting no more hidden
than the air itself that became part of me for a while
with every breath and remained with me unnoticed
something that was here unnamed unknown in the days
and the nights not separate from them
not separate from them as they came and were gone
it must have been here neither early nor late then
by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks.

(let's touch the sky)

by e.e. cummings

if up's the word; and a world grows greener
minute by second and most by more—
if death is the loser and life is the winner
(and beggars are rich but misers are poor)
—let's touch the sky:

 with a to and a fro
(and a here there where)and away we go

in even the laziest creature among us
a wisdom no knowledge can kill is astir —
now dull eyes are keen and now keen eyes are keener
(for young is the year,for young is the year)
—let's touch the sky:

 with a great(and a gay
and a steep)deep rush through amazing day

it's brains without hearts have set saint against sinner;
put gain over gladness and joy under care—
let's do as an earth which can never do wrong does
(minute by second and most by more)
—let's touch the sky:

 with a strange(and a true)
and a climbing fall into far near blue

if beggars are rich(and a robin will sing his
robin a song)but misers are poor—
let's love until noone could quite be(and young is
the year,dear)as living as i'm and as you're
—let's touch the sky:

 with a you and a me
and an every(who's any who's some)one who's we

Numbers

by Mary Cornish

I like the generosity of numbers.
The way, for example,
they are willing to count
anything or anyone:
two pickles, one door to the room,
eight dancers dressed as swans.

I like the domesticity of addition—
add two cups of milk and stir—
the sense of plenty: six plums
on the ground, three more
falling from the tree.

And multiplication's school
of fish times fish,
whose silver bodies breed
beneath the shadow
of a boat.

Even subtraction is never loss,
just addition somewhere else:
five sparrows take away two,
the two in someone else's
garden now.

There's an amplitude to long division,
as it opens Chinese take-out
box by paper box,
inside every folded cookie
a new fortune.

And I never fail to be surprised
by the gift of an odd remainder,
footloose at the end:
forty-seven divided by eleven equals four,
with three remaining.

Three boys beyond their mothers' call,
two Italians off to the sea,
one sock that isn't anywhere you look.

Passengers

by Billy Collins

At the gate, I sit in a row of blue seats
with the possible company of my death,
this sprawling miscellany of people—
carry-on bags and paperbacks—
that could be gathered in a flash
into a band of pilgrims on the last open road.

Not that I think
if our plane crumpled into a mountain
we would all ascend together,
holding hands like a ring of skydivers,
into a sudden gasp of brightness,
or that there would be some common place
for us to reunite to jubilize the moment,
some spaceless, pillarless Greece
where we could, at the count of three,
toss our ashes into the sunny air.

It's just that the way that man has his briefcase
so carefully arranged,
the way that girl is cooling her tea,
and the flow of the comb that woman

passes through her daughter's hair . . .

and when you consider the altitude,

the secret parts of the engines,

and all the hard water and the deep canyons below . . .

well, I just think it would be good if one of us

maybe stood up and said a few words,

or, so as not to involve the police,

at least quietly wrote something down.

Perseverance

by Marin Sorescu

I shall look at the grass
Till I obtain the degree
Of Doctor of Grass.

I shall look at the clouds
Till I become a Master
Of Clouds.

I shall walk beside the smoke
Till out of shame
The smoke returns to the flame
Of its beginning.

I shall walk beside all things
Till all things
Come to know me.

Rhubarb

by Joshua Bryars

The sign says "rhubarb,
a dollar twenty-five,"
and I smile.

Surely it's not a staple crop -
the kind given to wild fluctuation
when supply and demand comes and goes.

I mean, when's the last time you heard of a farmer
losing his shirt in rhubarb?

And yet someone must know something more.
Someone must actually know the going rate...
the going rate for rhubarb by God!

Suddenly I feel disconnected. I want to know
my rhubarb. I want to know how much is too much to pay.

I, for one, am convinced - I'm looking into it.
With a sound investment, getting in at the ground floor...
Oh, there's money there, you better believe it.

This is not your average stalk ladies and gentlemen!
If it were, there wouldn't even be a price.
They'd just be like, hey, if you want it we got it.

No, there's something more here, something more than
meets the eye. I mean, seriously...r-h-u-b-a-r-b...
Just the sound of it screams gold.

Seven Simple Exercises to Prepare for the Inevitable Arrival of Grief

by Tim Poland

Walk out of the supermarket and pretend your car has been stolen. Walk home laden with plastic bags full of groceries. Whistle something in $\frac{3}{4}$ time when the thin plastic handles begin to cut into your fingers.

Dig a hole in your yard—a deep one. Plant something inorganic, such as a hat or a lug wrench, in the hole and cover it with dirt. Water it dutifully all summer long.

Plan to take the dog for a walk. Take the leash with you and a bag for the poop, but leave the dog behind. Walk at your usual pace. Follow your regular route. Trail the leash aimlessly behind you. Pick up the poop left by someone else's dog.

Collect all the spoons in the house and throw them out. All of them—even the demitasse spoons and that old, bent serving spoon you use in the garden sometimes. Prepare a bowl of hot soup. Eat it with a fork, and keep eating until you've finished every last bit of it.

Forget where you live. Go home to someone else's house. Drop your coat over the back of a chair, sit at the kitchen table, and appear shocked that the people there are shouting at you, claiming they don't know you, pleading with you to leave. Remain seated at the table until right before the police arrive.

Knock on the front door of your own house and demand to speak to yourself. When no one answers, knock harder, shout that you know you're in there, and that you're going to keep knocking and shouting and creating a scene until you finally answer the door.

