

THE MUSIC

When they speak fine words, noble words but there is no
music in their speaking —
what should I make of the speeches?

And when they hold forth on
topics of urgent concern, yet there is neither
tumble nor clench nor simple copula jolt —
to what should I give assent?

What I listen for now is the voice, the eyes, the
bunched energy of a lifetime;
I listen for body music.
And I do not ask for
showy backflips of delivery — salesman or pulpit skills.
Just a live unprogrammed pulse, that resonates with what is.
An old man's weathered resilience.
A mother's hardwon dues.
Or it could be a bluesy wrench; a stammer; a lowdown kick-out-the-jambs.

All I know is,
where there is no human music, there is
no live truth to be found.

BACK WHEN I NEVER KNEW

Sometimes when the world
shoves too much, or my
friends are flipping and I'm not so cool myself,
or it feels like things are sliding straight to hell — sometimes I
think back to a
bedtime long ago, I might have been four and
my mother still read to us; anyway, this one night I
shushed her, and I read the book right through -
word for word, page-turn for page-turn - and it was
magic, it was electric, it was all an
act because the
thing is, I still couldn't spell my name.
But I was going for gold — heading for big-kid freedom, just
chasing my runaway heart. And I knew,
whatever I tried to do, my mom was always there ...
Oh man, sometimes I
think back to then, back when I was so
desperate to be older, and everything big was golden.
Back when the world was waiting to be unwrapped.
Back when I never knew.

DEEPER

Often at night, sometimes
out in the snow or going into the music, the hunch says,
"Deeper."
I don't know what it means.
Just, "Push it. Go further. Go deeper."
And when they come talking at me I get
antsy at times, but mostly I stay put and it keeps saying,
"Deeper. This is not it. You must go deeper."
There is danger in this, also
beautiful inklings and I believe it can issue in
gestures of homing; but I
cannot control it, all I know is the one thing —
"Deeper. You must go further. You must go deeper."

THE SHAME

Among the thousand, or maybe the million things I know,
my all-time least favourite is this:
how shitty it feels, when you admire somebody
for their talent, or guts, or maybe just their
nifty way of getting through the day; anyway, as
I keep trying not to tell you, how shitty it feels when you
admire this person, and then some mean-
minded jerkoff starts badmouthing them behind their back,
and instead of sticking up for them — and
remember, this friend has never done anything to hurt you —
you just stand there, while the cracks and cheap laughs get
meaner and hey you laugh too and
then, god help me I did I
joined in the trash brigade, I got off this
killer putdown, we all cracked up we were howling we were
helpless with laughter and I walked away down the hall I was
caving in I hated them all and myself I wanted to
break something, I walked and walked I felt so
helpless with shame, with the
shame.

A PLAN FOR PRESERVING BIRDSONG

Is it true that tiny lawyers
 Hatch in puddles in the spring?
I plan to capture orioles
 And teach them how to sing;
But if they can't, the lawyers,
 Dressed in little feathered suits,
Could congregate in sheltered spots,
 And play on tiny flutes.

SIR ETHELRED AND THE FATEFUL TONG

With that, the bold Sir Ethel sprang
And strung his bow with mighty twang
And swung his sword with mighty swang
And flung his tong with mighty flang,
 And yet the fling went wrong.

For ere Sir Ethel's fearsome flinging
Could send the foe to hellfire winging,
All in a bungled angle hanging
The wrongful tong came boomeranging —
 And pronged him through the lung!

Now dong the gong with mournful bonging
For knights must die without belonging;
Young, young in years, with virtues thronging,
Pronged through the lung by a wrong-way tonging,
 The bold Sir Ethel is gone,
 Is gone,
 The brave Sir Ethel is gone.