

Tony and the 24

—

Jerry Van Polen

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction . . . 1
2. A Song Is Like A Speech . . . 2
3. Stories Not To Tell . . . 4
4. It's Not There For Knowing . . . 7
5. Grounding . . . 9
6. Twenty Years And Twenty Minutes . . . 10
7. Fine Adjustment . . . 12
8. If Leaves Stay . . . 13
9. Heeded . . . 14
10. Please Refrain . . . 15
11. Ethics Is Outcomes . . . 17
12. Virtue Ethics . . . 19
13. God and Maya . . . 20
14. Tao, Set, Match . . . 21
15. Save Lindy For Marriage . . . 22
16. Friend Not To Know . . . 24
17. A Five-Minute Date . . . 27
18. Around The Block Blues . . . 29
19. You Take The Lead . . . 32
20. We Came To Dairy . . . 35
21. I'm Yours So I'm A Generalist . . . 39
22. We're Gonna Build An Empire . . . 41
23. Not What You Say In A Song . . . 42
24. Happen Overnight . . . 44
25. Poetry as a Magic Call . . . 46
26. Tony and His Shoes . . . 47
 - 26.1 But He Knew It Was True . . . 47
 - 26.2 Let Your Tears Be Sweet . . . 47
 - 26.3 Give Us to Someone Who Needs Us . . . 48
 - 26.4 Who Needs the Flowers? . . . 48
 - 26.5 I Will Talk to the Flowers . . . 49
 - 26.6 And This is Their Strength . . . 50
 - 26.7 Tony Lived with the Four Peoples . . . 51
 - 26.8 He Had the Shoes He Needed . . . 51

1.

Introduction

This volume selects twenty-three poems (including lyrics-easily-read-as-poems) from my collection/miscellany titled *Cheerful Moral Will*. It adds one new poem — *Virtue Ethics* — to make twenty-four.

Without question or hesitation, it also includes the story *Tony and His Shoes*.

Arguably, I spent two decades adding to and thereby obscuring an essentially-complete manuscript. My aim and/or correction here is to highlight some core, accessible work.

Small changes have been made (particularly in trimming punctuation); I prefer the versions here.

Jerry Van Polen

17 June 2024

2.

A Song Is Like A Speech (1999)

Tell a story of anticipating
Tell a story of a heart in waiting
Tell a story of a love to cry for
Tell me now what I search the sky for

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

Tell me something ... to go on working
Tell me something ... to go on shirking
Tell me something ... to go forever
Tell me something ... now or never!

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

Make me sad ... I've been happy
Make me sad ... life is crappy
Make me sad ... pain is real
Make me sad about some raw deal

Tell the truth about looks and weight
Tell the truth about lies and hate
Tell the truth about working it out
Tell the truth — I want to shout!

A song is like a speech
Or walking on a beach
Or maybe a first kiss
The good ones would be missed

A song is like a speech!

3.

Stories Not To Tell (1985,1993)

Everyone ... Has not been well
Each one a story ... Not to tell
Great grandpa's ill ... We have not cared
Did he die ... That we be spared

From zealot's force ... Wisdom does flee
In silence still ... Will you be free
Not the choice ... Resolve is new
An answer to ... What will I do

Got my kids ... See them again
Half my life ... Has gone to them
Making parts ... Go here and there
Not just work ... My life's a prayer

Scientist ... His theories flawed
W a i t i n g ... What is the law
Now at last ... Night my old friend
Our long wait ... Was clearly planned

Justice known ... Not at a glance
Love and knowledge ... Mixed in silence
Virtue's works ... Fit like a glove
Its words are deeds ... Its language love

Now that my days ... Are near done
To give advice ... I have just one
Come now child ... Do not despair
All you see ... Was once a prayer

It's a giant thought ... This world we're shown
Where not of God ... At least our own
Go heed the call ... Of age to age
Live good a dream ... Go turn a page

It's true not all ... Starts out with prayer
If it seems not ... We say "vulgar!"
Don't parrot such ... Display some class
By saying "no" ... Not "oh well yes"

We live for ... More than enough
Subsistence hell ... We'll make more stuff
In some ways though ... Could be 'nough mirth
To spend our time ... And not the earth

All that's been ... And all been done
All to win ... And all been won
All to do ... And all to try
From the question ... "Why not" not "why"

