

Deanotations



Issue 96

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Dear Reader,

Sorry it's taken me so many months to get you this issue. I hope its triple size is partial amends. It's a very serious issue, lots of lumpy, longish poems, short on short, witty stuff, so for some of you it will be like choosing from a Whitman's sampler the piece you expected to be crunchy and biting into a caramel. This stuff may stick to your mental teeth. Next issue I'll try to be silly again.

Speaking of silly, I keep hearing authorities on public radio applying logic to who and what we are that, if applied to a TV set, might run as follows: Though tradition claims that there is life beyond this TV set, a life that continues after its demise — actual living beings who create these moving pictures, the TV set being only a means of presenting them to others — we know, scientifically, that this cannot be the case. Here is the evidence:

1. Obviously, nothing of the life you see on a TV set can survive the demise of the TV set. Proof: destroy a TV set. It contains no more life, nor ever will again.

2. Evidence is mounting that the TV set is the SOURCE of the pictures you see on its screen. They are all created within the "brain" of the TV set. For example, if you sever this wire, the pictures vanish. If you sever THIS one, the pictures lose their vertical hold. If you cut THAT one, they lose horizontal hold. If you destroy that part, they fade. If you destroy THAT part, the sound vanishes. And so forth. Scientists, daily, are getting a clearer sense of how the various parts of the TV set are responsible for creating its own pictures by disabling one or another part to see what it controlled. (Tube or not tube?)

3. Where sets are faulty (electrical brain imbalances), we can't cure them, but we CAN keep them operating. For example, when we jolt this set by attaching a power line to this part here, we don't get the correct picture back, but notice how the screen flares up, all brilliant white? See? We can keep it happy.

Our scientists — never has more intelligence been exerted to propound greater stupidity. When a body dies, a body dies; therefore there is no soul. Huh? When you mess up part of a brain, the person becomes incapable of telling one face from another. Therefore the person IS his brain. So let's see: If I'm using brains and nerves to communicate via a body, and you can mess up my communication lines by messing up the body, I don't exist? If you can cut the brake linings on a car so that the brakes don't work, this proves that there's no driver?

I hope your brain (your?) enjoys these poems.
Oops — got to go now. I hear my brain calling.

Lobe (frontal) and xxxxx

from Dean's fingers

(They write the poems, not me — says my brain.)

Sunset. The sky, trying to see me, shades its eye with the earth.

The trail comes to a long rolling valley...Oh! golf carts.

Why don't these windy trees shut up, so I can hear the cars?



"...exclusive of acts of God (hurricanes, floods, war, lightning, etc.)" — what about autumn, babies, apples, butterflies, etc.?

Lightning, heavy rain. "STAY OFF THE ROADS" says the car radio.

Revelation

Butterfly flashes gold...vanishes...flashes again against the blinding blue, an electrostatic crackle sparking from the mad movie scientist's machine or some god's little finger to foreshadow the rending of the heavens and the earth,

which I will fear not, for there he flashes again, turning back briefly for me a torn flap of heaven to show me the inner lining. Perhaps Judgment Day will fill the sky with butterflies and other souls turning Heaven inside out,

our foreshadowings having mistaken for thunderous tearing asunder the ripple of numberless wings, and our radiance (naked of resistant flesh, freely arcing from soul to soul) for lightning.

On either side of the room, big Peavey speakers, silent. Quietly we chat right in front of them — NYAH NYAH!

Cabbie

Driving all night, I'd become my cab:
Passing between cars, an inch on either side —
it would tickle! Cruising down the avenue,
I'd notice a yellow reflection sweeping across
blocks of plate-glass windows and think,
"That's ME", and once when I lost power
and could hardly steer, it was paralysis,
almost death, being there, but not able
to move, and when I got off work, walking
home, I'd feel a cab-sized space around me
that was my own, brushing against and around
buildings and people and fire hydrants.
It's decades later, but that cab may be
with me yet — I haven't noticed lately.
When you see me coming, do you feel an urge
to dodge, to wave me down?



It rained here yesterday, cold cold rain.
It entered my mind. My mind is full of rain.
I'm pumping as fast as I can. Then I'll have to
wring out all my mental image pictures.
I'll try not to drip on the new Millennium,
but once I get into those pictures,
who knows WHAT century it is? God, I hate a wet
mind! All my crisp dry poetry is soggy.

"She's as pretty as a picture" — remember when
pictures were pretty?

Letter from a friend: new address, new phone number,
same planet, older.

I too know things that, amidst fierce debate,
I realize are just opinions, opinions whose source
I can't recall, but for decades I've been
using them to make me better than everyone
who didn't know what I thought I knew.

