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Human Nature is Unnatural

We are Cruel & Ill-tempered

What, are You Some Kind of Chicken?

Do you not think it odd to be
Sitting a-sowl, curmudgeonly,
When all around you dance and fun
And celebrating children run,
When boards piled high all groan with feasts,
And good cheer keeps the birds and beasts,
Harmonious, in a smiling frame—
Do you wish thus to stake your fame
On being sole amongst this glee,
The one who scowls, curmudgeonly?

Smile and be

What looks like a smile
From this distance might
Be the bared fangs
Of monstrous threat
Or then again might be
The hateful grin
Of rigid death
So much to read
Out of a single smile
But all I need to know
Is, do I keep on
Going toward it

Thanks but

No Thanks

If you really know a Good Thing
when you
see it,
(it seems to me) you ought to have
a better idea of
how to
be it.

It's not that I'm not struck by
the scintillation and dazzle of your
super-fantastic-ness
in person,
it's just
that I can't imagine it's possible
for anyone who is just like you
to worsen.
What I mean is that for someone
who truly seems to
think he
is God's Gift to Everybody and
stupendous and miraculous, you sure
are
stinky.

So Deeply Shallow

We all are stare as those rosy lips
Announce the daily news
With perfect blandness painted on
The direst of views
We tell ourselves this artifice
of unaffected calm
Is to protect the sensitive
With palliative balm
But really we are moved to this
Affect-less lack of heft
Because we know no other way:
We have no feelings left.

More Fun to Hate than Mediate

How we do love to boil our blood
And wrestle into controversy
Things that once were small and slight,
Warranting more, sure, our mercy
Than our spite or fear or ire,
But our desire to scream and swoon
Out-reaches wisdom to require
Tempests in every old teaspoon

Rough around the Edges

In the hearts of faithful men,
Sacred or not in path, a yen
For self-fulfillment will arise,

And if successful, choose a guise
Pretending prophethood and care,
Made up with clothes and wavy hair
And social graces and faint wealth,
To steal the souls of all by stealth;
Little is so rank and smelly
As to be a Machiavelli
Covered with the smooth veneer
Of love, charisma—to appear
Compassionate and selfless when
Inveigling your fellow men
Under a banner of religion—
Never was the night so Stygian
As when worlds were overthrown
Not for God's sake but for men's own,
And all while silkily insisting
Disagreement or resisting
Constitute cruelty and treason
Against goodness, faith and reason—
All while perpetrators ate
The fruits of conquest, greed and hate.

So Crotchety behind Her Crocheting

Does this seem troubling to you? All grans aren't tiresome, it's true,
But this old lady nurses ire as if she kept eternal fire
Cooking for gleeful roasting of all who would dare to fall in love,
To be successful, find delight in anything, morning to night,
That is not hers, and hers alone; she glowers as if from the throne
Of Empire, threatening with doom all who would dare challenge the gloom
With which she paints her own worldview; I find her hideous, don't you?
The only worse soul, I should think, would be my own, if I would sink
To wishing others ill because they weren't as awful as I was.

Background Check Pending

Every particle of me
(At least those parts the world can see)
Works smoothly to create the masks
Compliant with my daily tasks
So no one guesses that down deep
My inner monster's just asleep.

**We are Demanding & Greedy
Everybody Wants a Piece of Me**

If you think I'm paranoid
And worry needlessly,
Just have a look around the room
And you will quickly see
That all my family and
So-called friends are just a front
For grasping at what I have got
And am, the stuff they want—
Or think they want, or think I have,
If truth be told complete—
But whether I'm, or I've, the stuff,
I'm just their piece of meat.
I'd disabuse them of these fond
Embellishment of wish,
Stomping each one like some great bug
To hear it crunch and squish,
But that I like to keep them close
For comfort and because
I want their resources myself,
So keep them near my claws.

Quickly, Dear, the President's Wife

Quickly, Dear, the President's wife
Is coming down the road
To borrow some eggs or a butter knife;
Quick, get the garden hoed!