The smallest task ... Comes first to eye
To steer by that ... We do but try
If life gives each ... A star to track
Become one too ... And give one back

It's a giant thought ... This world we're shown
Where not of God ... At least our own
Go heed the call ... Of age to age
Live good a dream ... Go turn a page

Little child ... You're back so soon
Prob'ly been ... Around the moon
You're back again ... Remind us why
Travail like ... True love is shy

Across the land ... Across the sea
We all curse hatred ... Misery
But love's first test ... Is circumstance
Brother can you ... spare a glance

If eighty 'r well ... There's thirty not
Whose art of sorrow ... Is their lot

Who knows the words ... Knows well the cost
No one's thoughts ... Are by silence lost

In each a place ... Called to above
So whose pain we touch ... We touch in love
No bridge exists ... From wrong to wrong
Make a leap ... With prayer and song

It's a ragged song ... No truth I claim
We all have reasons ... Trued by our pain
Each one a pain ... (lost hope for some)
Sing these words ... A gospel for one

Everyone ... Has not been well
Each one a story ... Not to tell
Great grandpa's ill ... We have not cared
Did he die ... That we be spared

4.

It's Not There For Knowing (1999)

We're old enough to know
Takes two to make it grow
Each of us can say you were the first to let it show
Nothing locked in store
We'd be defining more
There's still time to try the rhyme of all that I adore

We've seen peculiar weather
Now that we're together
Things will come 'round again you wish were gone forever
At least we're still connecting
New styles resurrecting
Clear the air, avoid despair, avoid resent perfecting,
Avoid resent perfecting

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
And finding if we can

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
La da da da da da

Years mark dedication
A lot of this and that
Live a private language
And a dance around the hat

What worthy constellation
What good unfolding bind
And good that's gone before
Is good to leave behind

What worthy constellation
What good unfolding bind
And good that's gone before
Is good to leave behind

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
It's keeping something growing
And finding if we can

It's not there for knowing
It's not fixed in plan
But keep a good light showing
But keep a good light showing
But keep a good light showing
Be you woman, be you man

5.

Grounding (2012)

Grounding: notice, feel, sense
Focus, patience, and presence
Every pore a place to go
Embrace a way of going slow

6.

Twenty Years And Twenty Minutes (1999)

He takes a pen to paper
Mostly knowing what to say
There'll be surprise, in the end
But in the end he'll know the way

Others take a cloth to model
Or model to a pose
Every thought that takes a form
Every form where knowledge flows

Twenty years and twenty minutes
Twenty years and twenty minutes
It's what you know and how you spin it
Twenty years, twenty minutes

The child turns for comfort
To a mother or a dad
Now what to say or what to ask
For the sake of girl or lad

A lover asks for changes
Mostly knowing reasons why
Its a risk all on the line
But someone has to try

Twenty years and twenty minutes
Twenty years, twenty minutes
It's what you know, how you spin it
Twenty years and twenty minutes

What once we called precocious
We now do credit age
Doesn't matter old or young
Part is printed, part blank page

What once we called precocious
We now do credit age
In a tablet given form
Part is printed, part blank page

[chorus-as-instrumental]

No surprise now, near the end
It's all in how you've lived
Who you are and who you've been
Every moment yours to give

Scores of years and scores of minutes
Scores of years and scores of minutes
Who you are and how you give it
Scores of years, scores of minutes

Scores of years and scores of minutes
Scores of years and scores of minutes
Who you are and how you give it
Scores of years, scores of minutes

Twenty years ... how you spin it
Twenty years ... how you give it
Twenty years ... that's how you live it
Twenty years, twenty minutes

7.

Fine Adjustment (1999)

Devotion is never trendy
 To a trendy thinker
They say you have succumbed
 To a goody-hoody winker
The most obsessed they say
 Are up a loony tree
As defined by current standards
 Of psychology ...

First it was the moon above
 Then a stale air
Then it was desire
 For daddy and affair
Forsake the thought of justice
 Forsake on-high or God
There's only fine adjustment
 To society and sod.

8.

If Leaves Stay (2011)

One glass of wine
At the right time
Is my religion

And creed I have none
Except in the end be gently undone

Time I have had
And peaceably glad if forgotten

But if leaves stay
It's been a good way
Gladly trodden

9.