The critics gang up on a poem, a critical
So-what? team. [SWAT team]

Taking The Reader For A Ride

BUS STOP. I will stop a bus. Now I wait and
write poems, two activities that are practically
indistinguishable.

I'm on one end of the wide bench
at the back of the bus, facing out away
from the skinny old man at the other end
and the blessedly empty (to the extent
L.A. air can be said to be empty)
air between us.

Hollywood Boulevard — where the act
is shunned.

Bumpy bump — I have even less control
over the pen's motion than when it is controlled
by my ideas alone.

I manage a few lines. Can you tell
the ideas from the bumps?

I could write about the passing palm trees,
but wouldn't that insult you? After all,
if what I see here is more interesting
than wherever you sit reading this,
shouldn't you be riding a bus in Hollywood and
staring out the window, not being where you are
and looking at this page? [Shouldn't I?]

I know, I know — I'm a poet:
I turn paper into a stained-glass window,
through which all you see becomes golden;
shrines will say: The poet pissed here.

So here's Ventura Boulevard already, bicycles,
shops, cars and more palm trees. Enjoy, enjoy.



Rodeo --grown men tackling baby cows. But that's
what they do, and it's hard work; that's how they
tie them down for branding. They brand them to
keep track of what they own. They own them to
sell to be slaughtered for beef for us to eat.
It all makes sense and has been going on forever,
so it must be OK, but that squealing calf looks so
desperately scared, you can't own terror like that,
you certainly wouldn't want to eat it.



He's busy being a Guru. It's no fun talking with a Guru. He's got too much invested in being right and too much insistence on not giving a damn about being right. It's good exercise, I guess, shaking hands with an eel (O body electric!), but I'm not a bad person, and when I find myself having to tell myself that, I look to see whom I've been talking with — maybe I just out-guru a gurusome guru. (Yuhu! Gubye, Guru!)

“When you chant, feel the vibration in your deepest inner self,” said the guru OM-in-us-ly.

One Word, Son...Anaesthesiology!

We've solved childbirth: Women, persuaded that childbirth is an impossible ordeal, let themselves be drugged, the babies removed from them — painlessly. But this is only the beginning: Lovemaking too is outrageous — and surely is part of the cycle of childbirth (what goes in must come out). Soon men and women will no longer inflict the pangs of sex upon each other in the absence of professional facilities, but will enter a hospital to make “love” (all to be covered by a new Health Plan),

where an anaesthesiologist can attend to ensure that sex is painless — no moans, no screams, no grunting exertions, ticklish convulsions — and a physician will, as needed, extract and inject sperm surgically, in case the drugged lovers need assistance.

Should a woman conceive, medical insurance will support CONTINUED anaesthesia for her: Pregnancy is painful, embarrassing and often depressing, something to which no one should be subjected. And post-natally, should bottle-feeding not satisfy the infant, of COURSE all breast-feeding must be sedated: Who would willingly have her nipple yanked at and toothed by a drooling homunculus!

Best of all, those of us who must pay the taxes to support such services will be sedated most of the time — at least on payday and throughout the tax season. Soon “Natural Tax Paying” will be a distant unpleasant memory.

Chalk Dust

The “blank slate” theory justifies gobs of gore: “If we simply wipe out the recalcitrant old guard, the kulaks, the warlords, whoever's too accustomed to the old bad ways [you can't teach an old dog new tricks], then we can build by indoctrinating the untainted children” —

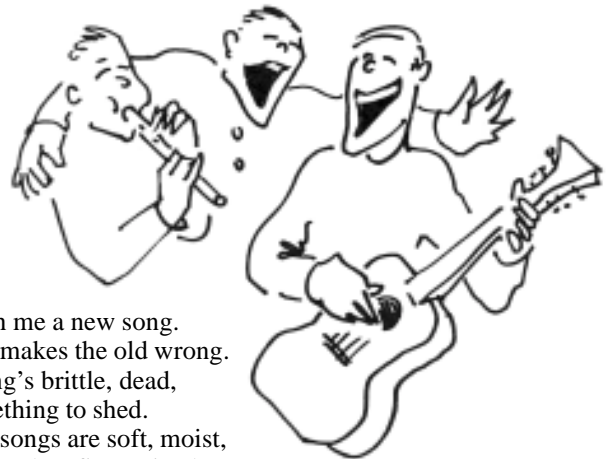
but what if these children weren't born yesterday — not for the first time? What if they've been indoctrinated before many times and with more force than these decadent days can muster, more than these flimsy modern bodies could survive?

Who, then, are these children? Many are the recently slaughtered devotees of the Old Order (old dogs yet older, only made stupider by fresh pain), some sullen with suppressed rage for vengeance, others eager to learn so that THEY can become the brutal indoctrinators, secure in the role of what they could not stand up to,

So that the new order becomes tainted at the fountainhead. These separations death makes are tissue thin. Death ends almost nothing. Immortals can forget, but each cycle of forgetting renders us less able to learn anything new.

