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DAVID SCHUBERT

A Book of Poems

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PART I

Kind Valentine

She hugs a white rose to her heart—
The petals flare—in her breath blown;
She'll catch the fruit on her death day—
The flower rooted in the bone.
The face at evening comes for love;
Reeds in the river meet below.
She sleeps small child, her face a tear;
The dream comes in with stars to go
Into the window, feigning snow.
This is the book that no one knows.
The paper wall holds mythic oaks,
Behind the oaks a castle grows.
Over the door, and over her
(She dies! she wakes!) the steeds gallop.
The child stirs, hits the dumb air, weeps,
Afraid of night's long loving-cup.

Into yourself, live,—Joanel
And count the buttons—how they run
To doctor, red chief, lady's man!
Most softly pass, on the stairs down,
The stranger in your evening gown.
Hearing white, inside your grief,
An insane laughter up the roof.
O little wind, come in with dawn—
It is your shadow on the lawn.

Break the pot! and let carnations—
Smell them! they're the very first.
Break the sky and let come magic
Rain! Let earth come pseudo-tragic
Roses—blossom, unrehearsed.
Head, break! is broken. Dream, so small,
Come in to her. O little child,
Dance on squills where the winds run wild.

The candles rise in the warm night
Back and forth, the tide is bright.
Slowly, slowly, the waves retreat
Under her wish and under feet.
And over tight breath, tighter eyes,
The mirror ebbs, it ebbs and flows.
And the intern, the driver, speed
To gangrene! But—who knows—suppose,
He was beside her! Please, star-bright,
First I see, while in the night
A soft-voiced, like a tear, guitar—
It calls a palm coast from afar.
And oh, so far the stars were there
For him to hang upon her hair
Like the white rose he gave, white hot,
While the low sobbing band—it wept
Violets and forget-me-nots.

When Apples on the Lilac

BRASS BAND! PEASANT DANCES! EXHIBITION BOXING!
INDIAN BUDGING! FISH POND! BALLOON MAN!
CLOWN! A COCOANUT SHY! HORSESHOE PITCHING!
ARCHERY! HIT THE MARK—WIN A PRIZE!

MAGICIAN! CHARLIE CHAPLIN MOVIES!
FORTUNE TELLER! FLOWERS AND PLANTS FOR SALE!
BRING THE CHILDREN IN THE AFTERNOON!
BRING YOURSELF IN THE EVENING!
DANCE WITH FRIENDS IN THE EVENING!
WITH THE TRUNKLESS MAN IN THE MOON!
SEDUCTIVE TUNES! IRRESISTIBLE ORCHESTRA! SAIL
FOR THE BALI ISLES IN A DINNER PAIL!
ADULTS 50 CENTS, 25 CENTS CHILDREN!
FREE DIRECTIONS FOR THE LONESOME PINE TRAIL!

The factory whistle blew and I remembered
The tent pitched in the vacant lot where I
Crept Saturdays to watch the Baptist Revival
And saw the Preacher knock the Devil out
While the tent leaped in the moon like a silver trout.
Outside the hoky poky man chipped ice
And while the voices droned like flies
With bottles full of hair tonic he placed
The colors all around. I hugged my slice
Of water and I saw where Gabriel (dressed
In corduroy) laced Mrs. Johnson's shoes.

The organ grinder with the parrot used to come
Out of a child's ear. We heard him blocks away.
Before the box began we knew the play.
His organ box had a sign, "Hearts mended here!"
Two hearts were intertwined in crayon. The parrot
Picked the pennies from our fingers and like
A tragedian gravely dropped them in a cup.

They tinkled a moment—were still—
And all the music was gathered for the till
Except the scattered chords we used to whistle.

O Mr. Medium Man—Italian—hurdy gurdy man—
Your little box spilt heaven and the parrot
Told fortunes on small name cards.
We all grew up to be President in the White House,
Preferably though, in a Log Cabin or—
Best of all—an aviator
On a fire net. Where is the nickel garret
We entered and could stroke Polly parrot?
A Ford sedan explored original skies—
The paper airplane sinks, freighted with lies—
The long ears of a child a jackass' ears—
Why does your face, Van, change to another's?

And Jesus leaning on a hydrant in the noon
On the lame street where the men stood
Into the moon, into back office doors—
Upon the air he watched their faces die,
Or sprawling on the windows like glass flies.
And pity like an adolescent cries
—Crossing the street—self-conscious awkward tears
For love! . . . Love that moved the stars
Begs at the corner and a hag's face wears.

Intersection

Mr. Riscica in his undershirt
Sits on a kitchen chair and puffs a corn cob. He
Swings his feet on the curb. No place to
Go. Nothing to do. Behind the water tank on stilts
The whistle blew, ages ago. Out of the butter tub
The ailanthus tree turns with the turning sun.
Out of pine out of loams out of air
The wild geese flying! Look. See there?
Open the surface opening your eyes. Take care.
Giddyap, Rosinante, giddyap old scarecrow,
Poor nag—his bones sticking through.

Voices in the air. Autos wheel by with
People dancing there. She is looking for her husband
Who is sleeping on the subway or a park bench. As
You look, a man with a basket, old man
Wrinkled as a prune. In the basket at his feet
Are gladiolas, anthers veined. If you give him ten dollars

The rags and bones laid out for awakening,—new leg
Struts down the street at the corner of
Little Street and United States Street.

Crooked Road Crooked Year

Only the sand against the windows, only
The smoke rushing through the night,
And your face gone out in the plush light,
And the streets, the street lamps guttering.
Here the pine that held the blue sky
And the willows carved with initials, heart and hair,
They drift to transient harbors, drift
Waxing and waning where farm wives shift—
On porches strewn with morning glories—
Their gingham dresses while the new moon lifts;
They shift and turn and shuffle up the stair.

As deaf mutes—all passion at their finger tips,
Their fingers an abstraction of the blood—
Your eyes, precision instruments, passed
Out of the train into the country
Of picture postcard skies where a man was walking
Into the trees and two boys fishing for minnows.
Upon the tracks amid the flying country
Only a woman running, only the street
That solves the stars, only the muffled beat
Of drums, of water falling;
The evening running and—O drums rolling
Orion, Orion, Orion!