Heeded

I heeded all the warnings
Heard them all
I never crossed the line

If you don't make your own mistakes
You'll be making mine

10.

Please Refrain (1999)

Refrain is not just counting reps
It's like a shift uphill
It marks a moving journey
It marks poetic will
Refrain is more than repeat line
More than recurring dream
It's like giving second thought
It's like a puff of steam
To push and push and push a point
To drive a chugging train
One way to surely do it
Is do it in refrain

Refrain is not just gobby glue
Holding in a ball
It's like a trinket-holding thread
Chain between them all
We gather diff'rent souvenirs
Something stays the same
We cycle diff'rent stages
Yet follow given name
If you want to talk of change
But have one thing remain
One way to nicely do it
Is do it in refrain

Refrain can also sound so good
Melodic for the mind
Nice sometimes to keep a wit
Leave the what behind
Refrain might make a pretty time
Or poetry anoint
Parsley sage rosemary
Hi ho scrabble point!

If rain should fall on plains in Spain
Again again again
One way to gladly say it
Is say it in refrain

Refrain is also like a friend
It's like respect that's earned
Such trust as one can give you
If tellingly you've learned
If you say you've tried all that
Results are not so nice
In reverse compassion
In advance advice
Should you have a meaning clear
Or point to better gain
One way to clearly say it
Is say it in refrain

Refrain can also false report
Moving from inside
Compared to master essay
Poetry can hide
Hide a shallow history
Hide no fear of wrong
Did not a Mr. Plato say
There's danger in a song?
To that crowd with fury
Yours half or twice a brain
Hang 'em hang 'em Sieg Heil!
These also in refrain

11.

Ethics Is Outcomes (1999)

Ethics is outcomes ... in fact or in theory
It's casting the terms ... of that you are leery
The pleased child says ... success is no lie
But each mother says ... you'll put out an eye

Preacher man says ... Divine Retribution
Comes to a person ... or whole institution
Ignore the rules ... that's braver than I
Cosmic slap in the face ... or pie in the sky

Some go on the face ... of what doesn't happen
What goes as right reason ... in them a'nappin
They don't go abstract ... they don't even try
There's only each act ... "let's make it fly"

It's getting abstract ... that makes thought a mission
Abstract to practice ... but your or my version
Is that an example ... of "*quid pro quo*"
Or the dark motive ... "I don't want to know"

Go buy a grape ... do you hurt a fruit packer?
Get out of shape ... perspective or slacker?
Different abstractions ... so much to know
Infer to a "practice" ... then on with the show

Ethics is outcomes ... in fact or in theory
It's casting the terms ... of that you are leery
The pleased child says ... success is no lie
But each mother says ... you'll put out an eye

You wash your hands ... to make the world better
That's a good practice ... we'll send you a letter
Whatever you do ... 'cause everyone should
Is part of the charm ... of how you be good

Whatever you do ... 'cause everyone should
Is part of the charm ... of how you be good

12.

Virtue Ethics (2024)

In the thousand roles
Ex-cel-lence to match
If shaping metal
If laying thatch

One word to use is virtue:
High skill looks so right
Thus (and so) this good world
Falls not apart at night

13.

God and Maya

On Hindic view
God is short on resolve
The constants can change
And matter dissolve

God says: "My freedom is Maya
And Maya's a curse
With each intervention
It seems to get worse"

14.

Tao, Set, Match

The Tao.

Word of the Tao invokes intuition about sets.

In that vein...

Say the Tao is the union of all sets — of all ranges —
of themselves limited perspectives.

Thus there is no way of seeing which is not within this Tao.

Thus this Tao encompasses all times and all points of view.

Thus this Tao encompasses all partial interests
including our own.

Justice is what this Tao contains.

15.