Hurry, Honey, here she comes!
The garage is a terrible mess.
I'd trim your mustache but I'm all thumbs;
Should I wear my purple dress?

Rush, my Sweet, and wax the car;
Paint the neighbors' house:
It'll make our street seem up to par,
Not to mention my Handy Spouse.

Hasten, Darling, bake up a pie
And build some furniture new;
If it's not all perfect, I'll simply die—
And guess what'll happen to you.

Move it, Beloved, get on your mark!
She's nearing the edge of the lawn.

Thank goodness it's mowed like Lincoln Park—
What's that? Walked past??

She's gone???

Vulpine

The vixen, when she deigns to leave her den,
May have designs on other vixens' men,
For, little as I know the ways of foxes,
I know they don't like being kept in boxes
But rather like the freedom just to roam
To any den, if it should look like home,
And any male they'd like to have as mate—
Beware the vixen's wiles, ere it's too late!

How Moby-Dick Sank the Reader Ship

Attach a sense of duty to
a thing I used to like to do
and in a flash, a dash, a blink
I like it less than I used to think

The Gifts of True Love

In lieu of parties, holidays
And feasts and fests, vacation days
And celebrations—rather, heck,
Than all together—send a cheque!
A party lasts mere days or hours
And Wilts like last September's flowers—
Festive events and gifts all fade—
No joy compares to getting paid!
So if you want to be recalled
And loved as one who has enthralled,
Forget the cakes, balloons and flash—
Just send me some heartwarming cash!

We are Delusional

All for One or None for All

I think there is no better place
Than school for the whole human race
To see just how extremely dumb
Supposed thinking folk become
Who study, yet fail to embrace
The notion that we are, from birth,

Just citizens of one whole earth,
Not central, magical or best,
Or totally unlike the rest,
Except perhaps as cause for mirth.

Stupenderiffic

My friends, now let us meditate
Upon how fine I am,
A paragon, supernal queen,
Pooh-Bah of perfect glam,
The apex of all aptitudes,
Dazzlingly grand and keen—
Too bad that you who are not Me
Might not know what I mean.

Extra Ordinary

Although I arrived in my mile-long limousine
amid a storm of camera flash lightning and wailing
pleas, 'Look here! Over here!', and with
my customary flutter all around, confetti-like, of fans
awash in sycophantic swirls of yearning whirlwind flight,
you needn't be intimidated by my entourage and air
of mystical perfection, for I am quite ordinary too
and put on my pants one three-thousand-dollar leg
at a time, just the same way that you do

My Superpowers

Having singlehandedly
subdued the raving hordes
and resolved the last
great puzzle of science and
gone into the halls of
international power
and brought about
world peace, I will now
awaken and get
out of bed.

Five Minutes

I could crank out, in my super-duper
cram-course way, five major excellent
works of world-class art worthy of
posterity and museum collection and
the haughtiest connoisseurs—if I really

wanted to—it's just a spiritual thing:
I need to pretend I'm imperfect so that
the world can never penetrate my
perfectly so-un-goddess-like disguise.

Appearances can be Deceptive

Fourteen piles of laundry and a stack of dirty dishes,
A grimy house, a hungry spouse, a car that smells of fishes,
A quarter-acre garden that is overrun with weeds,
And underneath the gums, my teeth are full of poppyseeds—
It looks to other people like disorder is my norm,
But me, I'm neat as heck; it's just my *life* that won't conform.

Self-Coronation

Our history is twisted: tangled lines of man and myth,
Lines too blurred by our belief that we have powers, potent with
Self-made magic; juxtaposed to this, we have a sneaking sense
The *perhaps* there's Something greater. Could there be One so immense?
That idea, if we are honest, sets a chill on every skin,
Makes each want to change the balance, name *himself* the paladin,
Master, royalty, creator of all good in this our sphere,
So we get to worship our fine selves with naught of shame or fear—
Every culture, every era, each community has shown
That we wish inside, mere humans, that what's fancied and what's known
Were no grander than our smallness, so we've always tried to make
Ours the godly race of rulers, even if it's clearly fake—
Pretty masks and great stone statues, crown and crypt, elixir, spell;
We'll try anything we think can make us kings of heaven, hell,
Earth, or dream, but here's the problem: it looks swell, but just a touch
Too good—turns out we're grand, but not for long, and not so much.