In the distance the rails bisect a town,
First the framehouses—then a factory.
A man was shivering. Here is the street. See,
The harbor dips to his knees and the sky of dawn
Is swinging as a fog is swinging bells.
The oak leaf flies. We are drifting. Here,
Is bat hair, owl glare, shells and Jack o'Lantern's fear.

Where a tear is the only light the train
Drives forward, lanterns swinging; where

Perhaps a singing school the night, perhaps
Rainbows from oil pools in newsboys' early eyes.
Perhaps bréath colored was the wind, perhaps
The trembling star of our spoilt holidays
Calling the hands to supper, cow bell tinkling
In what far valleys green? From a lagoon
A phonograph is playing; canoers throng
Out of division—meet the hands, touch hands!
The lips an aerial lust. And the road, tortured in strife,
Heals. They love each other and the ghost—
The singer lives in the song, come back to life.

A public park is traveling past the train,
Past spring and jonquils the straw hats are borne—
They are walking over spring, pathetic and forlorn.
The street sign says *Dead End*. Here
No progress for the admiral where nurses,
Nurses and sparrows chitter in his ear.
The Admiral of the Park calls to his friends
Strange and remote, remote; yawns once,
And pulls his granite coat about his neck.

And somewhere is a player piano throbbing
Or with a child's mechanics thumps a dance,
Pedals *My Rosary*, or *Hearts and Flowers*,
O Promise Me to ditch men and mill hands.
In parlors of cloth roses and hair divans
The air is sweet and heavy with the romance
Of Indian maidens—Sunday in starched wood lands.
And here an alley cat is screaming, sobs
Past alleys and back fences;
And now an organ grinder brings out of the ashes
Roses and pretenses.

The train is racing past, the lonely miles
Are shunted at grade crossings. Still and black,
O still and lustre-lack and stiller, stiller—
The tail light now and now the night collapse.

Lighthouse Mission

For men like this there is the sound
Of feet forever drawing near,
Withdrawing in the ground.

After the rain like leaves blown
Tissue paper, damp, discolored;
They fall from a tree of air, sown
By some peasant, centuries lowered.

It means always, "Move, move on!"
They rise and creep below,
Above, under, on—
Never face the sun.

Snow

Means charity at this Lighthouse floats,
Anchors the angels. Paper sown
Between their skins and thin coats
To keep them warm.

War and hand grenades are
Listening at the corners, noon.
All night they hugged the hungry bone,
And sealed the lips and broke the stars.

Gold Chariot

Lift anchor! Four leaf clover and the rainbow
Sailing across the Atlantic to the Americas.
The cross bled deep roots to gather the land—
Salt release—lifting rock, lifting seas.

Then they saw the gulls, birds and the gods,
On the street post a wilderness fell.
The oak stretched into the gambrel roof
And bird of passage on the Indian coverlet.

Dark continent! The bell in the cathedral
Poked out its tongue, said, "9, and all is well,"
And slept forever. Plunging one name,
The house leaped and fell. Smoky windows, sumac, lichen,
moss: all the same.

The madonna's smile froze to marble;
Step by step and face to face the hammer
Driving forward and on: bloodroot, new mown hay,
Arrowhead, maiden fern, cattail,
Silver fox in the trap next day.

The sword was topped by a cross. Cleared tree
Over severed heads of red men; bones last.
The Mayflower launched on the toy sea—
Lost in contentment, one horizon past.

One eye is hid in the darkness, one is left
Marine blue, blue as June seas. A few tears drift.
God and Mrs. God in watercolor blue skirt desolate.
In a sidestreet, condemned the house—lost! one sea, one shore!
—Lift anchor!—four leaf clover, fore and aft!

Crow on the Husk

Jed's walking in his sleep on the sidewalk,
Crows deploy in the Square from a starved country.
Migratory fields remember, cornflower and chinch bug,
Chinch bug and cornflower; and migratory factories
Creep through his cracked shoes, bursting at the seam,
Emitting the plough, the meadow, first violet, first dream,
First star first fathers saw. Tractor and tank dismember
The mutilated plain; Jed's walking in the city—
Immortally, eternally, the seed expels the flower—
Rewinding the film of smoke and self-pity.

The kids in paper bags, hour after hour,
Hunted potatoes, dug in the flour barrel. Someone else
Is hanging the clothes line to one end of the empty cow shed.

The crow is shot by the medieval man whom Gabriel touches
In blue snow behind the American barn.

Who sees nor knows nor feels; but eats the hole—
The small earth falls apart—where was a soul.

The Darkness of the Night

The walls papered with old newspapers,
And a picture with little blue flowers
Stares at the calendar. Her children sleep, inert,
Their faces falling out of shape,
Where the smoke rises from the clearing of trees
From the houses they glimpse on the road,—
Road that has caught them to its own city.

Singing folk songs, the whole house lifted light;
They stopped work in spring
To pelt the Winter King with pebbles,
Cakes and laughter afterwards. Singing folk songs,
Her children leave her the room lifting light
Up and up. Sweet smell of honeysuckle in the night.
Your heart lifting up and up . . .

(The Indian maid canoed across the Erie
Coal calendar on the wall very
Quietly, a mustache scribbled on her lips.)
White birch! glide into shoals of silence, glide
As life falls, quietly and afraid,
Between the whispers of the old woman,—
Or picking coal in flour sacks; waylaid,—
Against the huge darkness of the night.

West by the Rain.

If the wind blows in the locust tree,
The city, upside down in the gutter,
Stirs and explodes in a pool of rain.
The towers, if a strong voice spoke,
Would sink past plummet line.
Slum and thug and heart of the town
Concentrating on lost sweet Adeline,
Even if a good breath were blown
Their shadows hanging upside down

Building the water the sound of a mad
Bird, bird, bird, bird, bird,
Singing unlistened to, unheard
On this last branch of sky gone red
With the aura from a trolley shed,
Here, in New York, when the bells are ringing
St. Francis into Convent Avenue—
City, dull or aflame, the sparrows sing.

