

Floor-Sweeping Song

as soon as you make yourself a floor, there's need
to sweep it; even if it's just a platform without walls
a slow, swirling in, solo sweep, I never minded that

first the moist, sappy dust from fresh-sawn wood
but then potatoes, jewelry, flour, socks, whatever falls
as soon as you make yourself a floor, there's need

to let the stuff pile up is never any good
and anyway I always love the feelings it recalls
a slow, swirling in, solo sweep, I never minded that

each time I swept our floor I somehow understood
this place; and soon the floor is where a baby crawls
as soon as you make yourself a floor, there's need

to do a zillion important things, and yet I think I should,
now and then, attend my skinny partner when it calls
a slow, swirling in, solo sweep, I never minded that

So far the floors and walls we built have all withstood
the tests of ice and wind and angst and family brawls
as soon as you make yourself a floor, there's need
a slow, swirling in, solo sweep, I never minded that

The Dandelion Gardener

to see him get on the school bus
or cast a Harry Potter spell
or speed down the driveway on his bike,

you'd never know his role
in a secret team
of our world's essential super heroes: this boy
has an awesome responsibility

Jack does the intricate tracings of ice on morning windows
I never knew the name of that fairy who pays for teeth
that Santa guy is sainted, and stars in many movies
but Eli:
he makes the dandelions bloom

Long before blackflies, he's got to get to work
he's got some technology, but it's hard to explain
some years it's more a star wars thing, others it's sorta wizard-ish
the problem clearly
is my lack of vocabulary — you ask
for proof? Just wait, my friend
til spring!

He's especially proud of the roots, which are deep: YOU
try and pull one out, with just your hands!
But a spring without fields
and fields and fields
and amazing golden fields of endless happy puffs of yellow
is just unthinkable

which is why I want to say
I am so preased and plowed
to be the dad
of the dandelion gardener
(but listen, folks:
you didn't hear it from me)

A Haiku for Nancy Burwell

I hadn't done poems for years
but you asked me for some, and so
I wrote poems, Nancy, and I cried!

Beginner's Mind

He was busy devising
the perfect comfy cage
for a new pet ladybug

Trying to be all Zen,
I kept teaching
that it was happy, as it was
just let things be

But I heard in the stillness
of washing the dishes:
Stop the zencrap.
He's learning, as he is!

funny thing about the blues
they both crave and despise companionship

you wonder if the flood will ever stop

and a man who's drowning wants rescue more than conversation

problem is, though, the flood is inside you
nobody sees it

so a levee has got to be built, there's no way around it

the only question is, will the wall be made
of bricks, with cannons and searchlights

or of stagelights, pages and bits of color?

No, I just want to blast you into confusion, that's all
I want to load you with terrifying meaning, I want you to think
that everything you know is wrong, to walk all one long afternoon
singing one true and true and angry song

no more than that: just get the blues

it's just that so many well-educated people
are so surprised — they say "You mean
that sort of thing goes on?"

I just don't want you to waste any more time than you must,
when the time comes

I don't want you to be caught flat-footed
filling out forms trying to collect
somebody's jive insurance

I tire of perfect poems

in perfect working order
with every trope & strophe
in impeccable logopoeic mesh

much better to have a few
sighs, a stammer, a gasp or two
tripping some light off-the-wall
fantastic notion yer poet is too poor
a mechanic to XXX out

those slick little sly poems
speed by like Lamborghinis

give me a jalopy poem
whose mixture is a little rich

showroom poems with lots of chrome
look fine, but life's a bumpier ride

Here at the Parts Store

We stock a full line of replacement parts for your machine.
If we can't match it up,
you don't need it

Sometimes you do get the wacky stuff though

This guy comes in the other day (it's busy,
you got phones ringing, you got people three deep)
I said,

“Can I help you, sir?” And he throws this
thing

down on the counter.

