



Neal Whitman

The Bird Parliament

at the edge of Chinatown
held every Sunday
caged birds are given respite
from their solitary existence
two dozen birdcages
hooked high up on racks

a zebra dove
a small and slender bird
speaks in birdspeak
before the Bird Parliament
he speaks for Liu Xiaobo
whose keepers detain him

a bird sings
because it has a song
all sing in harmony
endless possibilities
curiously familiar
no enemies no hatred

There Will Always Be an England

People around the world can show respect
for each other with humor.

There was a 1939 song in Great Britain that became popular there at the outbreak
of war.

It's title, "There Will Always Be an England,"
today conveys affection we have those folks.

Case in point: under British Law, divorces are granted only under one of five
categories.

About half the cases fall under a broad category called "unreasonable behavior."

Consider these examples.
All are real but one.

The question is, "Which one is make believe?"
You be the judge.

Insists she dress in costume ...
and speak in Klingon.

Repeatedly serves his least favorite dish ...
tuna casserole.

Tampers with his T.V. antenna ...
spitefully.

Flirts with and touches tradesmen ...
inappropriately.

Requires their pet to sleep next to the bed ...
Timmy the Tarantula.

Uses her hair dryer ...
to defrost frozen peas.

Obsessively combs ...
the fringes of the rug.

Earthly Paradise on Main Street

A French Norman style home.
Steeply pitched.
Small round towers with cone shaped roofs.
I am seen standing in the rain.
I am asked to enter through an arched portal.
Inside smaller and warmer than supposed.
The pleasure of past years.
The gift to hear once again
voices of a lost age.
Invited to sit by the fire.
Tea and buttered crackers.
We read ourselves back to life:
Something old: *La Chanson de Roland*.
No false optimism, but bracing truths.
The whole design of life and death.

The Painter Edward Hopper Needs a Lube Job

We should not be quite certain of the crystallization of the art of America into something native and distinct were it not that our architecture show very evident signs of doing just that.

Edward Hopper

Under the Awning
Morning Appointment

We Meet at Right Angles
Front End Repair

Secure Perspectives
Wheel Alignment

Clean and Simple
Hand Wash and Detailing

Industrial Strength
Lubrication Service

Beauty in New Facts
Emission Testing

Complexity Disguised
Preventive Maintenance

Building Blocks
Machine Shop Services

A Googie* Burger

with all the fixings

Counter Service

Sputnicked

Space Raced

Streamlined

Silhouetted

Razor Sharped

Straight Edged

Doo Wopped

Cosmonauted

Aerodynamic

The New Math

To The Moon

One of These Days – POW

*Googie architecture is a form of futuristic design
inspired by the Space Age

Mail Call

Monday is a good day
Makes up for Saturday's junk mail
Tuesday not so good
but things pick up Wednesday
and get better by Friday
I can sniff out the mail truck
before it rounds the corner
and I'm out the door
Sometimes the mail lady
hands over my stack
before it goes in the slot
Today an self-addressed stamped envelope
Its envelope rubber-stamped
2 Cents Postage Due
That tells you how long
the editor held my submission
As expected:
Rejection
For as long as I can remember
I have been waiting
for the mail
It has taken time
but now I know
what I have been waiting for
my whole life
Some day
from the Universe
a message for me:
Acceptance
or at least an explanation

The Write Time

Shut in. Shut out.

Shut up. Shut down.

Make the door,

Make it fast.

No trespassing.

No soliciting.

No witnessing

Don't let the lies in.

The truth is not what happened

but what could be.

This is the write time.

Nightcaps

The party of four was returning home.
They had lost the race to the Pole.
Scott, the old Etonian, remarked
“Second place, second rate.”

Nonetheless, there was cause to celebrate.
They toasted Captain Grace Oakes
on his thirty-second birthday:
“A Gentleman. Quite a gentleman. Always a gentleman.”

Then they tucked themselves into
their reindeer-hide sleeping bags,
eleven miles from base camp and safety.
“Good night. And Good Grace.”

Oakes, handicapped by frostbite,
told his mates,
“I am just going outside and may be some time.”
He strode into the night blizzard.

Seven months later
Scott, Wilson, and Bowers were found:
three frozen corpses in a small green canvas tent
nine miles from base camp and hope.

Over and Out

my black mood in charge
a letter from an old friend
over and over
time to hit the road

almost one whole year
her sweater still on the chair
never and never
time to hit the road

way past season
for thistledown in the wind
over and never
time to hit the road

MIRROR IN A MIRROR

I begin and end
my public recital
with
a statement and a question
Statement:
“I do not write a poem.
We read it.”
Question:
“Is this a poem?”
Question:
Was *that* a poem?

Evergreen

are is
you are is less
where you are is less than
knowing where you are is less than hard
perhaps knowing where you are is less than hard fact
is
more like
an act of faith

How Are You Doing?

“All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone”

Blaise Pascal

Seeing a photograph of *Guernica*
a Gestapo officer asked Picasso,
"Did you do that?"
The Spaniard answered, "No, you did."
Why did human beings
become human doings?
Oh, doing would okay if it meant
doing unto others as you want to be done unto.
Even the negative would be okay, eh?
Do not to others what is hateful to you.
But, here's the rub.
We also are human wantings.
I want what you have.
From A to Z. Armenia to Zanzibar.
I want. I want. I want.
Instead, pick up that baby and hold it.



An Open and Shut Case

My Uncle Mac was a World War II hero.
He had a black lacquer box made in Japan.
He kept it on a desk in his den.
Stenciled on its lid was a chrysanthemum and a sword.
I never saw him open it.
I never dared peek.
It may have contained war medals.
It might have contained letters or a diary.
I once asked what was in it.
"I forgot," he said.
"There could be a treasure – maybe gold."
He stared at the box.
He reached for the lid.
Then halted.
"No. Let it be."

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Nicosia is a divided city.
North of the Green Line is Turk,
South is Greek.
To cross the line,
visitors need a passport.
309 poets from 59 countries
sent poems to Nicosia.
Poems do not need a passport.
Today our poems were dropped ...
from balloons!
Clear skies,
we are welcomed in two languages.
Spring rain,
each poem a prism.
Poems flutter to the ground.
My poem? Just a 3-liner:
*Poets ask readers
to have the last word.
Dictators fear that.*

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