

Things Are Bad

Things are bad. The doors are unhinging, guardrails
are down, the birds have stopped singing, waters
are rising, hard rains are falling, hard
men have grabbed the reins, brainless wars are fought
over little-boy playthings, over tantrums,
tiny hands, wounded pride, peccadillos,
passing fancies, and meanwhile fire ants
and poison ivy rampage northward, killing
frosts creep southward, storm clouds gather westward,
plagues loom eastward, our constitution
is cracked, our spirits are snuffed, the best
have been shouted down by the worst, the blues
are back in town, it looks like we've been had —
trouble ahead.

Like I said, things are bad.

Uncle

He's up there — Uncle in the attic, under
the chimneypots. We hear him at night,
enraged at things we just can't see. We wonder
at his funhouse laugh, his schemes to brighten
up the dark, his incessant tap-dancing,
his unbecoming sense of command.
Sometimes he stomps down in his underpants
and shiny shoes to give us guff, demand
outlandish rents and whatever we've got
in the icebox. We don't trust him. We fear
his sulks, his quicksilver moods. When it's hot
he complains, and when it's cold. Does he hear
us when we laugh at him? Do we disturb
his dreams? Does he even sleep? All our noise
comes to nothing — we ate the magic herbs
that make us think, *This time he'll give us toys.*

Kakistocracy

It does no good to mock them, true, but mocking them is irresistible — we've always made fun of fools. Before there was talk, there was derision; before there was politics, there was the desire to shame. Why pretend otherwise? But these people, you just can't shame them — they won't listen, they fry the wrong fish, they think the wrong thoughts, they do their fandango of unreason and love themselves for it. They want their kakistocracy — a word from Greeks who'd seen enough of monkeys to know how they scream and squawk and crown the monkey most without a whit of sense, then shriek and smear themselves with shit.

What If

What if it blinded him — the Great Eclipse!
What if he staggered backward, reeling from
the light of Truth revealed, the light that strips
away the lies, the rot? What if, now numb
to the blandishments of toadies, the lure
of pelf, he renounced the nonsense, forgave
all his enemies and former wives, purified
his spirit, tempered his words, saved
his soul? What if he confessed all his wrongs,
his sins? What if he took to wearing long
white robes that glowed with holiness and peace,
and prosperity settled on the land
like a flock of turtledoves, and unceasing
kindness blossomed like wildflowers fanned
by gentle breezes — a glimmering dawn,
a golden age?

There's something going on.

Bible Lesson

They're thinking of Saint Peter, denying
Jesus three times, then getting made pope —
it's all timing. As they adjust their ties

in the mirror, they're practicing faces,
how they'll phrase it. *I was never. I
couldn't have known and it wasn't my place*

to ask. I wasn't in the room. They hope
to get out of this. They pray that their grace
won't be Judas at the end of a rope.