We are Fearful & Hate what we don't understand

Hypersensitive

How thin is my skin!
What's outside can get in
With the slightest of touches,
The point of a pin!
What slippery slope
Is this one? Oh, I hope
To get tougher, not just
To the end of my rope!
I'd seek for help shared,
To repair my impaired

Nerve and fearfulness, but
That's just it: I'm too scared!

Cut

Skin, though as taut as rawhide, and as strong,
Still splits under a jagged, cruel knife,
Opens its jaws to scream a gout of life
As blood that would atone and end the wrong—
But wounds, no matter what the cause or source,
Cannot withhold their sorrows or their rage;
Injustice must be shouted off the stage,
So bleed they without pity or remorse—
Break, then, both skin and soul, and sear the heart
Of any who is cognizant of pain;
Who cries for justice and can't sleep again
'Til order is restored as at the start—
What's done cannot be undone should a scar
Reveal the fragile creatures that we are.

Cinderella Opts Out

From your assessment of my deportment,
I must ask what the statement "of a sort" meant—
Oh, was I, I wonder, a shade improper,
Not brass perhaps, but a hint of copper?
Did I stand out from the regal crowd
By being a decibel too loud?
When I met the Queen, did I rudely greet her
With a curtsy too small by a millimeter?
Did I jostle the King, or step on his toes,
Or remark on the magnitude of his nose?
Have I shocked the royal entourage
With an unplanned glimpse of décolletage?
Say, what have I done in these latter days
To occasion such backward, lukewarm praise?
Do tell me where this prejudice starts
That substitutes etiquette for hearts!
I'll not be one of the prince's bijoux
Knowing I can't have the wit to please you—
I'm off for home, where they make no sport
If my manners are only "of a sort".

Variables

What if I should wait in line
For forty days to see the queen

And when I get up to the throne
She's tired of everyone she's seen?
Would I drag home, dispirited
And, disappointed, take my tea?
Or would she recognize my worth
Unique, and have her tea with me?

My Distinction

If I should need some camouflage, should want to truly blend,
I'd better watch my persiflage and learn not to offend
By wearing last week's trendy style, my hair too short or long,
Or failing, yet, to reconcile which Party's Right (or wrong)
To run the government; which church is favored most by God,
How not to leave you in the lurch when I have been a clod,
Appalling with my social gaffes, faux pas and frightful fouls;
I may accept I'm built for laughs, but using the wrong towels
Or forks or traffic lanes, *That Word* in company unfit—
I hope I don't seem too absurd as-is, but that's just it:
My imperfections, my unique design as Me, are such
As might make me appear a freak if I am Me too much.
But, truth be told, while I may work to fit in with the rest,
I hope you won't think me a jerk for liking myself best!
I will blend in, keep pace, behave, up to a point, to please,
But lest you think me fashion's slave, I think it a dis-ease
To seek conformity and bow to other people's rules
When I'm quite nifty anyhow, and *others* may be fools.

Respite

Among the herds and hordes that clamor for attention undeserved,
Some few remain that will not yammer but sit back, demure, reserved—
Odd, in the cacophony of wild, attention-grabbing rush,
That what finally wins from me my focused notice is mere hush—
The effect of surfeit, excess, ultimately in the riot
Of the maelstrom, is what checks us in our racing: simple quiet—
So I seek the silent moment, empty spaces, basic form
Of absent noise and crush and foment, then go back to face the storm.

Room for Everyone

My friends, you are welcome to sit in my house,
admiring my other friends, family, spouse,
each one of us charming, delightful and sweet
as any convention of people you'll meet,
as brainy and clever and heartwarming, too,
as anyone can be, and that includes you;

come in and enjoy the great company,
come in and be welcome, as welcome can be,
but please keep in mind, while you lounge in this spot:
compatible, yes, but the same we are not!