Nothing new can be made of patched-over rags. Only those who can remember can change their minds.

Do you, too, when threatened, retreat to a fortified place behind a sign saying, “Keep Out, Lest It Appear That Something Is Ruining My Life When I'm Supposed To Have It All Handled, & Then I Might Have To Change My Mind About Something”?



Teach me a new song.
New makes the old wrong.
Wrong's brittle, dead,
Something to shed.
New songs are soft, moist,
Shiny when first voiced.
I'll shed my old wrongs
If you'll teach me new songs.

Credo

We're flesh, then sod —
No muss; why all the fuss?
We gravely nod
In chorus, "Dust to dust".
Yes, bod to clod —
But US? In God we trust.
There is no God —
He lives in each of us.

Even stars grow old and die —
See them shiver in the sky?
Stars, why dread your dark demise?
You're rekindled in her eyes.



The Worst of Times

Completing a date with (after slight hesitation) "2000" is disappointing. It's a nice round number — one in a thousand, but I miss the mouth-filling profusion of chunky syllables and hisses and titters and crunches of consonants of, for example, 1977, 1968 or 1995. These long dates roll so crisply off the mental tongue! I want the time I live in to have substance, texture, complexity...quantity. Shouldn't a larger number have a larger sound than a smaller number? Born in nineteen-forty-two, now I near 60, gray, complicated, doomed to distinction. What can such as I have to do with a slick, blank-eyed, pouty year like "two thousand"? It's like living in a comic book. Maybe it'll be better in the chewier days and months, for example, "October thirty-one..." — no, it's no good: To begin with the Gestapo severity of "October," descend into the Sylvester-puddy-tat salivating lisp and solid fullness of "thirty-one," then slam the date shut with "two thousand" is sheer betrayal. I cannot live in such a year. 2001? Still too abrupt (though "twenty aught one" is an improvement). I hope I am an immortal soul, not this dated body (soon to end too abruptly, rounded off), so can look forward to 2687 (twenty-six-eighty-seven — what a slashing symphony) and 2394, real, prickly, unshaven, ragged dates, times with character when people do not confuse themselves with brandnames and chatroom signatures, times when time flows in snaky, rocky, ripply channels, not between two rectilinear, flat-topped concrete banks.

Success can be disappointing, like an escalator going flat at the top to trip me up, just when I'm stepping high and fine.



My Body Made Me Do It

Soul is a gadfly, its buzz of aspiration and guilt never letting the body rest...

or is it BODY that won't let SOUL rest?
After all, it's not good for a body to lie around all the time. Maybe the native goal of every spiritual being is to do nothing forever — thereby harming no one and gaining ample time to cogitate, blow bubble worlds, think of what one SHOULD have said...

but our bodies, to survive (like sharks that must swim to breathe), diddle us with visions of the joys of energy, the purity of doing, the glow of progress. OOH! AH! cry our bodies — NOW we've got them moving!

You ridicule my vision of sloth —
Boy, does your body have YOU fooled!
Slip you a scent of wet earth and one can do anything with you — lif' dat bale, tote dat barge! Keep dem muscles lean and mean.

Biology is movement, frantic activity. Sloth is the supreme dominance of mind over matter. Why can't we learn from the wisdom of our parents: "Just SIT STILL and don't you DARE touch a thing!"

You hear him come in, but don't open your eyes or say anything, just let yourself be asleep, too tired to want to get into anything. Death is like that: You lie there, hearing them moaning over you, and you could say something, but they're far away and it's too much work and you're tired.

Will this fall wind carry away all our clutter?
Whishful thinking.



Why? I Ask the Kid

who's knocking red blossoms off the hedge with a stick. They hurt him, he says — shows me his finger. Thorns.

This kid has a great future — destroying, not the thorns, but the blossoms.

When he loses his job, he'll get drunk and beat his wife for looking too cheerful.

I say to him (brave of me — I've never seen him before and don't live in this area, so if the kid screams, "Daddy, that man is bothering me!"...) — I say, "Please don't knock off any more. They're pretty."

He doesn't answer or look at me, but moves away. There is so little we can do for each other. If you see a flower (I don't know what these are called — ANY flower), be kind to a child. It may be a flower I saved or the child I failed to help.

Good Will

He's a man of good will. Support him. If he's wrong, correct him if you can, gently, if you can. If he's ignorant, teach him if you can. If he's weak, give him what strength you can spare and a little more, and if he tries to help you, be helped by him and tell him you've been helped — don't lie about it, just let it be so.