Hide all day in the crawlspace under the house, but leave a tape recorder running upstairs so that later you can study the sounds the house makes without you in it.

Sisyphus

by Judy Barisonzi

After awhile, I no longer remembered
why I was being punished, and after that
I was not sure it was punishment at all. There was enough
to do with checking the weather each morning,
selecting the right clothing—waterproof for rain,
my slatted sun hat for bright afternoons, a heavy shawl
pinned round my shoulders on frosty mornings. Then a bite
to eat, choices there too, oat cakes or bread, honey
or marmalade, so many decisions
before starting the work of the day. And each day
was different. There were small blue flowers
breaking through the cracks when the weather warmed,
huge dusty turtles I had to swerve to avoid,
the occasional passerby, too far for conversation,
but close enough to study the new styles
of hat and jacket, each one's way of walking,
a shuffling gait, a jaunty step. And then
the rock itself was never the same. My fingers
would penetrate encrustations, caress
slopes worn smooth as powdered skin,
its touch remembered these many years,
dimly remembered, like morning rain
find sparking grains that embedded themselves
in tiny dimples. But always, behind the flux,
keeping confusion in check, that constant cycle,
that slow plod upward, that weight against my chest,
measuring my muscles, my soul, inevitably followed
by a wild mad dash to the bottom, the moment
of joy, of mad release. I was often overwhelmed
by the complexity of it all, and only rarely
had a recollection of something
I had meant to do, a time when I had said
When I reach the top, then...but I could not find
anywhere, in my mind, what I had intended.

from **Song of the Open Road**
by Walt Whitman

5

From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master total and absolute,
Listening to others, considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.
I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

All seems beautiful to me,
I can repeat over to men and women You have done such good to me I would do
the same to you,
I will recruit for myself and you as I go,
I will scatter myself among men and women as I go,
I will toss a new gladness and roughness among them,
Whoever denies me it shall not trouble me,
Whoever accepts me he or she shall be blessed and shall bless me.

The Real Work
by Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,

and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Thieves

by Marin Sorescu

I used to have a poem that wouldn't let me sleep
So I sent it to Grandpa
In the country.

After that, I wrote another
And sent it to my Mom
To keep in the attic.

Later, I kept on writing others
And, with sinking heart, bestowed them all with relatives
Who vowed to give them good care.

So then, each new poem
Had someone to take it in
Since each of my friends
Has, in turn, another friend
That you could trust with a secret.

So I don't know by now
Where this or that verse is
And should the thieves come to my house,
Much as they'd torture me,
I couldn't say anything but
They are in a safe place
Somewhere in the country.

from **Three for the Mona Lisa**
by John Stone

It's not what she did
at ten o'clock
last evening

that accounts for her smile

It's that she
plans to do it again

tonight.

To Help the Monkey Cross the River,
by Thomas Lux

which he must
cross, by swimming, for fruit and nuts,
to help him
I sit, with my rifle, on a platform
high in a tree, same side of the river
as the hungry monkey. How does this assist
him? When he swims for it
I look first up river: predators move faster with
the current than against it.
If a crocodile is aimed from up river to eat the monkey
and an anaconda from down river burns
with the same ambition, I do
the math, algebra, angles, rate-of-monkey
croc and snake-speed, and if, if
it looks like the anaconda or the croc
will reach the monkey
before he attains the river's far bank,
I raise my rifle and fire
one, two, three, even four times, into the river
just behind the monkey
to hurry him up a little.
Shoot the snake, the crocodile?
They're just doing their jobs,
but the monkey, the monkey
has little hands, like a child's
and the smart ones, in a cage, can be taught to smile.

To Levitate...

by Catherine Essinger

My mother swears she saw
 my baby brother rise from his cot
 one stormy night when
 we were living upstate.

She was awake, checking the shutters,
 when she saw him levitate,
 a foot or more, covers rising
 with him the way they do

in carnival shows, so you don't see
 the wires. But, he lay soft and pliant,
 a floater, weightless as
 a shadow on the wall.

"Something in the air," Mother said,
 because she believed in such things,
 and reminded us often that most
 children know how to fly.

And I do remember running down a hillside,
 breathless, the ground rising to meet me,
 my heart lifting my blood
 so effortlessly

I knew that if I stepped out onto the air
 that it would hold me.
 I may even have done it
 without realizing

how easy it is, before doubt takes hold
and weds you to the ground.

Odd that we should forget
such things.

Odd, too, when I tell the story
how no one believes exactly,
but the room gets quiet
and everyone listens.

“What Is Your Idle Job?”

—question (with typo) in a mass email’s subject line
by Ace Bogges

I wait for lunchtime at my desk, spinning
like a boy in a barber’s chair. Come noon, a walk
past pretty girls in flowered clothing, faces blooming
from sunlight’s brownish blush. I sit awhile,
lotus-like beneath a shadowy willow, breathe smells
of cut grass, melting chocolate.

I feed squirrels, sing love songs to pigeons,
watching as they bob their heads in rhythm.

Then it’s back to the office for coffee
tasting like gasoline, maybe a doughnut on the sly.

If my boss pops over, checking my progress,
I greet him with a good-natured pat on the back
to wipe the sticky glaze from my fingertips. After,
it’s time for all the important tasks: I shuffle
blank pages, transfer calls to disconnected numbers.

I wink at my window-reflection. I liaise. Mostly,

I deal with people come looking for me.

I give directions, always surprised if they reappear,
winded & flushed, to ask me where I am.

(what joy it was to fly)

by Arden Georgi Thompson

Without courage
to fail
nothing new
is ever tried;
then we
like flightless
birds rely
on feet alone
and forget
what joy
it was
to fly.