Save Lindy For Marriage (1999)

Oh

I was raised an orphan ... By Sisters of Swing
They could move and shake it ... And they could sing
Said it wouldn't help me ... At fitting in
Save Lindy for marriage ... Or it's a sin

Save Lindy for marriage ... Save it for a marriage
Not being mean ... Don't mean disparage
But it's so nifty ... And so nice
You better heed ... Our strict advice

Said a good date ... Would be in Latin
Said to wear a nightie ... Burlap on skin
Said of boys and girls ... A difference between us
Leaders are from Mars ... Followers Venus
Leaders are from Mars ... A difference between us

Save Lindy for marriage ... Save it for a marriage
Not being mean ... Don't mean disparage
But it's so groovy ... And so cool
You hafta have ... A major rule

Said to all the leaders ... t' go and confess
But what some did for penance ... Has their minds a mess
Would you trust a priest ... Who said with a gurgle
"Do three hail Mary's ... Two swing-outs and circle"
Three hail Mary's ... Two swing-outs and circle

Save Lindy for marriage ... In public it's lurid
Save it for marriage ... Six-count for courage
Save it for a marriage ... There's no going back
Take it from us ... The swingers in black

Said "keep those hands up" ... Your frame is your mission

Keep those hands up ... In every position
Keep those hands up ... There's Mork and there's Mindy
Jitter-bug enough ... You'll know how he'd Lindy
Jitter-bug enough ... You'll know how he'd Lindy

Save Lindy for marriage ... In public it's lurid
Save it for marriage ... Six-count for courage
Save it for a marriage ... There's no going back
Take it from us ... The swingers in black

A modern generation ... A new Lindy option
Something deep in me ... Says that's a concoction
In my life the truth ... Will have it's way
I'm saving Lindy knowledge
Saving Lindy knowledge
Saving Lindy knowledge ...
For marriage day!

16.

Friend Not To Know (1991)

Well I really don't dream
Of mischief with you
I'll guess you're happy in your marriage
I'm sort of happy too
But if ever our lives
Were to both turn blue
Seeing you gentle
Could make things new

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers

I suppose it's a shame
That life limits us this way
But I've got a good family
I've got a full day
A bird in the hand
Is worth in a bush two
And in my wife's hand
I won't need you

We have not discussed it
In so many words
But if we did there is a voice
I think we both have heard
Some pairs could not be lovers
If not first friends
And one friend to trouble

Another would not send

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers

Marriage isn't easy
It sometimes makes us blue
So we look out for kindness
We look for what is true
When time comes I don't see you
I will remember you
My life is richer having heard
A gentle thought or two

I'm not looking for a shoulder
For when my wife won't do
"Private solace leads to touching
And touching leads to fools"
I'm trying to place a value
On the not unhappy news
There's beauty around and in life's arc
We're not just two by two

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers

Yes I'm not deeply searching
For what I seem to lack
So you don't need to need me
I need not need you back
But if I had for reason
A new love now to find
If you did too
You sure would come to mind

But if I had for reason
A new love now to find
If you did too
You sure would come to mind

You're a friend I won't know
You're a love I won't grow
You'll have a different grave
And not my heart to save
But having seen you
In some minutes and hours
Has reminded me of
One's true love's quiet powers

17.

A Five-Minute Date (1999)

One dance
Partner for a song
Used to be quite rude
There has been a healthy
Change of attitude

With a brief commitment
Each can risk some wrong
Nice to stay together
For the length of a song

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

I could joker wild
Like a pick up line
Act like your attention
Spanned eight seconds maybe nine

But where is the incentive
For either to be real
If every moment serves
Another one to steal

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil

Let's not hesitate

You might say don't be dorky
When it flows it flows
Others say commitment
Gets you through when smoothness goes

The rule is wrong in flirting
Run when you've made nice
Why give juice to distance
Fear of pleasure has a price

The rule is wrong in flirting
Run when you've made nice
Why give juice to distance
Fear of pleasure has a price

A five minute date
A five minute date
A gallon will not spoil
Let's not hesitate

This scene is so distracting
Distraction sets the tone
What if we just spent
Five minutes less alone

This scene is so distracting
Distraction sets the tone
What if we just spent
Five minutes less alone

A five minute date
It could be divine
A five minute date
Your watch or mine?

18.

Around The Block Blues (1999)

Been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin round again
With some time and with some cure

I been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Be goin' round again
With some time and with some cure

I thought I knew her well
Though she lied I thought her swell
I thought I knew her well
Though she lied I thought her swell
I thought I knew her well
You know I knew a living hell

Yea I've been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin' round again
With some time and with some cure

I've been to hell and back
Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
To get me through this veil of tears

I've been to hell and back
 Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
 Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
 To get me through this veil of tears

I've been to hell and back
 Though it's been so many years
Been to hell and back
 Even after many years
But I never lost the hope
 To get me through this veil of tears

Yea I've been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
I'll be goin' round again
 With some time and with some cure

It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell
It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell
It's better I can tell
 Rest me easy for a spell

Yea I've been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Yea been around the block
 Was the wrong block, to be sure
Now I'm going 'round again
 Yea I'm goin' 'round again
 Yes I'm goin' 'round again! ...