Restoration Drama

Give me dreams, but let me sleep,
In peaceful rest to lie—
Haul off the tossing, counting sheep,
The nightmares passing by—
Yes, make the most of forty winks,
A hundred, if I may;
Remove insomnia and keep
Harsh wakefulness at bay—
No more foul nights as hostage to
Psychosis' nasty knife—
Now, make a truce and make it true,
Right through eternal life!

Paralytic

It seems I have been
kissed by
a poison-dart frog
I'm standing here
stuck in space
and time watching
the world pass
at dizzying speeds
birth and death and
night and day
screaming by,
streaming by
over and through
my motionless shell
all because
I am afraid
to do what I want to do
and what I know I should do
and I just stand fast
amid the zooming
molecules and think
myself a ghost because
I am so damned busy
hanging on to my fear

Scaredy Coot

My fears are principally these:
Of sharks, the dark; of killer bees;
Of speeding cars and drunken louts
That race them through the roundabouts;
Bloodsucking leeches; of the kind
Of beasts that populate my mind
In doctors' offices; of tests
That only earn me second-bests;
And most of all, I fall in tears
Lest someone should unmask my fears!

I Prey You

See how deeply I'm attached
to my delusions:
I'm convinced that danger lurks
around every corner, that
the neighbor so immeasurably
unlike me is constantly rehearsing
my doom, that I am small
and defenseless and helpless and
made for suffering;
All the while, another part
of my busy little brain is cherishing
my superiority in every way over my neighbor (so pitifully
unlike me) and loves the thought that I was specifically designed
to amaze the universe with the immensity of all my glittering gifts.
The only thing I can say in my defense is that
I'm fairly certain that my neighbor, quite notably in antithesis
to these my heartfelt hopes and fears, feels pretty much
the very same as I.

Hasty Retreat

You'll pardon me, I hope, as I grow pensive
And contemplate what's made me apprehensive,
And I request you not on this intrude
Despite your sense that my withdrawal's rude,
For while I may grow distant, it is true,
I've realized that what I fear...
Is you.

We are Foolish & Power-hungry

Substrate

Jim works for the Ministry
Judy is a Dean
Janet is an Officer
If you know what I mean
Pat is a director
And Rose Administrates
And I am just the peon-type
That everyone berates
But all of them remember that
They wouldn't have a prayer
Of being upper strata if
There were no bottom layer.

Power to the Precedent

Contradicting every rule
Is, sure, the hallmark of a fool
—Except in times and places where
The rules are stupid and unfair—
The problem, clearly: to define
Whose rules are foolish
—yours—or mine.

Canned Applause

Lavish appointments
lathery soap
and chrome all shining
like rays of hope
make a celestial
shrine of glory
in the executive
lavatory.

While I'm Rabbiting Around

Out in the widest open spaces, and the wildest places, too,
I have the tendency to racing 'round as rabbits tend to do;
I get a wild hair and I tear off just as often as I can,
Run all harum-scarum into Nowhere—yes, like any man,
Woman or child who senses freedom, hopping haplessly amok
With no goal or real direction, until suddenly I'm struck
With the knowledge I'm abandoned, lost, no compass-point in view,
Leaping like a rabid rabbit, with no hope, so far askew
From a purpose, from potential friends and comforts, joys and dreams
That I realize my running's not the freedom that it seems,

That the beckoning horizon's better when it holds a prize
I can dash toward, ears pricked upward, light a-dazzle in my eyes
And the scent of grand achievements drawing me to hare ahead;
All of this makes great the dashing and the derring-do, instead
Of tangential, random rambles, jumping pointlessly around,
And I'm glad to race and rabbit onward now, to higher ground

I Do Mean Well

Although I swear upon my grave
No more the goat, to misbehave
Or muck about, I cannot swear,
Despite sincere intent, that there
Will be no slip-ups, no mistakes,
No pratfalls, blunders, bellyaches
Or other foolishness, because
I'm still the clown I always was.

