

Like a Rose

You clench your age like a rose between your teeth
You wear those wrinkles and those scars like badges.
These are your service ribbons and your medals.
These are the carvings of a life lived full.

And now old man old woman go to the mirror.
Observe the dewlaps and missing teeth and fallen leaves.
Observe the sea grown dark and a wind rising.
Observe the winter of you.
Stare at those ancient eyes that stare into yours.
Board that hidden boat.
Read the invitation. Read it and laugh.

Observe how ridiculous you are and by God laugh.
Greet yourself like a drunken shipmate.
Laugh!

Laugh at the tales and dance away to the music.
Observe how every crazy thing now takes on color
and the script is lost and so are all your masks.
Observe your soul standing naked in the wind.
Observe it as a thing of desire and a thing of dread.
Hear it tell the finality of life.
Hear it sing the grotesqueness of old lust.

Your laughter bursts like a young bull from its tethers.
What you gaze on there in that mirror
is a window thrown open and light pouring in and the music
of your wounds and the eyes grown ripe with gifts.

You stand in the presence of beauty.
You receive it and you find it more than good.
Where that window opens is into your heart.
On this day you can dance.

You have now a song for the road.
You have something to wear for when you shed your body.

Lamont

You labor. You contend.
The sun lights your face and the sun goes dark.
All your works you stuff into a bag.
You write your name on it.
At the border you dump it into the river.
You make for a moment
ripples.

This is about Lamont.
Lamont lived on the street and he died there.
Lamont had a soul of remarkable sweetness.
Lamont was a curbside drunk. There he sits
on his perch outside the liquor store
and every now and then I slip him a buck.
He falls in love with my dog who shies at first
from the reek of whiskey
then sniffs again and reaches out her tongue.
and this is enough.

You who are old know how the need sharpens
to touch another being soul to soul.
I see Lamont and I am gladdened.
Both of us grin at the sight of each other.
In these roles of ours
hustler and mark in the ritual of panhandling
we take joy.

In the fall I help him celebrate his birthday
his 50th he tells me.
He says he doesn't figure to see any more of them.
I try of course to con him out of this doom.
I think in my educated white guy stupidity I can
show him a reality gentler than his fate.

Come spring Lamont you down your last drink.
It's good shit. You tilt back your head and send it flaming
down your gullet and you stumble from the earth right
into the onrushing unknown and you're lying there
in the gutter.

You're on your way my brother.
Here comes the moon up from between the chimneys.
No longer do you know what it is or what it means.
All you perceive is its beauty.

State of Grace

Right now I'm making love with you.
The leaves almost gone now, the moon almost new,
and you are so good to me.

Sacred now the dark sea of this night.
Sacred those distant ships of light
that crescent moon, that single liquid star
and your face bursting luminous from the waves
then sinking back then breaching once again
into my hands.

In my breast you are the heart
in my heart the throb and course of life.
In your eyes I am golden.

A man loves. He tastes
one moment of holiness. He dies.
Is it perhaps
 enough?

What Is It that Pleases the Maker?

Maybe it's Granny with her corn cob pipe
and out of it curling smoke ah! pungent as churches
holy as whorehouses
dark as bodies touching in the shadows.
So I say Give me a toke old woman
and she flashes me this snaggletoothed grin and
she hands me the pipe and I smoke and man
it is sweet shit.

It goes swimming through my head and spins me around
and comes floating down my spine like flowers
and I just kick back and dig all the old codgers
smoking reefer and drinking beer
and belching and laughing and farting and drooling
and one old dude blowing Dylan on the blues harp
and now the old coots singing "Everybody must get stoned!"
when scrubbed and blond and wearing designer jeans
the kids arrive
and they are appalled at what they see.
They are totally in a panic to find their grandparents are
dope fiends.

"Granny!" they holler "Gramps! Just say No!"
but the old reprobates just cackle
and one old fart with snot caked in his beard
and the Holy Spirit blazing in his eyes
comes staggering down from the porch
and he waves his arms and he hollers
children!
children, ah children! We are old
and we hear our graves yawning from the shadows.
We have gnawed our lives down to the bones and tendons.
So why not roll the dice
just one time more?

What we are saying children is Yes.
Yes by God to life and Yes to love
and Yes to the wildness of both those glorious messes
and Yes to tasting forbidden fruit
and Yes to feeling it all and Yes
Yes Yes to this one brief dance on God's green crazy earth
because it's over so soon so damned soon!

And right at that moment comes to his face a look
of profound amazement

and he clutches his chest and he falls to the ground
and his body ripples like a banner caught in the wind
ripples and then lies

dead

but ah his soul

His soul flies straight into the hands of God
and God for a moment pauses to contemplate
the reek of its scent and the colors of its glow and
the timbre of its song

then gulps it down like an oyster and oh damn
it tastes so

good!