She's quite a time
And quite a cure!

19.

You Take The Lead (1999)

[chorus-as-instrumental]

You take the lead
Toss me and turn me
You take the lead
Know me and learn me
You take the lead
You take the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

You take the lead
Show me and earn me
You take the lead
Grow me and yearn me
You take the lead
You take the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Sharing the lead
Balance and flowing
Sharing the lead
Newly ways of knowing
Sharing the lead
Sharing the lead

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Sharing the lead
Talking and strolling
Sharing the lead
Rocking and rolling
Sharing the lead

Sharing the lead

CHORUS:

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Keeping it going
Finding a way ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Keeping it going
Finding a way ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Taking the lead
Such a funny honey
Taking the lead
Aren't we in the money
Taking the lead
Taking the lead

Balance and flowing
New ways of knowing
Fire is glowing
These things I pray ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

Balance and flowing

New ways of knowing
Fire is glowing
These things I pray ...
Half how you hold me
Half going slowly
Half what you do
And half what you say

20.

We Came To Dairy (1991)

[Duet, Him:]

I came here wealthy
A bank account healthy
No burden in traveling
An unwrinkled suit

Then my car broke down
On way to nex' town
Me traipsing through mud
The car was kaput

On way to dairy
Was there I met Mary
 Oh for the sight of her
 Song of her
 Plight of her
 First sight a trusting stare
And wit like a flute

CHORUS:

We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But by fine habit
We've stuck one by two

Your pers-pi-cac-ity
My upper-class-ity
It started with friendship
And romance to boot

I thought:

“What have I tried for

“What has life lied for

“This is true privilege

“So many things moot

“How now to love her

“Brown cow above her

“Please be my garden

“My heart will take root

We came to dairy

Not for to marry

But as luck had it

We both said “I do”

We came to dairy

Not for to marry

But by fine habit

We’ve stuck one by two

[Duet, Her:]

You were a fine man

A cheese and a wine man

But you soon found I could

Make great cheese too

Heart like a round cheese

Hope-by-the-pound cheese

Will like a brick and

For variety, blue

I told you my story

Heart like a quarry

Many a stone turned

To find just one true

Then you were lovely

Our hands hand-in-glove-ly

Not just friendly
But happy
Oh God was it true

We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But by fine habit
We've stuck one by two

[Duet, Together:]
You are a fine one
A wine and dine one
Although I may see
I want nothing new

Oh yea there's money
But I don't care honey
The most valuable green
Comes from the blue

[chorus-as-instrumental]

[Duet, both, hushed:]
We came to dairy
Not for to marry
But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
And when we married
From kiss until bury
We pledged to each other
"I pledge unto you"

We came to dairy
Not for to marry

But as luck had it
We both said "I do"
And when we married
From kiss until bury
We pledged to each other
"I pledge unto you"

21.

I'm Yours So I'm A Generalist (1999)

Was it your eye I saw wander
Out there by the pool
Well if you're looking for some fonder
Don't catch that ship you fool

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
So much to share and tell
If you found a specialist
Of course she'd ring some bell

And that good girl Friday
Attentive to the max
So efficient and a lady
Well I'm sending you this fax

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
It's not all rock and roll
She's not so she's a specialist
You just think her tank is full

No one's found the formula
For making it all right
No one's found a perfect way
To skip a healthy fight
No one's got the answer
No one's always sure
No one's always dancer
No one's always cure
But if you trust me with your needs
I'll take them to account
If you trust with dark complaint
We can work it out
If you trust me I'll meet you
Half way if I can

If you trust me love can flow
Isn't that a plan?

I'm yours so I'm a generalist
It's harder then it's new
At risk of overlong digress
I stand here now with you

22.

We're Gonna Build An Empire (2017)

A slow-loving song
Doesn't have to end strong
It can be a normal thing

And speaking of things
That go well with rings
So does avoiding some wrong

A dozen approaches
None without their reproaches
Life's concocted that way

And working to say
It might work partly this way
For today is okay

We're gonna build an empire
regardless what is true
We're gonna build an empire
where the grass is green and blue
We're gonna build an empire
half-knowing what to do
We're gonna build an empire
for me and you

23.

Not What You Say In A Song (1999)

[She with sing-song lead-in:]

Loving words ... are so rare
I conclude ... you don't care
Say I can ... say I must
Ash to ashes ... dust to dust

[He with sing-song lead-in:]

I love you ... there it was
Any reason? ... just because
I love you ... twice for show
Don't complain ... now you know

Said I would ... said I do
Isn't that ... enough for you
Must I repeat ... and endure
Don't you really ... know for sure?

[She, singing:]

It's not what you say in a song
It's what you are saying all day long
It's not what you say in a show
It's what you will say to those who know
It's not what you say and then flee
It's what you will say to me

It's partly a look and a smile
It's all of the things that are worthwhile
It's not I should read your mind
It's seeing if you respond in kind
I'm finding the words to say
I'm missing a gentle way

Its not running or standing still
Or climbing up too steep a hill

Not just effort not just will
It's knowing small things are the thrill
Are the thrill
Are the thrill

It's not what you say in a song
It's what you are saying all day long
It's not what you say in a show
It's what you will say to those who know
It's not what you say and then flee
It's what you will say to me

24.

Happen Overnight (1999)

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Left it on ... my coffee table
Just started class ... on lyric writing
Wonder what to think about that

Some things ... will happen overnight
If you work at 'em long enough
Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Kissed a girl ... starting heart desire
Both now thinkin' ... yes we could
Prob'ly known her ... little over seven years
Some things just go like that

Some things ... will happen overnight
Trust your senses long enough
Some things ... hold despite the fight
Work work work work work work

Got a job ... better than I hoped for
Fin'ly needin' ... what I do
Been a hobby ... ever since high school
Some things just happen like that

[chorus-as-instrumental]

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Kissed a girl ... yes we could
Got a job ... ever since high school
Some things just go like that

Wrote a song ... radio potential
Kissed a girl ... yes we could

Got a job ... ever since high school
Some things just go like that

Some things ... will happen overnight
If you work at 'em long enough
Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

Some things ... go without a fight
Work work work work work work

25.

Poetry as a Magic Call (1987)

Poetry as a magic call
Should be learnt, not passed in drawl
Or at least in sound be sight
Only then can words be right

And in vision fullness too
Should I remember words from you
For why to learn if not to love
Seek out another voice

I take no steps or lay no tracks
If my heart in feeling lacks
Announce a rhyme, in verse embark
Only where in soul is marked

Each poem should make of little much
And if no ring of truth as such
Cannot be said a million times
Is no more good than clanging chimes

26.

Tony and His Shoes (1988)

§ But He Knew It Was True

Sometimes people thought Tony was just a poor boy without shoes. They would say to him, “Dear boy, don’t you have some shoes to wear?”

Sometimes Tony could find his shoes; sometimes he couldn’t. Sometimes, when he had his shoes on, people would say, “Oh, those are very nice shoes!. Tony, what a man you are becoming!”

Growing up was so funny. Tony laughed when people talked about him like this. But he knew it was true.

Sometimes he tried to forget. Perhaps that is why he left his shoes on the rocks by the lake — where he now could not find them.

§ Let Your Tears Be Sweet

Tony remembered how he had acted when he discovered his shoes were missing. It had rained and the shoes were gone. Tony went back five times each day for six days; then he went back six times each day for five days. Even so, he did not find them there.

On the twelfth day Tony did not go to look. This time he went to wait. He went and said, “I will wait for the shoes to float back to me. They will! They will!” He knew the shoes would come back.

Tony waited by the water. It was hot, then it was cold, and then Tony cried.

That was when the flowers talked to Tony. “Tony, why do you cry?” “Your tears are like rain, but they are salty. They are like water from the ocean. Let your tears be sweet.”

Tony did not think he just answered: “Flowers, I need to find my shoes.”

And the flowers said, “You will find your shoes, Tony. We will help you. But we need you to take us home.”

Tony took the flowers home.

