

The Ballad of Willie Loman

Talk is, the road salesman's a dying trend,  
But not me. Me, I'm the customer's friend.  
My territory's dotted with people who care,  
Who treat me gracious, who treat me square.  
They know my car --the Pontiac Catalina,  
The two-tone hard-top, green and greener.  
When I drive up with my order book  
I get a handshake and a friendly look.  
O deedily doo, O deedily dun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

That's what I recite as I clock the miles,  
And clock the rejections and clock the smiles.  
The territory's endless, it cannot be covered--  
The entire Empire, a state to be suffered,  
And every hotel room is like the last,  
And every stoop where you haven't been asked,  
And in every empty a lamp chases the dark—  
You learn to chase gloom with a pint and a lark.  
Still there's some part of it you can't chase,  
Some part of it where you can't close the space.

That rubbery space from where you are  
To where you figured you ought to be,  
The cash in your billfold, the make of your car,  
And even the space where your boys now are  
To where you figured they ought to be  
At their age, at yours, I guess everyone's ages.  
In the blanks of your life, in the order book pages  
You pencil in calls, the time and the place,  
Strict accounting of doors shut in your face.

In a half-inch of dust on the Pontiac's fender.  
I write all this out then go on a bender  
That uses up twice my week's per diems.  
And so to kill time, I hang out at museums,  
Cafeteria dinners with free saltines.  
Order book empty, soul in smithereens

O deed'll doo, O deed'll dun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

I knew I'd be gold if I just got to Corning,  
Just one more stop on a Thursday morning  
And after that, the honey pot—I kill in Corning.  
Do fair in Utica, but I die in Geneva,  
No matter whether you're skeptic or believer,  
Geneva is tough. They just don't like me,  
Or maybe it's just competition,  
I die in Geneva, it's a lose-lose mission,  
But the route's the route, you follow the route,  
No slacking, no cutting, no turning about.

I'm stopped at reception: you're supposed to call,  
You can't just walk in, don't you know your position?  
Hell I called on them when she was in diapers  
But I drag my ass out, those cheap Swedish vipers,  
You're in deep trouble when the customer's a Swede,  
If they cut themselves shaving, they're too cheap to bleed.  
Get out, drive hell-bent through the October morning  
'Cause I know I'll be gold once I get to Corning.  
O deed'll doo, O deed'll dun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

But God help me in Corning I get short shrift,  
Goose-egged, *garnicht*, on the schneid, stiffed.  
They've placed their order, just arrived by rail  
Saved themselves the commish, ordered by mail.  
Saves Willie the trouble, easier this way,  
And Willie won't mind, ought to make his day.  
Hours from Geneva, twice that from home,  
Back to the hotel, dinner alone.  
O deed will he do, indeed is he dun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

No Corning Miss Harvey, but a nice one in Rome,  
Another in Buffalo, but never at home.  
A Miss Harvey in Babylon, Alexandria Bay,  
In Canaan, Cheektowaga, Saratoga and Day,

In Genesee, Geneva, Elmira and Broome,  
And the one who insists on her own hotel room.  
The Miss Harvey in Fishkill likes candy and flowers,  
And two-handed rummy to help pass the hours.  
O greedily goo, O greedily gun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

Willie or won't he, and where, how, and when?  
A bold act: the boys will respect me again,  
And my wife again think me the pluperfect mate  
Who ran all the errands, who never worked late.  
Who weed-killed the lawn and pruned the dead roses,  
Performed a full line-up of wax-paper poses.  
My eyes are all dotted, my lists are all crossed,  
I'll reach home exhausted in need of exhaust.  
O deed'll doo, O deed'll dun,  
The deed the deed, the deed'll be done.

Sixfold '19

Love at the Diner

Let me be the bacon  
To your tomato heart.  
Heavy on the mayo, light  
On the toast. Deal the lettuce  
Leaves from their round deck.  
Tear the ends  
Of paper straws and launch  
Their sheaths into the far  
Stratosphere, booths beyond,  
Our foreheads touching over  
Vanilla cokes as we sip.