We are Opinionated & Self-righteous

The Royal We

We wish the world would so improve as to fit with us in our groove,
But while we grandly sit and wait, and yammer and pontificate
On all the failings, all the fuss of people being unlike us,
So stupid and so retrograde as to be *differently* made
And to espouse another thought than the superb one that *we've* got—
How troublesome! Noses aloft, we deem them worthy to be scoffed
And cringe in horror that they'd dream of doubting that we are supreme—
All ills, in fact, could be foregone if others could be counted on
To shape right up and so improve as to fit into *our* great groove.

The Principle of the Thing

My principles, held high aloft,
may make me hard rather than soft:
I'd need to bend them constantly
so folk won't be afraid of me.
I find it's so much pleasanter
to be amoral and demur
From such off-putting conscience laws
as would result in fear, guffaws
Or retribution, when instead
I can put off until I'm dead
Behaving like the grand and good
and doing only as I should;
Yes, rather I'll avoid what dulls
me by *not* having principles.

Emptying the Vessel

Under my penitential veil,
Blue-socketed and ashy pale,
I genuflect and toll my faults,
Demurely dance a pious waltz;
I bend and bow and pine and scrape,
Dressed in hair shirts and chains and crape,
And when my guilt's no longer sore,
I'll dash right out and sin some more!

Know Your Audience—and Your Auditorium

When proselytizing,
You may find it surprising
That all are not moved
To be so improved
As you might hope,
Be you the Pope
Or Guru wise,
So proselytize,
Whether thinly or thickly,
With an eye on the door for exiting quickly.

Jester by Vocation

Think of me as a flitting fly;
I watch you with my ogling eye
From dusty corners and dank drains,
Always annoying—it remains
Your maddened wish to swat at me
And make the nasty nuisance flee,
But as you, saddened, quickly learn,
I stick to you at every turn,
For flies don't go away with ease
Though you persist, and if you please,
Our lineage hews to this crime
Of stalking, to the end of time.

We are Self-Absorbed

It IS All About Me, Really

To see the main
objective of the game,
It helps if one can
keep the goal in frame

And focus on it clearly,
deeply, truly,
But not to lose all
other sights unduly,
So if you'd like to
keep ambition near,
I recommend you stare
at me, my dear.

My Hero, My Self

The guide to my path,
The lamp to my feet,
My counselor, guru,
Informer, my sweet
Intelligent tutor,
My rescue, my hope—
Too bad you are Me,
You poor pitiful dope.

Seam Ripping

Little Miss Bride of Frankenstein
I hate to brag, or is that, whine?
But let's just face it, this here scar
Is uglier and is by far
More showy and impressive than
The accident where it began

Self-Portrait in Tessellation

I never see myself but in the smallest part,
all others quite obscured by my beliefs,
incessant shadows of my little griefs
and the convictions of this moment's heart—
in tiny pieces shaped by this day's faith,
see this week's angle; my fragmented soul
seen but in shards, not as a whole:
instead of spirit, as an empty wraith—
I hope that I will someday finally see
this whole chaotic multitude in view,
convened, a coalescent scene anew,
those fine mosaic atoms that are Me

Drone

I'm not a soldier or a bee, but when I'm passing through
You might mistakenly think me a drone, for what I do,

More than a bagpipe ever did, is blow and bloviate
And buzz so much—I do not kid—you'll wish the kinder fate
Of early death, deafness at least, enveloping with fog
Your tender soul, until it's ceased—my tedious monologue.

Just My Opinion

While I pontificate and muse
On any topic I should choose,
You can't be blamed for heading east
When I head west or, in the least,
For covering your weary ears—
Like any sentient who hears
Such foolishness as what I spout—
But don't talk, too; I'll just tune out.

High Hubris among the Lowbrow

I, like the mighty John Fall-staff, may fall, the butt of others' laugh,
If I heed not the warning signs, and slip in traps, believe the lines
Yarned by slick liars, kind and not, that tie me in knots I've dumbly wrought
Myself; if I would puff and preen, I'll skid and splat upon the green
In front of wiser fools in stocks, caught up in the snares of my own locks.
Like old Sir John, I'll meet my doom
If I think me the smartest in the room.