When he does well, tell him so. When he does badly, correct him if you can, gently, if you can (until he is very strong, and gentleness becomes optional). When he is wise, learn from him — even if you know it already, let his knowledge resonate with yours and make it radiant. Help him see that those who use his words, but lack good will, are not his friends. Never lie to him, not even "for his own sake." Good will, without knowledge, is dangerous. Find good things to say about him. Don't worry about his faults: If encouraged in his good intentions, his faults will bubble to the surface (for he'll be boiling with ideas and actions) and vanish. He's a man of good will. Support him. If he fails, we all fail.

I need to change my priorities — and subsequentialities and simultaneities, eternalities and neveratallities.

Warning to the Overly Spiritual

Animism is risky:

Grant that every bird, cell, stone, molecule of air is alive, is spiritual — spirit entangled in flesh, in elements; yet, while we are ourselves dependent on bodies for communication and play, we depend on maintaining the myths of the solidity of matter, on keeping the spirits who operate deer, birds and trees assiduously doing so to make meat, music, fruit and shade for us; we rely on rocks not waking from their ceaseless muffled internal quibbling to dissolve the earth in laughter.

Given this dependency, is it not rash to thank the buffalo for their bounty, the grass for comforting your feet, to treat each thing as a being worthy of respect — won't all these slaves begin to get uppity? And then where will you be? Brother Buffalo will say "Feed yourself! We're tired of humping over dusty plains!" and Great Grampa Sun will say "Warm yourself. I'm tired of fanning this furnace?" And stone — what if, when you address it, it remembers itself a clot of ancient, unanswered communications and begins to unravel, dissolve into its vanishing components, while billions of beings whose petrified gropings are thus released into fluidity find themselves, for no reason, wanting to whistle or laugh?

So unless you have begun to sense that you can survive without flesh, unless spirits speak to you and you can answer and know that you have been heard, unless you know more than you could possibly know, would it not be prudent to treat your slaves sternly — not cruelly, but minimize chatter and keep them in their menial places, mere dirt, grass to be stepped on, dumb (if pretty) brutes to be brutalized, stones that are merely stones. Is it not adventurous to encourage them, to fill them with these dangerous ideas?





Do I Know You?

You speak of how little we know one another, as evidenced by your forgetting the scar on my leg. (You noticed and I explained it years ago, but you just noticed it again for the first time.) Well, I might forget it myself, if I keep this body long enough. Am I then only shallowly myself? I don't know how many hairs I have on my head or what I had for breakfast on any given morning a year ago or a thousand years ago. Sometimes, scratching, I discover a mole I didn't know I had, and who knows what's beneath my skin? And if I knew all that, each freckle, each cell, would I know all about me? Would I vanish?

Should the being WE are know itself better than the being I am and the being you are does? Ah, but we come so vividly alive at the seam where (however loosely) we are joined, and know ourselves better for joining up in this joyous idiot-us that doesn't even know where to scratch when it itches.

**Mom's Ass
(or Oedipus At Jerry Colonus)***

Mom was modest. I almost never saw more of her than I should have, but once (age 16?) in the hall, I paused to gawk as she stepped past me in just towel and puffy muffiny plastic shower cap — when, quick as a wink, she dropped a purple peekaboo of towel, wiggled her fat rosy-yellow-blue fanny, then through the bathroom door...zipped — blam, click.

It must have traumatized me, for I just stood there laughing. From the bathroom, too...laughter. Jehovah wouldn't have gotten the joke, nor would Sigmund (Jehovah-in-human-drag) Freud, but, horny teen though I was (seized and spasmed with the seriousness of sex), I found her ass no more stirring than her quaint shower cap (Baker, Baker, bake me a cake...),

but the silliness - ah, the silliness - the rosy yellowy bluey bare-assed silliness!

* *Oedipus, who is more serious about seeing Mom (he blinds himself), is the hero of Oedipus Rex and Oedipus at Colonus. Jerry Colona (Colonna?) was a comedian (or colown?).*

I've been asked to say a few words at my Grandma's 90th Birthday party.

"We're here because you're very old..."

"...because my uncle and aunt feel guilty about having put you in the home..."

"...because you were a moderately affectionate parent and grandparent who did most of the things such a one does (with an air of slightly pained abstraction, but a hint of humor)..."

"...because you lived longer than most and probably outlived most of your reasons for living, even your ability to give, now materialized as a box of chocolate candy by your bed which always we should eat some of because you can't eat any more of it..."

"...because it keeps the peace with family and you'll probably die soon, which, if we hadn't come, would have left us feeling that maybe we should have..."

"...because we love you for being old enough to be part of that wonderful time we all like to believe once was our lives..."