Pantomime Horse

“...two people pretending humorously to be a horse by dressing in special clothes and standing one behind the other...” Cambridge Dictionary

Years of practice, halves hewn to one flesh,  
years of rear hoof nicking the lag leg ahead,  
*oopses* and *sorrys*. A comic ballet  
of bagged-head beginners. Tokens mark the years:  
leather for the third, linen for the twelfth.  
But leather splits and linen pills. The chip  
grows durable: sapphire at thirty-five,  
diamond at sixty. Eventually  
(walk before you canter) they try the next gait,  
But where its key? how to spring its latch?  
Daftness turns deft, tangles are parsed, creases smoothed.  
*Warn me when you turn. Telegraph when you stop.*  
And what if the wires are down?

The grafts outlast the oaths.  
Synchrony sands down ineptitude,  
and reveries of distant pastures dim.  
Rehearsing they alternate, switch fore and aft,  
fuse first by words, then habit, then being,  
catching the other's totter, counter-weighting.  
Crises of direction, speed, parturition,  
even identity, solve –perhaps resolve,  
dissolve—themselves. In easy optimism  
each assumes the other's good knees,  
firm hocks, limbs. From two wills  
one voice, one act.

Every producer knows, duo routines  
are twice the risk. And sure as Time,  
the sharpest stress finds the weakest bone.

Mirrors

In Mirrours, there is the like Angle of Incidence,  
from the Object to the Glasse, and from the Glasse  
to the Eye. ---Francis Bacon, *Natural History*

How is it that these angles corroborate,  
Cooperate, such that they arrive at the glass  
And depart, reflect as a perfect match?  
Geometry is admired for its chasm from our lives,  
We marvel at theorems and proofs immune  
From jealousy, appetite, remorse.

Sir Francis describes not simply the mirror  
But the mechanics of marriage, and thus life.  
When the angle of reflection is greater  
Than the critical angle, all light enjoys reflection.  
If  $p$  then  $q$ . If it rains, then  
They cancel school. If they cancel school,  
Then it rains. If it does not rain, then  
They do not cancel school. Thus life is described  
Not by inverse and converse, but constantly  
By contrapositives. Thus we live, we love;  
We don't live, we don't love; and we die.

Didi and Gogo Try Tweeting

I've not done this before. Are you getting this?

*I don't quite know yet.*

Well you must be if you're answering.

*I'm not answering, I'm saying I don't quite know.*

You either know or don't know. It's binary.

*Winery? Did you mean winery?*

Why in the world would I say WINERY.

*It must be the auto-correct.*

I don't understand.

*I guess I'm not getting it.*

There's nothing to be done. Let's move on.

*Didn't you say we're limited as to characters?*

That's right. 140 characters.

*But we've exceeded that.*

140 characters per message, but unlimited messages.

*Unlimited?*

Depending on your plan.

*I have no plan.*

Your contract. Your contract with your carrier.

*I don't have a carrier. I don't even have a cat.*

You're being difficult.

*How else is there to be?*

What do you mean?

*Being. I find it difficult.*

We are simply exchanging tweets. Nothing more.

*And nothing less?*

And nothing less. Keep that in mind. You seem to be forgetting.

*I don't seem. Therefore I am forgetting.*

What is it you're forgetting?

*I wouldn't remember, would I?*

I suppose not.

*Do you object to forgetting?*

What's to object?

*Forgetting seems like death, don't you think?*

Quite alike.

*Are they the same?*

No. In death there is no growth. No love. No whisky.

*Is there a God?*

It doesn't say here.

*Where?*

On the instructions.

*I didn't know there were instructions.*

What do you think? Is there a God?

*If there were a God there would be whisky. Also instructions.*

And if there's whisky?

*Then it wouldn't matter about God.*

Do you suppose?

*Not often.*

It's an odd word, isn't it? It sounds like a brand of stocking.

*But there is no suprapose, or infrapose, or extrapose. We're allowed only the one pose.*

Not true. There is impose and expose.

*Why do you suppose?*

It must be human nature.

*What does it mean?*

Nature? It's what's outside the city: rocks and trees and worm droppings.

*No, no, I mean the word.*

The word was in the beginning.

*The word "suppose".*

Oh, that. It comes from the Latin, ponere, to place. And sub, under.

*To place under?*

Correct.

*Why then, were I buried, would I not be supposed to be under the earth.*

But you will be.

*I will be what?*

You will then be supposed to be under the earth. And you will be.

*Well then. That's all right, then.*

It is.

*There's nothing to be done.*

I've already told you that.