So I look up at the guy (he's well-dressed, and distracted)
and I look at this
thing

on the counter (and I look back up at the guy,
who reminded me of somebody) and back down at that
thing on the counter, searching frantically for some way
to avoid having to ask what the
hell that is

“Whaddaya mean, what is it!?” he thunders, “this
here is a two-thousand four model Strategic Move
and I need ramifications for it — you got em?”

Right. Check listing under R,
head back to the stockroom and find sixteen
thousand shelves piled with the suckers.

“Look Mister, I'm gonna need some information here.
Is that a left-hand or right-hand move?
Inflationary of contractual mechanism?
Direct, or covert? Domestic or Imported?”

“Yeah right,” the guy says, “and what's my cost on that?”

Now everyone has his own little baby deal in the parts business
You got the sky-blue discount sheet for true-blue pals;
You got the pink sheet, rosy deals for real sweet guys;
You got the green sheet for the hard workers who try their best;
And the gray sheet for the do-it-yourselfers —
Or if he's really a dick you give him List. 

Finally the customer growls, “Look, kid
I got a rendezvous with destiny coming up.
You got my ramifications or not?”

What can I do but smile graciously and well him “Well, sir,
those ramifications are available, but they’re special order,
and they’re gonna cost you,
that’s the risk you run with these new strategies.”

He stomped out to go and meet his destiny. But, you know what?
He’ll be back.

Play it Again, Sam

His name isn't Sam, of course

but, this restaurant called *Casablanca*
has only posters of Bogie and Bergman
but has Sam
in the corner
on the pianos
snacking on chicken wings
providing some easy
listening
 it's not a bad job

pay's all right
and if he has a bad night
nobody boos

nobody on the other hand notices
the way he dovetails *As Time Goes By*
into *Brother Can You Spare a Dime*
though it is after all
a natural connection
the fundamental things
apply

sometimes he chats while he plays
sometimes he stops talking and just plays
every now and then
the patrons are startled by a little growl
which is sometimes part of the act
and sometimes not

Taos Pueblo, 1990

at only 300-odd years of age
the catholic church of Taos Pueblo
is a recent addition to the city

but it has real adobe
a half-inch of it chickenwired over concrete

I believe that someone heard the land and made sure
that a piece of thin clay skin was knocked away

for busloads of noble advocates
to see, if they could

there is great blasphemy here

inside the shop a nine-year-old kid
bangs his brand new cottonwood and elkhide drum

outside the shop a fifty year old kid
bangs his brand new cottonwood and elkhide drum

the shopkeeper's drum is deeper, and it hurts.
he plays vacantly, and faintly
as if the last heartbeats of the city move his hand

I don't mind
being a stranger
Homebody folks
always warm up to foreigners

Invite 'em to dinner
and to sleep over on the couch
Treat 'em to all the best stories
and photo albums

I don't mind being a vagabond,
A foreigner to all localities
Sometimes I think I was born that way
As if this planet isn't quite mine

The sturdiest roof
can get blown right off
Uprooting is easier than you think

I don't mind being a sojourner
Yet the world is complete in all directions
and fuel is expensive these days
So I never go anywhere

nothing usually moves
us down to our
bones
but
all
over
town
folks hang these skeletons
 on their houses
 only
 thinking
 to please the powers that be
 enough to join them
 in their so
 called homes
but hoping some
where deep
inside
to be struck
by
lightning

a neat poem

one day when I was (as usual)
weighed down with indecision and sin
and also had this hacking
cough I couldn't get rid of

I visited you at work
at the office of the department of Religion
you were typing the Professors' correspondence
listening to the New Testament
over walkman headphones

you said,
"Jesus is so
neat!"

that day you told me a parable
about that crooked spindly little tree
outside your office window
caught in shadow between buildings
twisting this way and that to find the light

God loves that tree especially, you said

later I realized, that was the moment
when I stopped coughing

I'd sit there for hours and hours
hindering your office work
but you never asked me to go

one day we took a long lunch hour
visited the art gallery
took a walk through azaleas and dogwoods
and we held hands

my bright-eyed avatar

you were a Christian wife and mother
and I a red-blooded college student
and you always insisted that our love
for each other was strictly
the work of the Lord