"...because you're still sharp as a tack, considering, and can do tricks (that's a GOOD Grandma!) like understanding words, recognizing some of us, almost smiling, shaking hands, rolling over..."

"...because maybe with all this food and drink and buzz of relatives, we'll draw you back into life, make you feel better, not just more and more tired, sort of smiling, tired..."

"...because if we don't remember you, what is there to remember..."

Also it gives me a chance to visit my brothers and sisters, though it's bitter cold here.



Grandma is Dead

She was old — or was being old.
I like her, but it's a relief to hear
Grandma is dead, like finally finishing
something put off for a long time.

She'd hold my hand, hers shaking,
as she said the same things over and over.
Her smile still had mischief
when I saw her in August.
It took three more months
to kill the smile.

She was always an old woman
called "Gramma". I was her favorite.
She gave me way too many poppy-seed cookies.

There's a lot more, but why make
characters? *War and Peace* swarms
with characters. So does the earth.
Somewhere in the room or house where you read
are there not pictures of infinitely special
persons?

This special person happened to be grandma.
Now maybe she's infinitely special
to someone else, probably to someone
infinitely special whom I've never heard of.

That seems wrong: I feel jealous! I want to say,
"Hey, you can't do that! You're supposed to be
my Grandma!" "That's all over now," she'll say
when she can talk again. "But," I'll plead,
"it was good, wasn't it?" (She used to
cuddle me and talk baby-talk to me
(the back of my neck she said was my "kisspool")
and later tell me how important it was to her
that I be happy.) "Ah well, that's all
in the past now. I don't think about that
anymore."

No wonder death has a bad name.



Long ago speedy cameras proved that when we run,
there is an instant in each stride when we do not
touch the earth. That is, with each step,
briefly, we fly. Yes, already we can fly.
Now we need only take bigger steps.

Grandpa Going Away

Home on vacation (grad school), we stand by his bed
in the Home, trying to talk as if we're just
talking. He can't get my name, says the doctor's
to blame for something. It doesn't look
like Grandpa, pale, shrunken, almost translucent.
He was a loud-breathing, intimate whale when,
as a child, I'd creep into bed with him to hear,
inexhaustibly, the same Bible stories (David and
Goliath, Joseph) again and again, afraid to touch
the big brown wart on his shoulder; or looming huge
over the five a.m. kitchen table
the few times I got up early enough
to catch him slurping beet borscht
("Have some, Sonny," he'd always say;
"No thanks," I'd always say) or pumpernickel
with sliced raw onion and sugar.



Now, his shrivelled head set high on the pillow
is lost to us. He thinks he's at home,
says he'll get us some good apples,
and a ghost lumbers from the bed to the ghost
of the chilly back hall with its musty smells:
wood-slat bushel baskets, aging apples, oranges,
onions, dusty-meshed potato sacks, while,
in the white room, he turns
under the sheets to rise, and I put out a hand
(afraid I'll have to hold him in bed,
ashamed that my real concern is
that he's nearly naked, and my wife
is with me, and as the sheet lifts,
the sight of his still pink, childish
nakedness cruelly embarrasses me) —
I say much too loudly, "No...not now, we'll get them
later...later!" He keeps trying to sit up, falls back,
egg-yellow streaks dribbled on his lunch bib.
Still he twitches at his blanket, baby tugs, wanting
who knows what, eyes rheumy, mild, far away.
"I'LL GET THE APPLES LATER," I almost
yell. He looks at my fright -- at me —
with such mild curiosity that I have to cry.
"What's the matter, Sonny?" he asks gently,
lying back. "I don't know," I sob, not lying, though
I think I am, and he reaches out a trembling arm
takes my head to his shoulder
(not remembering me? Knowing my need),
strokes my head, my face wet against his neck,
robbing me of my easy loss.

Grown Up

Out walking, peevisish, knowing my unhappiness
but poorly propped up; I could pluck away
the crutches, and it would collapse:

Just spot when I started worrying
and what happened just before that,
probably something someone said
or something I didn't say,
probably something that, really,
is no concern of mine
or some future problem
that, if it came to that
(and it won't) is no big deal
or is such a big deal
(like nuclear war) that who cares? —

as easily punctured
as the logic of a crying child.

But also, I can let my unhappiness be.
Why shouldn't people be unhappy?
I can just keep walking,
run my hand over wet oak bark,
peek out at the full orange moon
from behind this mask of sorrow —

and if I hold my attention equally
on the night and the sorrow,
finely separated,
sorrow becomes a solid mass,
then begins to flow,
a rippling around my head
as if two huge opposing forces all atremble
were letting up on each other as gently as possible
lest uneven relaxation crush me.

