

Any man with a small moustache wearing a bow tie and a loud vest is an asshole.

-- George Carlin

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The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock

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In Little Rock the people bear
Babes, and comb and part their hair
And watch the want ads, put repair
To roof and latch. While wheat toast burns
A woman waters multiferns.

Time upholds, or overturns,
The many, tight, and small concerns.

In Little Rock the people sing
Sunday hymns like anything,
Through Sunday pomp and polishing.

And after testament and tunes,
Some soften Sunday afternoons
With lemon tea and Lorna Doones.

I forecast
And I believe
Come Christmas Little Rock will cleave
To Christmas tree and trifle, weave,
From laugh and tinsel, texture fast.

In Little Rock is baseball; Barcarolle.
That hotness in July . . . the uniformed figures
raw and implacable
And not intellectual,
Batting the hotness or clawing the suffering dust.
The Open Air Concert, on the special twilight green . . .
When Beethoven is brutal or whispers to lady-like air.
Blanket-sitters are solemn, as Johann troubles to lean
To tell them what to mean. . . .

There is love, too, in Little Rock. Soft women softly
Opening themselves in kindness,
Or, pitying one's blindness,
Awaiting one's pleasure
In Azure
Glory with anguished rose at the root. . . .
To wash away old semi-discomfitures.
They re-teach purple and unsullen blue.
The wispy soils go. And uncertain
Half-havings have they clarified to sures.

In Little Rock they know
Not answering the telephone is a way of rejecting life,
That it is our business to be bothered, is our business
To cherish bores or boredom, be polite
To lies and love and many-faceted fuzziness.

I scratch my head, massage the hate-I-had.
I blink across my prim and pencilled pad.
The saga I was sent for is not down.
Because there is a puzzle in this town.
The biggest News I do not dare
Telegraph to the Editor's chair:
"They are like people everywhere."
The angry Editor would reply
In hundred harryings of Why.

And true, they are hurling spittle, rock,
Garbage and fruit in Little Rock.
And I saw coiling storm a-writhe
On bright madonnas. And a scythe
Of men harassing brownish girls.
(The bows and barrettes in the curls
And braids declined away from joy.)

I saw a bleeding brownish boy. . . .
The lariat lynch-wish I deplored.
The loveliest lynchee was our Lord.

Gwendolyn Brooks

VACHEL LINDSAY
(1879-1931)

THE LEADEN-EYED

Let not young souls be smothered out before
They do quaint deeds and fully flaunt their pride.
It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull,
Its poor are oxlike, limp and leaden-eyed.
Not that they starve, but starve so dreamlessly;
Not that they sow, but that they seldom reap;
Not that they serve, but have no gods to serve;
Not that they die, but that they die like sheep.

WE ARE CUPS, CONSTANTLY AND QUIETLY BEING FILLED. THE TRICK IS, KNOWING
HOW TO TIP OURSELVES OVER AND LET THE BEAUTIFUL STUFF OUT. RAY BRADBURY

ON THE ELEVENTH DAY OF GOOD IDEAS Beauty

Someone said you can only use the word Beauty
Twice in a lifetime of poems.
Keats used up his reserve in one flat
Declaration that we argue still. I wonder if he
Contemplated that dying in the small room
By the Spanish Steps. He knew his fate
As we know ours: decay or ash.
Anything but beauty.

Joan Colby
In Memoriam (1939 - 2020)

Love Sorrow

Love sorrow. She is yours now, and you must
take care of what has been
given. Brush her hair, help her
into her little coat, hold her hand,
especially when crossing a street. For, think,

what if you should lose her? Then you would be
sorrow yourself; her drawn face, her sleeplessness
would be yours. Take care, touch
her forehead that she feel herself not so

utterly alone. And smile, that she does not
altogether forget the world before the lesson.
Have patience in abundance. And do not
ever lie or ever leave her even for a moment

by herself, which is to say, possibly, again,
abandoned. She is strange, mute, difficult,
sometimes unmanageable but, remember, she is a child.
And amazing things can happen. And you may see,

as the two of you go
walking together in the morning light, how
little by little she relaxes; she looks about her;
she begins to grow.

Mary Oliver

California wildfires



Wherever there is
a human being, there is
an opportunity for
a kindness.
- Seneca



"Leaping for the Stars" by Mia Kelly (age 10)

Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth.
Shirley Chisholm

THE ARTIST OF THE BEAUTIFUL

In my paintings the hands of men
are beginning to look like oranges;
placid and menacing like turtles, their skin
knobbed and altogether strange.
And the onion-skinned ones rear their mottled heads
in the green light that deceives
everything but evil. They grow like vegetables, they rise
from the ground to shame the ground.
Like something found under cabbage leaves.
The Body-Snatchers. The Living Dead.
In the homes I paint around
these figures, the walls do not recede
but press up to the foreground
which I painted first. There is nothing behind
these figures but a canvas sail and a wooden frame.
And on their shelves, too close, the bottles nod
accusingly with a wise
self-evident pride. They blame
me for painting nothing
but their transparency. There is more than this
contained inside their emptiness.
Yet for all this, destruction
is so easy. It should be a graver thing
to slice up a peach I have painted.
It should be harder, a slower rite
performed on this yellow globe, touched only with sainted
knives to spread the colors I stared at for hours—
and yet I swallow it and it is gone
like anything else.