Narcissical

When man's-man men find womankind
especially spectacular,
it often seems their taste's opined
as front-ular or back-ular,
and chicks who eye them back with leers
and rudeness too vernacular,
also choose looks, though dudes' hearts bite
as badly as though Dracula-r.
How can they stand their standards thus
and stoop to stupid gravity
that pulls them down to lower lows
of foolishness, depravity
and such devotion to slick looks
that any cranial cavity's
acceptable, as long as 'hot'
and needs no jot of suavity?
Must we accept only the slinky,
cute, or babe-a-licious?
Such flimsy taste is quite a waste,

and creepingly pernicious
when all the future of mankind
becomes so superstitious
as to attach to looks and limbs
values so shallow? Vicious!

Self-Analysis

In this light, I don't look bad,
But I keep gazing inward—
An awkward habit I've long had
That tends to leave me injured—
Obsessive self-critiquing leads
To sore dissatisfaction;
Much better to close up what bleeds
And take the kinder action
Of looking past my wounds and flaws,
Toward sweeter and more graceful
Views of both world and self, because—
Head down—I'll get a face-full
Of all the dirt surrounding me,
A treatment not behooving
A betterment the world can see—
Wiser to start improving.

Beauty is in the Mirror of the Beholder

Brenda, trendy modernist, zips through her ultra-racy home
Her super-powered vacuum on a wave of pearly foam;
Her sexy subatomic voice, her skirt of crisp chiffon,
Her to-the-minute kitchen wares, her wildly brilliant spawn,
Her microscopic facial pores, her savvy in her biz,
Convince nobody that she's great, but make *her* think she is.

Show of Proper Respect

The Mistress in her jewelry and finery and furs
Thinks everyone should bow and kiss the ground—that's also hers—
And genuflect before her grand tiara and her mace,
So that is what we tend to do—at least do to her face.

Uncertainty of Heart

Amid most fond expressions of affection, endless love,
Devotion and determination to be stewards of
These sentiments and feelings, is that little nagging voice
That tells us it would not be so if we had any choice,
Because we are perfidious by nature, roaming, weak,

And fearful of commitment to degrees we cannot speak,
And paranoid, on top of it, that others are the same,
And so we speak our pretty vows and play our little game,
Attempting to convince ourselves as much as other folk
That our desires and adoration aren't some flimsy joke—
The shocking Surprise Ending to this tale is that at death,
Some of us finally realize upon our final breath
That all of it was true, and that our hearts were so inclined;
Too bad we take so long, we fools, to see that we have lived as blind.

Heartless

Hey, don't go blaming me
For being such a heartless beast,
But pity, rather than revile,
Me, at the very least;
My tragic history was really
Loving at the start,
Until my cruel darling went
And stole my aching heart—
I will admit it might require
That it be understood
That was the only part of me
That harbored any good—
Let me remind you, though,
It should excuse my nasty state,
And while you might
Have liked me then,
By now, it's far too late!
The only cure that will suffice
To make me sweet again
Would be to fill me up with love.
Or loot. Say, nine or ten
Kazillion dollars, plus a car,
A diamond watch, a yacht,
And I can promise I'll become
The sweetest friend you've got!

Fly-by Knight

'Come fly with me,' he says, and then
he wanders off; how fickle men
can be when vying to impress—
they are just weak and vain, I guess—
it's just that I would rather not
have had the offer, gotten hot

under the hood, raring to go,
for such an inattentive beau.
I know I'm not the only bird
around—the very thought's absurd—
so now I think I'll shift my gears
for solo flight, as it appears
I'll have more luck, and much more fun,
if I don't wait on anyone
so self-absorbed, so bottom-shelf:
I'll learn from him and love *myself*.

Style will Always Win the Day over Substance

One need not be poetical
In comments parenthetical
And not intended
For the world to hear,

Except if one's heretical,
For though it seems pathetic,
All the universe will whisper
With its malice in one's ear

That, though it were rhetorical,
If seen in light historical,
The commentary
Likely will be judged

On content metaphorical
In ways phantasmagorical
No matter if the facts were all
In order or were fudged!

I Went to a Show

I went to a show
and the theatre was filled up to the rafters

This must be quite a show, I said
to myself,
quite a show

There were people of every
stripe, every age, color, size, and shape
elbow to elbow

completely immersed
seized with the moment
seized with the performance

The screen was immense
stretching from wall to wall
floor to sky
and we all
parked in the dark
all
together in the dark with flickering
starlight seeming to light
each upturned face in momentary
tics and sparks
catching
as though in freeze frames or stop-motion
images a strange
unearthly parody
of us

We were all
lit by the screen

I looked

I went to the show
and crawled
over knees and necks and knuckles from one
aisle to another to find
a spot where I could wedge
my person into some little niche
between the full
rows and rows of
otherness

The show
evaded me at first
as I
was so caught up in my clambering
so taken
with the strange alluring
quiet in the room
I was busy
creeping along in the breathless

silence taking care
not to stumble upon
the people of
every stripe, every age, color, size, and
shape who were
elbow to elbow and
completely immersed
in the show
so rapt
so taken
so many there and yet
each one so far away

This must be quite a show, I thought
again to myself
quite a show

I looked

At last at the screen to see
the enormous show
mesmerizing on
the floor to ceiling wall to wall
flickering starlight screen
to see
what
the amazing
fabulous
magical movie show could
possibly be

The screen showed us
showed only us
the audience
us
looking back
at flickering us

Mesmerized

Oh it was to be sure
was quite
was quite a show

I am
so glad
I went to the show though what it was
I am not sure
I'll ever really know

It's All an Act, but Heartfelt

Am I manipulative? You bet!
As sneaky as any old snake could get.
And if you assume I am nice just-because.
You'll quickly be snapped in my slavering jaws;
I'll eat you alive with the primmest impunity
The moment I notice the least opportunity.
But don't be put off, disillusioned, dismayed;
I'm devious, yes, but I am not afraid
To be fluffy and innocent, sweet, kind and cuddly,
If that is what melts you and makes you all puddly;
Yes, I can be kindly and full of good cheer
Because, for a phony, I'm mighty sincere.

We are Violent

Wounding Wonders

One needn't be a Visigoth or Hun
or carrying machete, poison, gun,
or be eight Samurai with flashing swords,
to do the deeds of such marauding hordes—
Supposed lovers, intimates and friends
have other weapons to achieve such ends,
devising and divining fresh new schemes
for making misery on endless themes—
Have irritating nettles, needles, knives
plus-perfect for the ruining of lives—
Imagine if invention, by intent
so much the sweeter, how life would be spent!

Too Bad for the Bug

The insect under scrutiny
In Suzy's science class
Is shiny-backed and has six legs,
Antennae thin as grass,
And big bug eyes that stare her down
And make her feel quite small,
So when she chloroforms the bug

She won't feel sad at all.

The Emperor's Newest Costume

An Empire never gave good reason why
It ought to rule instead of native sons
And daughters, who, if they survive the guns
And carpet-bombing, still might long to die,
For terrible and bitter is the rule
Of anyone who dares to steal the throne
Of any land or country not his own,
Which often trades a despot for a fool,
Or worse, fool for a despot, and the land
And all its people suffer at the change,
No better, oft enough, and ever strange,
Without the hope and strength to countermand
The awful miseries imposed by those
Who choose to rule as wolves in ovine clothes.