It's almost pleasant to stroll with sorrow
all by itself, free of those squabbling children,
significances, circumstances, importances, hopes —
let them straggle behind: they'll stop short
of badly hurting each other, and it's best
they learn to settle their own quarrels,
not expect a wise grown-up to appear
every time one of them cries. Sorrow and I
have so little time alone together.

They'll catch up to us later.



Good Morning, America

“Well, Connie, darkness is fading to gauzy gray.
There's no way at this time to be certain, but it
does appear that night is giving way to day.”

“That's right, Peter, but as you say, there's
no way to be sure, and even if daylight wins this
round, I don't think we've seen the last of night.”

“No, Jane, our day-and-night specialists tell us
that, as in the past, day and night will probably
continue to alternate. But let's visit the scene.
We have Doug Innes on site...Doug? Can you hear me?”

“Yes, Dan, loud and clear.”

“How is it out there, Derrick?”

“Well, Tom, the grass and leaves are dripping
wet, both bird and traffic noises are clearly on the
increase as you can hear...and the eastern horizon
has begun to redden...”

“Much like what we observed yesterday and the
day before and, actually, on each of the past several
days just before the advent of a full and apparently
endless day.”

“Exactly, Debra, but of course we have no way
of knowing if this is just another dawn or some quirk
of lighting -- God, as it were, striking a match to
see where he is now.”

“Very Poetic, Howard. Thank you. We'll call on
you from time to time so you can keep us abreast of
further apparent day-breaking events as they unfold.”

Well, Pamela, it does seem that we're about to
have another morning and most likely a full day.”

“Yes, Walter, it does indeed. I think it helps
to look at past developments, which, though they've
varied from time to time, do seem to repeat in
essential ways.”

“They do indeed, Kim, but experts say that many
questions remain unanswered, and meanwhile all we
can say for certain is that it's wisest to treat each moment
of gray or reddish or blinding white light or none at all
as just one in an unrolling sequence of events.”

“Well put, Mike. One simply never knows. Thank
goodness for this artificial lighting and the steady
hum of our air-conditioning.”

“Amen, Trish! On another news front, all along
the Eastern Seaboard latest reports indicate that
millions whose bodies have for hours been stretched
out horizontally on beds are now beginning to rise
up, first a few, then in large numbers, moving, in
most cases, into their bathrooms. How will this
impact...but here's Donna Longway LIVE on the scene
to tell us more about it. Donna...?”

On the Care and Feeding of Time

Because you didn't call, I had a 100 things to do and nothing to do.

Because you didn't call, I learned that I live in small boxes within larger boxes.

Because you didn't call, I wondered why I had to have that picture on the wall.

Because you didn't call, I didn't want ANY picture on the wall and wondered why I had to have a wall, and if I didn't, would the sky be any better?

Because you didn't call, I tried to busy myself, but found I was too busy waiting to get anything else done, so tried to read, then to watch TV, but gave up, for they polluted my waiting.

Because you didn't call, I learned the grain of the wood floor, the pattern of the rug — which insisted on repeating, and the texture of wall and ceiling plaster and that these changed continually before my eyes, running like water.

Because you didn't call, the dog put his snout in my lap and peered up at me, and I stroked his head and ears and said, "It's OK," but we didn't believe me.

Because you didn't call, I told myself, "You've been through this before, and you've lived and even been happy later — this will pass," and, just like before, could not believe it.

Because you didn't call, I watched the numbers changing on the clock to prove to myself that time was passing, but right after each change, it seemed there'd been no change.

Because you didn't call, you called a thousand times to tell me — but each time I cut you off, because you were about to say what I didn't want to hear or, worse, what I wanted to hear.

Because you didn't call, I paced from room to room, circling the house, tugging at what tethered me to the phone.

Because you didn't call, the silence became so noisy, I was afraid I wouldn't hear the phone ring.

Because you didn't call, the flame-like grain of the bedroom door began to flicker and surge.

Because you didn't call, I knew exactly what you were doing and with whom — knew it more graphically, even, than you did — and scraped my head violently side to side against the pillow to unknow it.

Because you didn't call, several years of my

recent life became inaccessible.

Because you didn't call, I tried to think about the things I'd been worried about — bills, competing obligations — and couldn't find them or any future, even tomorrow's shower lost in another galaxy.

Because you didn't call, I became very very calm, and this lasted a long long time and seemed eternal, invincible, but something happened — perhaps I exhaled — and I was scraping my head against the pillow again and yelling SHIT SHIT...

Because you didn't call, I turned to wood, but the wood grain heaved and twisted, so I turned to stone, but the stone melted and I was crying, but it wasn't me crying, but someone small and ridiculous on the bed wearing a crying mask, and there was nothing I could be, not even nothing.