§ Give Us to Someone Who Needs Us

When Tony got home he slept. He slept like it was forever — but when he woke up it was like only half of forever. Everyone else was still sleeping like it was forever. Tony was the only one awake.

The house sounded so quiet. Tony stayed in bed. He put his hands behind his head. His feet came out from under the covers. They were saying they couldn’t sleep without the shoes either.

Suddenly Tony remembered the flowers and looked over and said, “Flowers, you are beautiful!”

The flowers said, “Remember our promise Tony. But there is one other thing.”

Tony opened his mouth and his eyes. His whole face was a surprise. He jumped out of bed and took a big breath.

“What, flowers, what!?” — Tony begged them to tell.

And the flowers said, “Be quiet Tony. We cannot speak to you again. But we can speak to anyone you find who will listen.”

The flowers said, “You will find someone, Tony. Give us to someone who needs us.”

§ Who Needs the Flowers?

Tony now had both a secret and something to do. He started to say to himself, “Who needs the flowers?” “Who has lost

something?” “The flowers can only help two people at once.”

He talked to himself this way two times a day for ten days, then four times a day for five days, then ten times a day for two days. He would wake up and ask, “Who needs the flowers more than I do?”

Then, in the same way he had decided to wait for his shoes at the lake instead of looking, he decided to just wait for someone to give the flowers to. That was when Tony started to learn the language of flowers.

Tony’s eyes started to say without asking, “Will you take these flowers.” Tony even started to look like a flower himself. He became sweet like a flower — silent and there for to see.

Tomorrow would be a special day.

§ I Will Talk to the Flowers

When Tony got up this day, he knew he still needed help.

And today he learned from where it would come.

This day, when no one was looking, a little girl came to Tony and said, “Yes Tony, I saw you asking. I will take your flowers. I need them too.”

Tony said, “Thank you. How are you? Did you know I’ve lost my shoes?”

She said, “I will help you get your shoes back. I will talk to the flowers.” ... And, with Tony still there, she asked the flowers where Tony’s shoes were.

And the flowers said, “We do not know, but we can ask the soil.”

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil where Tony’s shoes were.

And the soil said, "I do not know, but I can ask the trees."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees where Tony's shoes were.

And the trees said, "We do not know, but we can ask the wind."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind where Tony's shoes were.

And the wind said, "I do not know, but I can ask the clouds."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds where Tony's shoes were.

And the clouds said, "We do not know, but we can ask the rain."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain where Tony's shoes were.

And the rain said, "I do not know, but I can ask the river."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain who asked the river where Tony's shoes were.

And the river said, "I do not know, but I can ask the lake."

So she asked the flowers who asked the soil who asked the trees who asked the wind who asked the clouds who asked the rain who asked the river who asked the lake where Tony's shoes were.

And the lake said, "I'm glad you asked. Now you Tony, just listen."

§ And This is Their Strength

The lake continued: "I've been saving your shoes Tony. You still have a mission to accomplish, then you will have them."

“I need you to go to the four peoples. Meet them and make friends; they are my friends too.”

Tony listened.

“This is the story of the four people.”

“The first people have the strength of tradition. They know how they have done things for as long as they can remember. They do not need to question these things, and are from day to day at rest. Tomorrow does not trouble them. They laugh, cry, and work, and time passes, and this is their strength.”

“The second people have the strength of decision. Each person is a law by themselves. They move, try, fail, jump and run; they do what is best for themselves, and what they find they share with all. Theirs is to step into the future, and this is their strength.”

“The third people have the strength of listening; they hear the people that no one else can hear. They hear the old woman alone. They hear the man who is down. They hear the child who is lost and cannot come around. They hear the fish in the sea. They hear the bride not to be. They hear the blind and the deaf and the words not to see. And this is their strength.”

“The fourth people have the utmost respect for personal duty. ...”

“And this”, said the lake, “is their strength.”

§ Tony Lived with the Four Peoples

Tony went and lived with each of the four peoples in turn. He made friends with them all, and they were all his friends.

§ He Had the Shoes He Needed

The next day, it seemed, Tony went back to school. He did not worry about his shoes; he had the shoes he needed. He met the

same people at school that he had lived with in four lands. They were wearing different faces was all.

Tony remembered his friend Mr. Lake.

He also remembered the girl.

Now when Tony cried his tears were sweet.