Against the lesser darkness of the night
Injustice keeps a lantern lit
In the street straddled by rain.
The profile of the rain in the pool
Where the sidewalk sinks to grass in less than soil,
The wind blowing in the tree,
Accepts the water's city with a total infidelity.

City, city, city, city, city—
Talking transportation, a wind blew out of the sea.

PART II

Peter and Mother

"A hand is writing these lines
On your eyes for journeys
You'll never start for. They're
Transparencies. Wear rubbers
And you will be wise."

In dreams initial A and in the parlor
The chandelier was bright with small toy tears;
At evening the door opened on clematis
And his mother with a shawl ran down the years
To meet someone with an empty lunch-box.
As they returned across the lot—
He listened—in her head was truth
Hansel and Gretel and a bar
Of sweetest song.

Where the word
Is shadow of the deed and hard
Upon it like first crocuses
In snow . . . "grow up and be
My tenement house, my brick building!"

This paper representation imperfectly made,
Be like words at a railway station still
Speaking though the train has gone—
The pity strong enough
To tear the four walls down, scatter the children,
The picture of the cow on the wall
Grazing a different pasture.

Talking her trite ghost, the smell
Of lilac is fainter and fainter;
Thinking her worn face is like a face
A whiteness on the brush of some eternal painter.
And always growing farther, trying to hear

Something that was never expressed very
Clearly.

Her journey ended, that was hidden
In the blindness of his naïve skin.

The Letter

Built out of words, he sees her face
As something more and something less
Than evergreen. The day will soon replace
Each feature with a feature that will then
Continue its pathos, unseen.
Where have you come from, how far it is!
Right through the useless window, footsteps of
No sound and syllable. Thinnest woman, your

Hand that stretches night,—it asks to be
“A love that’s total?” Continents of clouds
He reads, and the “I do,” ironic, too.
Till ripest, laughing lanterns come anew.
Her light, her dark, how shall he spell
Or her torture and salt and Ali Baba towers?
The sail limps in the empty cup, quite tame;
Lying awake, he thinks of her tired name:
A waving of the ink and her goodbye.
The constellation’s handle is the question
Between the sentences that leads him on.

Her form—it hesitates within his eye—
Her wake, the ash, the smoke that curls above.
Here, the tall street has faltered and the stamp—
With cold and torn eyes—
Advances, is one step from paradise : . .

Pier I

Full noon, and he is walking
With letters in his pocket,
A razor and a spool, a spool,
Needle and thread.

Full moon, and he is waking,
The spray parted his hair;
Between the ooze and garbage,
The stiff red hair is drifting.

The pockets are all empty,
The hands are clenched and ready,
A button in his wallet.
The world is two-and-twenty.

A razor and a spool, a spool;
No homecoming, girls' giggles.
The children in his loins—?
"No men required here."

The homecoming strives till
It comes to no shore.
The waters of Manhattan
Beside the barges lengthen.

The barges drift and lengthen;
The pleasure boats are full.
And O, so fair the Hudson!
And O, the girls so loving!

And O, the sailor sailing
Under the ancient stars.

The Lake

Star above, star below,
Smoke creeping on the fields—
The locomotive creeping.
O my star, my star below,
Take me so.

Poplar, green poplar and shadow
Of headlights, autolights on the pines.
Dry-rot forgot, maggot slug,
Bought and sold and lost and found;
Pine cone, pine needle on the ground,
On the pine a star, a moon;
On the pine today, yesterday,
Tomorrow, the mourning dove's tune.
Landscape of a dream and landscape tall
Of yours and my fairy tale.

Star above, star below,
I never loved you ever, never.
"What in the world shall we do," you said.
"You're always six years behind. Wish I were dead."

Star above, star below,
Too far to walk home. "Lord,
It's too far to find the word
In the train, in the rain, and through the glass
We saw through tears their gestures pass—
The kiss, the father, the errant child."

Star above, star below,
My lover, O my lover, O
The way is hard and wild and wild,
And the heart—it cries like a lost child.

For a Boy Infant's Wreath

"My piece of string, my crumb of bread,
The ruler says you are one 'smile old;
Now you will never be, on gold
Roller skates, my tall Rolls Royce;
Nor bring, except despair."

Winds of mirth, glittering teams of stars,
Springs, runnels, freshets, unto
The harbor's rubber heart.

It was a child, blithe as a strawberry . . .
It is the leaf's innuendo, the bare virtuoso.
It is the mother's face, contorted with spasms
Like the grain coming out on wood, like the creasing in tracing
paper.

"In the bracken a fawn is bleeding.
The screaming branches are owls.
I count one, I count no star.
Where is the star called Theodore?"

Like a simple song of shoefly, bothering
A crust of bread, an inch of threaded ribbon
A pushcart, pinchpenny, bowlegged,—
A woman, races through the centuries
A shawl of praying hands: *pursuit!*
By fugitives, their footsteps quarry the street.

They plant a funeral wreath
To be cut like a ring to wed the dirty door.

The Christmas Tree and the Terror

"Sea that used to come to the gates of the school"
And never crashed the gate,
I wonder, do you remember
The carollers crying with bitter cold,
Red apples for cheeks and candles?
O sea, we looked at you as exiles,
With Ditte chained in the house.
And poverty burrowed as a louse
In the hair of the poor; and sweat
Was crystalline and harps that holy evening.

II

Imagine the snow dropping on frame houses
Beside a river. A fat peasant woman
Carrying logs, her skirts blown awry.
Three curs with tails up in a raincoat sky.
She can see below the three smoke shafts
Of the power house, the abandoned summer porches.
She hurries home to eight glad eyes, four souls
To provide for. But the coals
Are flickering, are guttering as she walks.
There will be stockings waiting, oranges
And promises. Somewhere the nightingale.

III

At the foot of the Holy Jesus
Holy Jesus, Holy child, she lay
An offering of tears and gray
Withered mountain laurel. This spring
Songs will be sung and lovers
Will thank the good God in catholic countries.
She prays for a half articulate thing:

Snow is blowing bitterly, the fox
Barked all night. Even the people
In the brick house looked at their clocks,
And smiled reassured, thinking of Christmas.

IV

Bring a wreath of ice skaters for the tree
Without roots in Washington Park.
Incandescent was the sea,
Incandescent was the dark.
The road curled about his head.
The rose was red.
Beggars and tramps thought perhaps
Of homes in Flint or Wilkes-Barre.
The fox was caught in the trap
That night.

V

A snowman with pastel, child globs, warm globes
Of flower color; sleigh and bells
Along the Alps Road. Road that leads me back
To misery, broken and maculate road.
The silo half empty, the farm angles cut.
Along the bitter night you will return
By a celestial train you never discerned,
Even in moments of utter sadness
When school began or the hired laborer
Dropped his heavy boots on the ground:
They stood like soldiers waiting for Taps to sound.
We stood about the tree thinking of heaven
Of earth and of all possible greenery:
A strange lamb from a strange scenery,
And the trams running on as usual,
And children playing in the streets,
And the rich people drinking coffee.

Sea that used to come up to the gates of the school,
We were jealous of your freedom.
Now you will come again with the sound of muffled
Tiny drums, again, again. Now
Imagine, imagine, America, from the poet Alberti
The veritable roots of a Christmas Tree:
Gladness and singing and the warm south
In your mouth; hand in hand, land to
Land,—singing the old year out with his blood.



PART III

The Happy Traveller

Farewell, O zinnias, tall as teetotalers,
And thou, proud petunia, pastel windows of joy,
Also to you, noble tree trunks, by name
Elm, with your dark bark in the dark rain, couchant
Like comfortable elephants. And you
Mailbox colored robin's egg blue on the poor
House, shy, set back (a poor gentleman but
Irreproachable), with your shutters robin's egg
Green. You, street, striated with rain like a new penny,
And houses planted by arbor-vitae trees,
By miniature pines that lean against you for
Support,—Hail and farewell!

And I, outside in the rain, look inside
These elms whose branches tip and touch
The slant roof, slain by the four fireplaces
Where life, slowly, life is conventional
In a sheer seersucker dress, with blue eyes,
A red ribbon in her pale hair, eats a sundae,
Glances at the young man.

O city whose lives
Gather their accumulation of days
Carefully as well-kept lawns.

Past the proud apartment
Houses, fat as a fat money bag. I wish that I
Might stay in this pleasant, conventional
City, as I study a sturdy clover
Bent back by a dewdrop of rain. But then
From the corner of a mood like Les Sylphides,
Impossible, romantic as certain moons
In certain atmospheres, then you called me
From the corner of the street. And,
Like buttercups, like invitations: I.

Dissertation on the Detroit Free Press

For my vacation, I thought like Silas
Marnar, being my own miser of the past,
To revisit what Craven calls "the good
People of Detroit." I went elsewhere.
Why is it that the voyage is always
Consummated in speech; travel is
Silent, plans profound, original ways of looking.

Who left this copy of the Detroit
Free Press on this seat where I shall
—If the engineer keeps his pledge—
Spend seven hours watching cities
Tossed away like memories, hustled
So that I have to tell myself that this
Tempus of existence, rather a tempest
Is life, with all these people I am
Living through their lives.

I offer you a candle, old fashioned
Fidelity, on your grave, O lonely dead,
To whom unhappiness no longer makes a difference.
These flowers, which I do not bear, I drop
On your tombstone, so that could you hear me
As I dare say you do, in this' wilderness
You would be proud of a gift
Who always gave.

I like the amateur
Homeliness with which this paper is written.
I can see the reporters trying to
Impress themselves, the very words are
Roughedged, the ink is impermanent.
That is the Middle West. Friendliness.
Even Ford is just a unit in production
Homely, dazzling nobody with his headlights.

Since I am at your grave, I want
To beg of your incredible goodness, the
Flowers I gave you. I want to give them to
The living, a loyalty like your own.
Without commitments, life go hang.
I am looking for the person you want me to
Give these to. Before I am dispensable.

Now as the train rounds a curve, I see
The engineer who impels our movement.
Only at the curve, perhaps, do we realize
The impetus with which our goal is driven.

Gawayn and the Green Knight

It began as an idyll of Theocritus
With the most sophisticated simplicity
You can imagine. We spoke in understatement
Each going under the other's unremark.
I thank you for your courtesy, gentle knight,
I will intrude myself in your domain,
Being in need of sustenance, and I
Promise to keep intact the fair tradition.

The work prospered, till the yellow time
Of parting, when vacationers pick out
Their favorite stage setting on which
To take a minute's recess from life,
Maine or Vermont or South to Caribbean's
Key West.

My host came out of the chapel,
I kept the rendezvous in what fashion
My legend has told you, though I was sick to death
Of the bloodshed of hunting, the gore, the hacking
Of nations on the growling backdrop of the time.

The room itself, in five short minutes, I saw
Transformed into a scene for waltzers
From a staid business appointment.

"Someone," the Green Knight said, "said that you
Would not come." At these words I
Could not contain myself. I was not
Gawayn. There was no chapel. I hate
Triumph and victory. The other's loss!

"I am not afraid," I shouted, "not terrified,
That every man must learn to work together
In the common task."

The Green Knight, thereupon,
Drew me back to myself, being appointed
Prisoner of poverty and
Gawayn by one I do not know. He said,
"The masquerade is over., Mankind is ready."

The Snow in the Mouse Wind

I

Its cigarette twitches like a heart
It smells of smoke, carbolic acid;
While wishes snore, it will write
Letters to the queen of hearts;
Its shuddered face it could not stop
Voice of the screaming, shrill roof tops;
Suffering with each bone it is.
It could not stop its ghastly sweat,
Choked in a terrible childbed.

And every street, too old, too cold,
Too wrinkled to support that load;
And no brass-buttoned voice, trumpeting out
The shell cracked, and slimy rout.

And it is like a ferris wheel,
Up and down, the stars reel,
It takes the north star, shines it more,
It's on a plane tree it adores.
Whose roots creep up and down beside
Mumble grumble, seek and hide
Children: are its lullabye.
And for brown eyes, and for blue eyes—?
And how much for my baby? Sigh
The mothers, and a penny cries,
So cold, the wind's nose on its nose.

Past panting lions with smudgy joys,
It whirls through a carousel of boys,
The century cracking to cracked toys
Its whispers and complaining ears.

And then from door to door throughout
The whisper world until it hears
In stone and steel, "For god's sake, what

II

"What in the world are you trying to do
In the small room, shivering so.—But
It won't hurt it really won't, tell me!—
I'll touch you with my thought and we—
We'll walk out on the sea as one
Crosses the street, and on the sun
In amber day, before!—but run!—
The road can catch and catches us—
But the black buoys! and before
Those buildings lean down grabbing us—
Run! It won't hurt. Learning's like
Learning to walk after a long
Sickness, singing, happy as
Happy children all day long."

Its cigarette twitches like a heart.—"I
Beg you, take the desirable horse
For hills that saddle a most unpopular course.
They once made a wish, remember? You
Once made a wish, upon a time, too.
The green gown was a window, a wind house
From which you frowned. It was a light
You nibbled at. You had a picnic of
Bright tulips on your hat. You said,
'It will always be like this?'—spoken
Between a laugh and a kiss.—Won't you
Come with me, my dear, I beg of you."

It smells of smoke, carbolic acid, as
It pulls like a kite. "Crying, you
Want to get off. But you know, you've

Just died. Indeed all the tears are
Counted, one by one, and safely filed away.
Respectfully dried that were respectfully cried.
My vanity case hides
Between your old words in the night."

Its woolen lashes laugh a brouhaha. "I would not
Go through that business once more,
Not in a million years."

Whispers of the snow
Complaining smoke and blood.
And wishes snoring while it writes
Letters to the queen of hearts.

The Picnic

I

They tread, softly, out of the vagina:
The kiss incarnate, the shot spark,
Climbing the tree:
Women wake, fantasy fabricated,
In relatives, in property, narcotic in rouge and silk.

Eyes worry that laughing lap
Gay in its design of sunflower. She
Has the anemone fat in its vase.
—The legs men fringe are mauve and indigo
Tissued . . .

—Black wind, —you! —raper of skirts!
Arc that fears begs its fear. —Earth's crust
Is also a frail, wrinkled walnut shell, biding
These mouths, tremulous, minuted, fading
Like the afternoon's patchwork quilt of newspaper.

Glory of funeral, of salamander lips:
The rose here composes archaic bells.
Ice at the core, fire at the very tip—
Lounged eyes—

Hands plunged on swaying hips!

II

The tugs will mutter, "I hate, I love,"
In the key of B flat minor; your
Face, misted with the curling of
Voices, relaxed in sleep's sweet smell,
—Rouge and indigo silk the door—
Will be in the elms a murmur bell,
—Tall as a tulip, who sleep, sweet girl,

Beyond that most tremendous apple
With the first silver fishes swimming by it:
The sky peals, it's almost gone.
On this steep shore, almost fallen,—
Sighabye, lullabye, the sighs are wan,
Are this leaf moon, this picnic ground,—
Monotone clouds presaging storm.

The falseface moon redeems, however,
For one split second, a stray match;
Ignites an island with its catch,—
Detached, beside some torn newspaper.

The Simple Scale

To Ben Belitt

She is playing, *The Harmonious Blacksmith*;
Inside the music is a window; there, she sees,
A raindrop's drop of dwindled rain,
A fly that lifts two legs, scratches, bored bourgeois,
The calculating air,—when lo!—
The music interrupts them all, as it interrupts itself.

I

That rushing tree is red! Breathlessly,—
John, where are you John?—an errand waits.

II

Shall he speak the slight mistake, without
The waving of handkerchiefs, the flat
Roofs falling, in the hurricane of hands.
Goodbye's a slight mistake; distances
Beside the secret conversation stand,
Beholding, like milestones, the harmonious blacksmith.

III

Their voices are thinned, and threadbare; they both sound,
A chinese school, a tawdry merry-go-round.

IV

Far, how far, O out of the sea's smoke quarries,
Its thousand skies, its gull claw sail,
Its horse's flashing tooth,—
And farther than the scream, that coils around

The underside of her smile,—to hide . . . underground!—
Their faces are like hollyhocks,
Across a fence of rain they mock
The puddle, and the chewing gum wrapper!

v

Pencil, pencil, speak it again,
How the woman is playing, *The Harmonious Blacksmith*.

vi

She is playing, *The Harmonious Blacksmith*.
Inside the music is a window.
Is she this gay and wimpled smile,
That sobbing children will someday sob?
He is not too small, not too tall,—
He's one who doesn't grow at all.
They listen to the blacksmith, he is forging
Their ancient joy, their lucky leagues.
The rain is dusky with fatigue,
She leans upon it, she taps out
Globes of light on the window, she
Holds herself, on the raindrop's branch.

vii

She is playing, *The Harmonious Blacksmith*.

It Is Sticky in the Subway

How I love this girl who until
This minute, I never knew existed on
The face of this earth.

I sit opposite
Her, thinking myself as stupid as that
Photograph, maudlin in Mumford, of
Orpheus.

A kinkled adolescent
Defies the Authorities by
Smoking a butt right next to me. He is
Of Romeos the least attractive who
Has played the role.

He
Smirks, squints, glues his eyes to her
Tightly entethered teeth, scratches
His moist passion on some scratch paper.

Her eyes
Accuse Plato of 'non-en
Tity. Most delightful creature of moment's
above-ground.

The Skeleton in the Closet

This man, who suddenly appears out of my past
His face remarkable like an Italian peasant's
Gnarled and rugged with roots of weather,
Rivulets of suffering, hands crude, swollen
With work as a patchwork field, makes me
Think how Nietzsche, who knew the pathos of
Distance, was unacquainted with the presence
Of pathos.

Childhood is an indignity, which
Our pompous manhood stoops to elevate
With rote laughter at what it was. Think then,
How erratic, what a diapered feeling it is
To be in the compulsory province of
A tyrant you do not in the least understand, who
Breaks the mirrors of your unlucky years
With devastating effect.

It was a marriage. Last I saw
Him, it was a funeral. I speak of the meetings of
Climatic moments. There were the one or two
Intervals of rebuff, a half-hour at most
Spread through a decade. Here he was, in flesh and
Blood, the odious.

Villain. What did I do?

I felt sorry for him. I who had
Hated him so, didn't even dislike
Him. Until he opened his mouth.
His barbaric yawp chased me across the roofs
Of the world, into childhood, where, I am ashamed to
Say, most cordially, most fervently I detested.

The Transformation

The caterpillar, convoluted on the sun
Flower, like a cat purring before an
Eighteenth century fireplace, classically
Retrospective, is neither violent nor enigmatic.
He is a Brooklyn Dodger, popularly reckoned
As the leaf's nibbler, in reality
The butterfly's storehouse, as the cat is
Watt's inspiration, his steam engine.

Curled so, on my own leaf, I have
Like Augustine proceeded through suffering
To suffering because I suffered and
Suffered over that, hunting not the current movie
But the star, more radiant than Greer Garson;
While my kin, I mourned their departure.
Thus I died, as she did,—for is death not
Only vacuity, a luna in the breathing
Habits? And what good is it to be
A Moon, when what is wanted is the pulsing
Radiance of homecoming and laughter?

Now that, like myself, I walk the firm earth
I think of those whom living see I not,
Separation of errands, leading onward.
My sister, who accompanied me.
On good times on the grass, walks through
Belle Isle, swimming, whom I trailed while a tot
Like a Siamese twin, with what insidious
Pursuit, trying to catch up with her wisdom,—

What about her?—She too suffered the lapses
Of remembering which is grief's nostalgia,
Recrimination for no wrong done, unless
Ignorance's youth is evil-doing. She saw
New York's definition

As brute power while I still bewailed,
My lack of support, of "sympathy."
She watched her friends taking on
The aspect of building materials,
Iron, cement, concrete.

What of her
Friendlessness. Who took care of her?
I, being her ambitious genius, scoffed the
Insouciant blackheads, whiteheads of her
Concern more than she disliked her own
Face. How tired I am of myself,
How tired she was of herself.

If either had
Been much older or much younger?—In hôtel
Lobbies, after every particle of energy
Spent typing figures, gazing at the rich,
At Coney Island, making believe a beach
Where there were real waves, full of water
Not the little litter of junk and filth
Which the shingle retains till doomsday.
Finding in cheap amusements her support?
How cheap the svelte in the Persian Room
With their décolleté intrigues, bare-breasted.

And I ride with her now, in the subway,
Wanting somehow to do something
For my omission. It is to my eternal
Discredit that, just as years gone by,
I cannot communicate with her, can't
Think of a single thing to tell her.

I wish her well. The therapy
Is taking for granted the ugly scene, the
Actual tile subway station and
The frustration which time,—can it undo?

Getting a Mosquito

When I most savagely
Attack him in my conversation (he
Is not there—), afterwards
I see his abundance, rebuking my
Partiality.

I am red with anger, bloodshot.
This mosquito's tintinnabulation,
Vociferous gongs, molests me
Just a trifle. My wife
Investigates each cranny of the wall
For the malicious enemy.

(Through his conversation
I met his mother: she is still sitting
Far away, in the Jersey hills on a
Sunday, her hands pressed together, sweaty
Palms, gazing into vacancy. He
Said,

“When I saw her looking like
That, I never again resolved to
Budge one inch, in kindness. It's a fight
For existence, Darwin or no.”)

My wife, sweet angel, has
Located the mosquito. How triumphantly
She bangs out its death with the *New York Times*.

Looking for a House

All evening the smell of phlox, your head
On my shoulder as the countryside sped
Past the auto.

 You are,
Instinctively, the feeling
Of happiness, the visit equal
To desire.

 Now my sober after-thoughts, in a
Double-breasted business suit, reckon
Not the minute review of time past
Which is the repetition of
Anxiety; only your face I see.
How can people hate?—it is
Such a waste of time.

 Beloved, we went looking for a house
We could not find. Or did we find it,
Kind hearted girl, of flowers the mignonette.

Monterey

The hills were lush
With rain and youth. I did
What chores were my portion
In the shack I shared with two friends.
It was to be for us
A landmark in our lives, a moment
In our lives to which we returned,
When we were tired out, when
We didn't have anything else to
Do. What a home and parents should
Be.

She came with a friend,
Calling, on the road. She was
Dissatisfied with her lodging.
One of us met them on the
Road, invited them in for lunch.

I loved her not
For herself, but for myself. She
Was, of girls imagined, one.

I am a rugged individualist;
I did not tarry or pretend.

With Japanese Lanterns

Month of brides like white roses,
Perfect days. The garden dewfaced, greengood
To look at. June's festival.

Sabrina

On her pedestal, in front of the
Conservatory. My fleet-footed Thetis out of the
Winedark sea. Do not
Look at me. I feel so young and helpless.
As though I do not belong in this lawn
Of laughter. Where the Japanese Lanterns
Hang from the pine trees. The tennis courts,
A rotunda of nymphs in the arms of
Their partners.

Walking amid these elegant young men.
Girls like petals. Do not touch them, they
Are too delicate for your thought, I dared not
Walk among them but stood
In my room looking out.

Could I ever be as wise
(Looking)? Handsome as that
Man, in his Chrysler car?
Now no longer surprised that so
Fair their faces, foul their tongues.—
They are my orchids, blonde and brunette.

Knowing what it is worth; neither discreetly
Nor prudently.

Tomorrow to fresh woods and lanterns new.

The Visitor

He came from the mountains into this
Garden. Welcome, sir, all that I have is yours.

He came from the mountains, he spied
The kind shade. He sate with me under the oak tree.

What have you done in the mountains, sir,
Beside hunting the white deer all day?

In the mountains I hunted and I plotted
Your garden's destruction and ruin.

In the mountains I hunted a similitude
To obtain your trusting mood.

Therefore I slay you as
You dream of the friendship I bear.

Said the man from the mountains the mountains
Who came to visit me here.

But I shall, as I look only upward
My star being set in the mountains,

Said the man, the man from the mountains,
See only the fair garden that I murdered here

Said the man the man from the mountains.

PART IV

Reflections on Violence

I dislike going with a woman
Into a restaurant. There is
A plot of mirrors
All designed to make me self-conscious.

“—Will you
Please stop looking at yourself
In your exquisite Cloisonné compact.
Your lips, your hair is
Very nice. Everybody’s eyes say
So.”

O voyeurs! intruding
On my domestic date, do you see
Any glory in this ancient
Ritual?

Hunters of
The unshuttered nudes of accidental windows.

Prospect Park

I would like to ask that dumb ox, Thomas
Aquinas, why it is, that when you have said
Something,—you said it—then they ask you
A month later if it is true? Of course it is!
It is something about them I think. They think
It is something about me. It adds up
To my thinking I must be what I don't
Know . . .

—The park is certainly
Tranquil tonight: lovers, like ants
Are scurrying into any old darkness,
Covert for kisses. It makes me feel
Old and lonely. I wish that I were
All of them, not with any one,
Would I exchange my lot, but the entire
Scene has a certain Breughel quality
I would participate in.—

Do I have to repeat
Myself. I really mean it.
I am not saying it again to convince myself
But to convince the repressed conviction
Of yourself. I think. I think. I think it.

Midston House

What is needed is a technique
Of conversation, I think, as I put on the
Electric light. But not the limited
Vocabulary of our experience, the
Surface irritations which pile up,
Accumulate a city,—but the expression,
Metamorphosed, of what they are the
Metaphor of;—and their conversion into light.

On the bus toward Midston House
I survey the people in their actions. Placid
And relaxed are they; this is the humdrum
Claptrap costume of girls and food, men
And work and house. The insurance
Of habit is circular, as
Democracy has interlocking duties,
Circular obediences.

Yet how to transform
The continual failing clouds of
Energy, into light? The vital
Intelligence of the man whom I am
Going to visit,—does he know? I
Think how the sharp severing of
My life's task,—severed associations,
Produced in me almost a
Lypothymia of grief and a hiatus of
Days, which grew fangs of anger, my
Lycanthropy,—thank god, it's over!

I am fired from my job by flames, big
As angry consciences: I can do
Nothing; I have not one ability! This man
Whom I am waiting to see in the lobby—

All my life I am waiting for something that
Does not eventuate—will he
Exist?

The law of life, like an abstract
Rigorous lawyer, passes a terrifying judg-
ment on poor little me, in a strange foreign
Syllogism. He is cheating me! He will not
Keep the appointment!

His probity
Rebukes my suspicion. What can I say, that
I love him; that I am un-
worthy? My doubt makes me feel,
—Even as we discuss another's dishonesty—
Ugly, irate, and damned avid, a cunning
Rascal, like that ugly bird of the White
Nile.

But the poem is just this
Speaking of what cannot be said
To the person I want to say it.
I am sleepy with subtlety; the room strikes me as
Dark, so cold, so lonely. There is
No one in it. I will put on all the lights.
I wish I could go
On a long, on a long long journey
To a place where life is simple and decent, not
Too demanding.

No! On the vehicle, Tomorrow, I will see
That man, whose handshake was happiness.

The Meaning of Winter

O I see the
Face—hideous is selfishness.

(What was summer? It was the descent of
leaves? October is the month of breaking
mind, though I assert with complete certainty,
it is ultimately the oak's strength. What
celebrations!—)

Carolyn told me:

"The winter wind on Amsterdam Avenue
Behind St. Luke's Hospital, listens, halts.
It is a maimed crippled beggar, wanting a
Handout. The sailors talk of big
Times. Then the winter wind begins.

"The winter wind blusters like
A base ingrate; has no patience.
Muck tramples the green film of
Girls in remembered frocks."

(And then, you must add to all this the cold
sky, the color of a quarrel. Premonitions of
disaster; of course, the month's environment.
Why do I keep thinking of you?)

The principle of our time is
Selfishness.

Victor Record Catalog

Most unexpectedly it happens, just
As you don't know what you say till you
Say it. Sleighbells in the winter of
My discontent.

(Like all people, she spoke
By contradiction, so that I had to hear
The negatives of her remarks to find out
How much I liked her. She lived, way up,
In a Kafkalike passageway of bureaucratic
Offices, anonymously ugly, one inside
The other, just like Kafka's temper tantrums.)
She lived there. I didn't like it.

She looked at me
Alternately too severe and too
Gentle. Why did I hear
Her say that all men are brothers?
"We journey
under the four winds, past
The enemy's chariot and
Past the river where drown the
Attached. You and I, however,
Are exceptions to every rule. Being glad,
We will survive."

Outside the window it was
A hot saggy day in August. The Coast Guard
Drilling at war, far as the Pacific.
As poverty is my taskmaster, as
I study the Victor Record Catalog instead
Of listening to the paragon's
Prerogative: Eugene Ormandy, my

Expectancy

Makes me slightly sick, as when years ago,
Hungry for food, I came to friends and they
Talked; now I wait for her to speak
The meanings which I must negate before
I am admitted to the gayest person.

A Successful Summer

The still small voice unto
My still small voice, I listen.
Hardly awake, I breathe, vulnerably,
As in summer trees, the messages
Of telegraphed errands buzz along
July's contour of green.

Predicament

"Their love is exhausted in
Family," you told me. It is true
To my experience; what can one do?
To be left with the cinders of recrimination
For what cannot be returned. No,
To live without expectation of
Love. That is like a toothache,
Chronic and infectious. To mock
Your feelings, as someone I know,
Laughing at us all as sexual
Maniacs, is but self-mockery.

Shall I say the apple, lone on
The stem, which the pickers have
Forgotten or has forgotten them
So shines, so rots from morn to eve
Thuds to the ground, unmissed. Believe
Me,—I cannot agree.