Because you didn't call, I thought, what's the worst thing it could be, but there was no worst, no end to waiting.

Because you didn't call, I understood that what we think is new time is really time that has already been consumed and vomited up over and over.

Because you didn't call, because you didn't call and didn't call, I learned that I was no wiser than I'd ever been, that no amount of living and figuring things out can prepare you for what can't be prepared for — how can what we call living prepare us for what is outside it, for this raw, solid, undifferentiated thing that time is when we do not decorate it with our living?

Because you didn't call, I made myself not think of hurting myself, just in case life ever resumed, and anyway, no pain would end this endlessness.

Because you didn't call, I thought of ways to hurt you, make you cry, bleed, beg, ways to please you, eloquent, noble things I could say to you, arguments to show you how wrong you were, how hurt and magnanimous and reasonable I was — all these thoughts winding through me as savorless as spit.

Because you didn't call, I wished I had never seen porno movies, never seen that close-up view up hairy thighs to tight balls and contorting anuses as, to bouncy music with grunty, rattling bass, the engorged prick endlessly pumps in and out of angry oozy lips — and I got an erection and thought how corpses of hanged men have hard-ons, and it went away.

Because you didn't call, I noticed how when your life falls apart, it really does fall apart, because

[continued on next page]



I felt broken up in little pieces, as if my surface were made up of thousands of tectonic plates separated by fault lines, floating — together by chance, but separate — on a molten core.

Because you didn't call and persisted in not calling, I noticed that time had begun to cohere again, as if the gaps between the microseconds into which I'd slipped were closing up again, nothing changed, but the stench of foreverness dispersing.

Because you didn't call, I noticed that I felt only lousy, but tried not to make much of it, for fear time would open up again like an accordion that won't stop or a closed Oriental fan whose abstract design opens out into a tormented demon-face.

Because you didn't call, I realized I needed to pee and did so and that I was almost hungry, but didn't risk eating yet, knowing an angry god had spared me and should be propitiated.

Because you didn't call me and didn't and didn't and didn't, at last, by the time you called, I was able to listen to you and talk with only an occasional spasm of tears, and was even able to tell, when you told me what I wanted to hear (a reasonable excuse), that you were lying and that it was all over, that it would be bad for months, but never as bad as what was now over, and I said, yes, we'll talk when I see you tomorrow (which was by then today), and I put down the phone, which had done what it could, and picked up my notebook and pen.



There is no place one can go where God is not. But Hell is not a place; one cannot go there. To reach Hell, one must already be there. In fact, one must have been there forever. Eternity, after all, has no beginning. But to be in Hell, where God is not (i.e., nowhere), one must be nowhere. And that is Hell. When you meet people who are not there, they are elsewhere. If, wherever they go, they are elsewhere, then they are nowhere, that is, in Hell, unable to be anywhere lest God find them, or, worse, BE them, for then there would forever be and have been no place to go where they were not.

My memories were painful, so I had them removed. You really meant a lot to me before my mentalotomy.



I'm Over Here — in Next Week

A gaunt, hard-eyed face, hand shading eyes, squints over the rim across the basin, spots a tiny swirl of dust. They're coming. "How long?" "They'll be here in three days." Nothing to do but slouch, smoking, and watch what is three days away.

If this were a movie, it would be death approaching (tall, gaunt, on a coal-black horse, implacable) or the cavalry to save the day or the stage to be held up. What's odd is, these men

HAVE three days the way one HAS a knife or a girl. You may know something will happen in three days: That future is vaguely there, a hope or fear. But these guys can SEE it. It's right out there, happening before their eyes.

That's what space is about, that feeling, when first you see the Great Plains or lean out over Grand Canyon, urgently reminding your body that it cannot fly and yourself that this certainty of flight is not the body's — that feeling of hugeness (or tininess): We say we HAVE all this space,

but it's time we're looking at, future (even death, way down there) and past — what is leaving and can be seen to do so long after it would be only memory to city or forest folk.

Imagine, you say farewell; Your lover rides off; and each morning you climb the hill to see how far the tiny form has gone until the world's blue roundness veils the equation of time and space, turning past and future into hazy pictures framed on walls or sketched in dreams.

And even where no dust ascends, just knowing that blue mountain right over there (you could stretch out your arm and touch it) is three-days ride is...it's like touching next week. And if, looking at a star, you can comprehend the light years, you are looking long past your body's death or birth. What, then, must you be?

You Must Remember This

I'm a fortune teller. I will tell you ALL: I foresee your body coming to a full stop, but for you it will be only a semi-colon or ellipses or a brief, punctuationless descent into gibberish or, if you are very alert, a colon:

There will be many temptations to forget, and details will escape you, but you will remember. (If not, come back to me and get your money back.) You will remember.

After your next birth, though it will be more painful and oblivion-filled than death, still, you will remember. And when you can speak and are told your memories are cute — WHAT an imagination! or THAT will teach you not to tell stupid lies, not to talk nonsense, not to be chattering all the time — even then you will (in secret) cherish a few memories that you know are memories.

And if, then, you chance upon this poem, whether or not you remember it, it will be as true a fortune for you then as now.

Dark and Deep

Trees are object lessons in perspective, so many planes — and not by accident: Leaves dispose themselves in patterns that let light touch as many as possible. Therefore, we speak of the woods as “deep”, for we see so INTO them, the eye slipping past clumps of leaves into holes within holes, stumbling, at last, into blue or black.

Stars, like leaves, are at varied depths of sky — but randomly varied? Or patterned to some principle — to reveal the most points of light or the largest quantity of night?

Trees are hardly random, each species (like a gambler) having its own handicapping system, its own trick for food distribution to hungry leaves. We, too, in our elbowing rampage sunword, achieve maximum depth when we learn to share the light.



Spring woods
jittery with dead leaves
and live squirrels.

Home

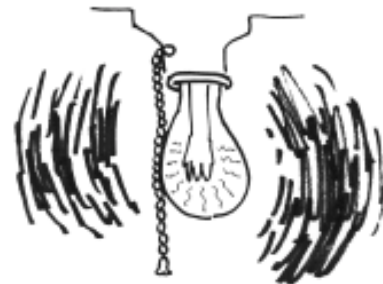
I exposed an old lie last night,
one I'd long cherished, about growing up
alienated, the madness
of mother, grimness of father,
being misunderstood, the usual,
no loss, no regrets, good riddance.

What happened was (maybe because
recently I've met some people
who have no home), I opened
our double-garage door (which
automatically turns on a garage
light) and wheeled our blue-plastic
garbage bin to the curb for pickup,

and, turning to the dark house
on a dark street, garage a cave
of warm light, was back there
for a moment, coming in out of night

to our old house in St. Paul fifty years ago,
my heart stretched out like taffy
toward yellow warmth of kitchen light
or garage light picking out the bright red paint
of my wagon; the orange pleasure, when going down
the dank basement, of seeing a light on
at Dad's workbench; even, later,
wiping my feet in the front hall after midnight
and seeing worn faces and a plume
of Mom's cigarette smoke (Camels) glowing
in the TV's blue light —

Lights, simple lights, but these lights,
like those we call intelligence in eyes,
are where stars have faces.



We were hard on each other and stupid enough,
but suddenly, seeing how much life has been
soaked up by a garage light bulb, I am amazed
at how tiny our wrongnesses were
beside the rightnesses,
at how little has been lost
in all these years
to darkness.

From the Bottom of Pandora's Box

I hope that one day I'll be able to explain
all the things I've done to those I've done them to
(even the dog, even the moths I crushed last night
as they whiffled from our cupboard to become
smudges on my fingers) so that they'll understand
and it will be OK with them and even with me.

I hope that the good guys win and that there
are good guys and that I'm one of them and that
even the bad guys turn out, secretly, to be
good guys.

I hope that the half-blind puppies
staggering in the pet-store window find
good homes and never die. I hope all the good homes
find a good world. I hope I can get all the toys
into my tent in the living room so that none
of them feel left out.

I hope the world becomes the world my hopes
come from.

—————
"Perhaps I will never again love . . ." But that's
the definition of never.



When I say I'll love you "forever,"
I'm not kidding. One day the sun will burn out,
and busy planets will need our warmth
to revolve around.

A Pleasant Stroll

To walk down a street and call it a pleasant walk,
I must have a body that is held together
by the grimace of my not knowing
miles of molten earth beneath my feet
or deserts of torrid and frigid vacuum
in all directions beyond the atmosphere
or starving North Korean kids or African massacres
a few thousand miles away —
or behind a curtained window I pass,
a young woman, despite or because of medication,
gone mad and taking from my passing shadow
an omen of God or Death or some unnamed marvel
looming. Or even the intricate insects
my blunt shoes disturb or crush or give something
to brag about having barely escaped.

All this unknowing is contained in a pleasant stroll,
or so I've been persuaded,
and yet, if I could release my ancient blinders,
unhinge my skull and the big blue outer skull
of sky to go for a romp, my joy, once free,
might expand faster than knowledge of entrapment,
swallow up a world of wrong, penetrate sunsets —
even in Korea — with golden crystalline flitter;
My joy might do even the ants,
who will haul bits of leaf by the dew-light I kindle,
more good than what damage my feet can do.

Lady behind the window, open your curtains;
I am no omen. I am like you — the sealed container
of anything worth omeneing.



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