Perhaps I should turn away
and weave in a high corner somewhere the interlaced bright
threads of metal, devote myself to thin wrought iron flowers
and brass masks to serve as faces for the unnaturally gay.
Emperors' nightingales, small capering animals
with clockwork bones. Everlasting butterflies.
And perhaps I shall scruple to follow the letter of nature
with unlikely precision in these unnatural materials,
and be finally, utterly able to flee her unsure
spirit beneath which everything generates or dies.

Jendi Reiter

I Attend a Poetry Reading

The fellow reading poetry at us wouldn't stop.
Nothing would dissuade him:
not the stifling heat; the smoky walls
with their illuminated clocks;
our host, who shifted anxiously
from foot to foot.
Polite applause had stiffened
to an icy silence:
no one clapped
or nodded.
No one sighed.
Surely he must understand that we had families
waiting for us, jobs
we had to get to in the morning.
That chair was murdering my back.
The cappuccino
tasted unaccountably of uric acid.
Lurid bullfight posters flickered
in the red fluorescent light—
& suddenly I knew that I had died,
& for those much too windy readings of my own
had been condemned
to sit forever in this damned cafe.
A squadron of enormous flies
buzzed around the cup of piss
I had been drinking from.
Up at the mike, our poet of the evening
grinned,
& flicked his tail,
& kept on reading.

Steve Kowit
from *The Dumbbell Nebula*

EMILY DICKINSON NEW FEET WITHIN MY GARDEN GO

New feet within my garden go—
New fingers stir the sod.
A troubadour upon the elm
Betrays the solitude.

New children play upon the green—
New weary sleep below.
And still the penstive spring returns,
And still the punctual snow.

You're Gettin' There

After five summers of messenger days
and countless 4 a. m. pots of joe over
hastily written studies of single lines;
after wandering drunk and American through
Bolivian, Portuguese, Indian shanty towns, dust
sopping collagens, after millions of meetings
between jogger's knees and pot-holed asphalt roads;
after weeks of meetings in laminate conference rooms,
discussing plans at doodle stage;
after hundreds of months aboard commuter trains
smelling of backed-up toilet and burgers and beer;
after five servings of fennel sausage and fake crab meat
at each of ten annual family feasts;
after twenty-one walk-up flats, one co-op, one condo,
one private house and two upstate vacation plots;
after two gerbils, four guinea pigs, a goldfish,
a ferocious Persian cat, five thousand walks
of a fluffy dog with inch-long fangs and attitude;
after three squally marriages and four live-in trysts;
after two years of hormone treatments
and one adoption across three continents;
after the endless discovery of poopie diapers;
after the same three episodes of a pre-school puppet show
over and over again; after a majority of sex-less months
and resignation to limited success,
I visit my mother, who eyes
my gray strands, creased cheeks, blank stare
and announces, *You're gettin' there.*

George Guida
from *Pugilistic*

Before Rosa Parks

Before Rosa Parks, before the Montgomery bus boycott,
Claudette Colvin boarded a bus home from Booker T.
Washington High School. She was 15 years old. During
her ride, the white section filled up, and a white woman
was left standing, so the driver called out, and three
students in Colvin's row got up and moved. She did not,
and the standing white woman refused to sit across the
aisle from her. "If she sat down in the same row as me,
it meant I was as good as her." The driver yelled, "Why
are you still sittin' there?" A white rider yelled from the
front, "You got to get up," and a girl answered from the back,
"She ain't got to do nothin' but stay black and die."

Oh Lord. We're into it now. Get ready for a lifetime of pain
and suffering and sorrow before any of this is even halfway
over this March 2, 1955 with its cascading grief and avalanche
of woe.

Laurel Speer
from *Swim, Gilda, Swim*

The Bishop of Atlanta: Ray Charles / HORACE JULIAN BOND

The Bishop seduces the world with his voice
Sweat strangles mute eyes
As insinuations gush out through a hydrant of sorrow
Dreams, a world never seen
Moulded on Africa's anvil, tempered down home
Documented in cries and wails
Screaming to be ignored, crooning to be heard
Throbbing from the gutter
On Saturday night
Silver offering only
The Right Reverend's back in town
Don't it make you feel all right?