Love, I think, is
With hate our most spontaneous
Reaction. We are unforgiving in our
Egoism, set pillars for ourselves,
Being our own Simon Stylites.
At worst, burying our small, dull
Talent, under a bushel of
Other people's responsibilities:

Repeatable patterns, cheap at any price! Yet
Under the surface, under the
Effete noon's memorandum,—
Uprushes love like a Fountain,—
A gentle stream, yet speaking

A lesson to the morning star.

No Title

A ghastly ordeal it was. In
Retrospect, I am no longer young.
Wise, sad, as unhappy as seeing
Someone you love, with whom life has
Brought suffering, or someone you
Have nothing in common with, yet love,—
Unable to speak a word.

If when I say this I weep, it is not
Because my heart has turned into a
Lachrymose commentator; the
Discus thrower's still
There,—the shining one, quick. It is because
In my moment of rejoicing, I
Thought that one who has suffered with me shall
Rejoice. There was no
One. Not one answered.

Of suffering, who wants to be reminded?

Sitting on the bench in the
Botanic Garden, watching the charming scene
Beguiled by poplars giving it a fairy tale
Atmosphere

I was annoyed by someone!
He wanted money. I resented
Him. He disturbed my mood.

The euphemisms of our age
Make tolerable a universal selfhood,
Which the sick soul, alas, was always sick of.
What but goodnesses' was the dark night
Of the soul, as yet unimmured to its

Failings, sensitive as the snail's an
Tennae?

I stood there on 42nd Street and
Eighth Avenue. I stood there with two
Nickels.

I went to one on whose
Memory I hardly counted; my
Friends—did they care?—and how could I
Ask them, being if a beggar, proud.

How little space there is
Between success and nothing at all.
Watching the passersby
Who fitted in somewhere in what was a
Society.

Outcast. Exiled. Penniless.
Never. Never. Never. Never. Never.
Shall I stand spellbound by the
Reiteration's disaster?
No! What is
Over is over.

A Corsage

Feeling like "a very village of sorrow,"
Just like Franz Schubert, with each sad bourgeois
Dolorously doleful, I only said
When you asked me for my life-story,
"Well, the world is a funny place, un
Pleasant things can happen."

I chewed
The silence, cryptic and stupidly.
I felt diminished by myself, much like
The passport photographs that make you look
Like an escaped convict or
The victim of circumstances.

I
Am the oyster shell, after the
Succulent seaworm's been devoured,
With only the pretense of sea in your cupped
Ear.

The next day you wore a
Corsage of pansies.
Exultantly alive, serious scholars
Of melancholy, brave and lionhearted
With thoughtful thoughts.

Now
In this wall of eyes before me, icy eyes,
Now in the Broadway 7th Avenue Van Cortlandt
Subway, feeling quite walled in, Henry
David Thoreau breaks the ice, says,
"Time is the stream I go a
Fishing in,—what about
You?"

I, Henry, will study
These pansies, profoundest
Professors of the world's woes.

The Creation of Others

"What soul is without flaw?"
Asked sad Rimbaud, rebellious.

Now as I end the career,
Arena being flood's circuit,—
I see the people I passed,
Whom I must live with, still;—their right
Who can question?

I see the sad lost face, white, and white,
Of Parsifal. Reining his horse in the
Dreary hostel of his desperation.
Eyes drawn. Skin tight about the cheekbones.

Sad lost eyes; cramped in the barren wild.

Although he must now enact
According to his ability, the role given;
Parsifal is obedient. Faithfully bides
His sincere tryst, in the moonlight.

The Mark

Sad as the rain am I now that God has
Graded me with a B-; in his class,
I loved the recess, studied the window.
Is it my fault who built me that way? Yet
Even God must suffer at his mistakes.

Why did he lie? Or didn't he know
Who promised me, that of phoenixes, I
Was not to be cremated, but a Glory.

A B- hurts; it isn't even
A mediocrity; not an A standing there
On its own legs, a smart man; but
A curved Greek, pliant and polite,
Lacking something.

Think of the sinuous bosom
Of a C, which sees all, and feigns
Indifference! An open mind is a C, a good
American, friendly, someone you can talk with. A D
On the other hand, stands for
Damn you! Who

Can survive its scurrilous echo?
An E is like an eel, squashy, squishy—
But mud in your eye whichever way you look at it.

As for the sacred excommunication's
F,—final is it, finalities
Beyond the grave. And like the question *why*,
Haunting the victim in his tabula rasa.

BA (On the Same Theme)

Unsatisfied, that's the word. As when
Your meanings talk across each other with
Your best girl friend.

I see my name baaing
At me, like the blackest sheep of all,
All my associates have a great many
Degrees, *BA* wags after me
Like the can on a beaten cur's tail, reminiscing
Of cruel boys' victory.

I feel like an academic
Futility!

Who wants to be
The facile descensus *AB*, from being
To ineffable lowest depths. I tell you I'm
In a black mood. As
In the voices of grieving Euripides, woe

Is me.

Another Poet Called David

I reached a point where there was no
Use going on: my companion said, "Do not waken
The watchman, do not shout, he will die
Of shock if you make the slightest
Sound." I stood in the utter darkness,
Cold. Without evidence of myself.

The technique of diversion con-
Founds the rival by simulating friendship or
As the Victorians might say, worming
Affections. Then, at the point of trust,
As on this dark stage where one man sleeps
Slumped by the flashlight, to change the
Mode of address, from friend-
Ship to a complete stranger, to shriek-
ing subtlety, to innuendo, and back to
Friendship. The executive wishes to
Demoralize his employee, perhaps he is slightly
Jealous?

I do not know. At the time I could not enjoy
The enchanting silly coffee waves, sometimes
Sapphire, which is the fluid stream of our life.
Since then, like William James, I have learned
Ice-skating in my August, after—

At that point I returned;
Since there was no point going on I went back,
I spoke again to the marvelous friends of
My youth: for a short while it was a life.

That you were not willing I am sorry.

No Finis

When you cannot go further
It is time to go back and wrest
Out of failure some
Thing shining.

As when a child I sat
On the stoop and spoke
The state licenses, the makes
Of autos going somewhere,—

To others I leave the fleeting
Memory of myself.