We are Fine Creatures in Spite of Ourselves

Flower Arranging

A delicate operation
An eyelash's flick to impart
The slightest of dainty adjustments
Makes her hesitate even to start
But knowing we all must start somewhere
Or freeze in immovable awe
She jumped into flower arranging
With her hammer and pliers and saw
It happily all came together
Designed to a major extent
By letting things happen by nature
And curlicued stems being bent
Not so much by the pliers and hammer
As by their photosensitive urge
And her letting them twist in the sunlight
While watching their patterns emerge
Sometimes she obsesses on doing
Things vigorously and with skill
But then is reminded that living
Is shaped more by love than by will

Closed/Open

Windows and doors

Are metaphors—
But also real
Gateways.
So: are Yours?
How open to change?
How closed in fear?
Do you throw them wide
When a friend
Comes near?
You can bar the way
And lock out
All storms—
But have you
Barred Chance in all
Its forms?
Are your windows sealed
To stop the rain
So tightly that
No light can gain
Entry anymore?
Is your door of steel
Holding off
New joys
For fear you'd *feel*?
Throw open the sash!
Swing wide the door!
Adventure is what
This life is for.

Work Forever in Progress

Hundreds of lines later,
I have nothing to show
except if you count
a sense of accomplishment in having
been faithful to a commitment, in having
persisted steadily in the face of the
unseen and unknown, in being
somewhat soothed by the simple
process of having given a little
heart and soul to something
simply because I could.
However I came to exist,
I think I might be a little bit
the same kind of puzzle myself,

imperfect and utterly incomplete,
but nicely so, for all of that—
nicely, because,
after all, I am working my way
toward being something at last,
and whether I have
an encompassing purpose or not,
I have at least
begun to Be . . .

How did We Get Here?

In our dreams, we were hip-deep in cotton picked by willing, happy, high-paid underlings and we smiled with satisfied benevolence

We were standing in the shade of magnolias and wearing our widest-brimmed Sunday hats and crisp seersucker and poplin even on Tuesday

We nibbled tiny toast points dabbed with pimiento cheese while a string quartet hummed like honeybees up at the portico

We fanned ourselves to keep cool as the sun sank, listening to mourning-doves serenade the arrival of the winking fireflies

We drank our bourbon out of snifters, neat, and never got more than a little bit hazy, what with having well padded ourselves with roast pheasant over a very long suppertime

We spoke in soft, lilting tones and said kind words to our mothers and children just because that's how it was done

In our hearts, we were the pathfinders, the athletes who carved a road of freedom and justice across the plains to make new territories ring with accomplishment

We stood tall in the evergreens and set down mighty roots of dedication in lines running from the lakes to the mountaintops

We shipped on the seas and shouted joy with the birds of the air, and of an evening we were wont to watch the stars for signs of adventure yet ahead

We called ourselves hardy stock for braving the cold and wrapped our red-cheeked children in woolen blankets after a day spent in the bracing light of education

We wrestled with bears for the salmon that we ate, but then sat down to dine on it with all the gentility of our many foreign forefathers

We called our politics piety and our egalitarian philosophies a revelation even if everyone who didn't qualify might not agree

And here we are today, being All-American but half-savage...

We live in the same states of grace but relish our superiority with self-congratulatory rudeness that would shame our imagined selves

We sneer at gentility as outmoded and write polemical pieces about each other with no sense of irony left in the spaces between the hard-edged words

We forget the flaws that taught us our cultured best's fragility and instead of

learning from the mistakes, we widen them as far as our waistbands and pockets can stretch

We turn a critical eye on the wounded world and manage to keep it keen despite the moral blind-spot toward our contributory, if not our sometimes causal, role

We are a nation of would-be saints dressed in brutes' clothing...but perhaps in that, we may not be entirely alone...

If there is hope, it's that we've gotten here at all, for surely those in our hearts and dreams must have been real somewhere to seem so tangible in imagination

We might still embrace the justice and benevolence we thought we had, if we are willing to strip away delusions of grandeur and the lust for power

We could take a moment, while nibbling our toast points and standing conqueror on our latest promontories of success, to offer a meal to the hungry and a foothold to the poor

We ought to care less about self-image, and more about wholeness and devotion to the betterment of those people and privileges we say we love so well

We are capable, if we watch the exemplars before and around us whose courage and kindness walk arm in arm instead of standing on opposing distant shores

We may yet become the greats that we imagine we should be, if only we stop pretending we are so and humbly take to walking toward it on the faint horizon instead...