

The child could count to four or five and before it was very long he had reached the number ten. His mother taught him well, she taught him to dislike it. The boy wrote his numbers down, then he erased them, and placed the rewhitened sheet of paper on his pillow. He was destined to become a minor poet. All he needed was the ability to rest his head upon those crackling blank pages, and sleep-dream.

Uncle Williams

Uncle Williams pointed in the direction of the llamas' cage said he'd seen 'em in the war. I pointed to the lambs 'n asked him if he seen any of those. "Nope. They're common. But I been everywhere in my life. I traveled the Mongolian Sea and Oh the sights! The water there's extra wet so you don't need to take baths so often. Went for a week workin' on them greasy engines 'n my hands just a little smudgy. They got princes over there that go huntin' for elephants. That's all I know about llamas."

-- Stephen Hall

Attleboro, MA

Around Her Leg She Wore

She said the Prince had sent her
all the way from the castle
she'd come running
all that way

She said there was a war on
and asked me if I would
wear one of their roses

I said I would be pleased to
we both smiled as she pinned it on me

It was about a week later
when the gentlemen came from the firingsquad
of course I came away quietly
to here

Now I fully agree with them
a man must learn to die with dignity
and though they've a cruel job I see them
as essentially honorable men

And they've given me the time in this place
to work it all out in my head
and make peace with my past

Babysitter

man he says I always did
want to meet one of you college dudes
then horse lids his eyes and he puts his head
back on the top of the chair
the cigaret lolls in his mouth

he is 18 but looks 25
he has been in and out
of various joints since age 13
first time he eyeballed my books
as if they represented the ultimate heist
he is one of Blithering Jack's boys
quite paranoid and a potential danger
sometimes Jack drops him by
when the heat's after him
or he thinks they are

asleep he turns his head
and the cigaret begins to burn
the left shoulder of his shirt
the smoldering fire moves
like a slow eruption of acid
in a vial of very pure water
he has a tattoo that is
being progressively revealed
as the shirtsleeve crumbles away
and I watch wondering what it is

he wakes with a rising slapping
motion and gets things under control
then he looks at me and I
walk over pretending
I had fallen asleep too
there is a terrible angry black skull
perched on angry crab-colored flesh
with a turquoise inscription below
which reads DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR