

WR:86

Flowers in a Tin Can

A lone
semin illiterate
whiskey drinking
tobacco spitting
you dont expect an old
man
like John Wentworth
to have flowers on his
wobbly table
zinnias
in a tomato juice can with
the label on it

Best regards,
Wilma McDaniel

FLOWERS IN A TIN CAN

Alone

semi illiterate

whiskey drinking

tobacco spitting

you don't expect an old

man

like John Wentworth

to have flowers on his

wobbly table

zinnias

in a tomato juice can with

the label on it

-- Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

ASSESSMENT

Big Mama Porter knows
people
she shifted her weight on
swollen feet
looked down Persimmon Road
and saw John Healy walking
with his cane
A faint smile rippled across
her banana colored face
and she murmured approvingly
That old man
John Healy
is a pure peaceable fellow
he don't want nothing that
don't belong to him
just enough ground to walk
on
just enough air to breathe

OLD TIMES OF 1950

The girls walked by
two and two
giggling with the only thing
they had
the gift of life

and a package of Wrigley's
spearmint chewing gum
given by one trailing boy

AFTER A DIVORCE

Harley Blake said
I don't know what I thought
it was
but it certainly wasn't
anything like this
freedom
from what
and he dumped the pancake
flour mess
into the sink
washed it down the drain
and went to Sambo's for
breakfast

ULTIMATUM

Lupe's family
had a fit
but she enlisted in the
army anyway
She said, I'm old enough
to vote
and make my own choice
and if you don't want me
coming home
on furlough
just say so
Everyone kept stone silent
watched her close
the suitcase
and zipper up her life

CELEBRATING THE FOURTH OF JULY

When Rosa Valdez cashed
her welfare check
her ten year old son Rudy

informed her outside the bank

Part of this money is mine

you wouldn't get it

if you didn't have me

and Rosa doled him out

enough dinero

to buy five hundred giant

fire crackers

He threw them all over town

caused two serious fires

but he got his money's worth

MEMORIALS

Johnny Grayhorse

you talk so much about
the subject.

I agree that you
should have a proper
monument

after you take early leave of us.

A mound of earth at

Broken Arrow

among your ancestors
would be fitting.

Even a G.I. marker

Vietnam-simple
would be adequate
but don't allow this mounting

pile of beer cans
to become your pyramid

SURPRISES

Mary Washington reads
the obituaries
with liturgical solemnity
Cella Pointer
216 New Day Apartments
killed February 22, 1982
pauses
on George Washington's
birthday
age twenty three
she was young, Lord, Lord
survived by sixteen brothers and
sisters in Detroit, Michigan
Lord, nobody knewed that and
a grandmother in Columbus,
Georgia

HOMICIDE

Cella Pointer
had eyes in the back of
her head
to catch
admiring
glances
She rolled them backward
one time
too often at someone else's
husband

THE JESTER

I don't know why
Uncle Bartis Duke made
so much fun of Indians
their braids
and Saturday red satin
shirts
When all anyone had to do
was
look at his Bull Durham
face
and see Choctaw tobacco
running down his chin
Guess he wanted people
to think he was pure English
like his Grandpa Duke
up there in the Odd Fellows
Cemetery

THE COLLECTOR

Rosa Menchaca's big
front window is full of
bottles
fat green Vin Rosé
clear Almaden
brown glass Coors
some tall ketchup and
Seven Up
People dump choice bottles
on her lawn
she picks them up happily
makes room

GROOMING

No matter how hard
things got for Mavis Witt
she put that eye makeup on
blue when she graduated
from Fresno State University
brown for the job she got that
very summer
mourning purple when her
young brother put a gun to
his head
and pulled the trigger

TRAVEL

You may not believe this
but I know a Portugee boy
from a Valley family who was
disinherited for writing poetry
singing songs
playing a guitar to anyone who would
listen
took to bumming around
got really acquainted with the world

HORTICULTURE

Plastic poinsettias
have been cultivated
enlarged
and improved so much
that Ruthie has a row of them
on her sink
forgets
and gives them each
a drink of water
now and then

HABITS

Bobby Wayne Dike
changed his name to B. W. Dike
after he graduated
from law school in San Francisco
more credible
he told his mom and dad when
he came home
in a three piece suit that they
financed
but he went to the kitchen and
ate beans from a pot on the stove
I came in the back door
and caught him
before he could put the mixing spoon
down

GOING AWAY COSTUME

He was thrifty
and loved old clothes
friendly
battered Stetsons
patched overalls
and mudcaked boots
all his ninety years

I know he would

fume today

probably cuss

if he could see himself

wearing

this pristine white shirt

and knotted

choking tie

the suit alone

cost more than the 100

acres

he spent his life tending

PHONIES

They would deny it
to the last breath
but I know that Clarene and
Alta Mae
are ashamed of
their old uncle
Why would they send him
to Raley's house
to play dominoes all day
every time that skinny
lockjawed
optometrist comes to visit
After all
Uncle Wiley raised them
put ham and blackeyed
peas
in their stomachs when
their parents died of flu
in 1918

QUESTION

He said All I have
is a patch
of pumpkins
and there ain't no
price for them
Do you think the
constable might
report me
as a lunatic
if I give a
Halloween party
in the field
Let people pick
their own
jack-o-lanterns
and play their own
tricks

EQUALS

Melvin is a way too
big
for only eleven years
wearing his daddy's pants
he hunts Easter eggs
with all the little kids
hogs
a fistfull in one coat pocket
a fistfull in the other
reminds himself
be careful Melvin
don't break no eggs
cracks
a red one on his head
eats it in two bites

SPENDTHRIFT

Fidelia Montero
can not tolerate a garment
more than two months
During Lent
she cleaned her closets
nine consecutive days
Finally
her husband Manuel asked
Wife
are you making a novena
each day
you offer something up
a pile of dresses
a heap of shoes
a box of costume jewelry
When
will my prayers be
answered

STYLE

Armondo has style
when he goes for his food
stamps
he wears a purple velvet
jacket
with a well known label
Word has it on Persimmon
Road
he stole it from a men's
store
while his friends distracted
the clerk

MISER

I saved my time
in a broken cup
a second here
a minute there when
I could have called
your name
to see the iris and
hear thunder
but I dropped them all
among the buttons
and bobbypins until
I had a wasted year

IGNORANCE

Entering town
a sign reads
Tulare: The Town With A Smile
Hard to understand the grim
fastwalking people
coming out of Wells Fargo Bank
Maybe they haven't read the
giant message
on the billboard

THEN AND NOW

We thought of teachers
as godly creatures
just below
Abraham Lincoln in rank
wise
temperate
disciplined
and always able to give
the right answer
to every question
What in the world
would we have done
with Ellery Hoskins
who knows
absolutely nothing
about anything
least of all himself

NIGHTMARES

Masuka said her
husband
Okie Beavers
used to dream of
his mother's pies
after they married
in Japan
and talk aloud
apple, peach
chocolate meringue
Once he got
out of bed calling
Mama
give me another
piece of custard pie

SOCIAL CLIMBER

Rilla May is always deep
into something
that she feels will make her
more important
in small town eyes
bread dough sculpture
origami
finger painting with
left over tempera from the
school
where she works as a
teacher's aide
Last week she set her
apartment on fire
melting paraffin to make
Christmas candles
told the firemen who doused
the blaze
I'm going into making
ceramic jewelry
not so much mess involved

CREDIBILITY

Sylvia Blake

is a flaming woman

with a wild tongue

but she has never lied

to me

so I believe her implicitly

when she declares that

two giant angels with

eyes like automobile

headlights

pulled her from the river

when she was going down

for the last time

Credibility

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Conversion

He wore a Palm Beach suit
and had one of those exotic
homemade first names
Karadamus
and the surname Boley

from a plantation past
A big black man
with a sweet spirit
and a great voice
who sang He gives me
peace

in the midst of the storm
until the TV cameraman
with his agnostic
earphones
began to jump and

stomp the floor
and cry out
Thank you Jesus
These freaks have been
right all along

CONVERSION

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and had one of those exotic
homemade first names

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DAY AFTER A DIVORCE

Cleaning out the bureau

by dumping its contents

on the king size bed

Rilda saw hundreds of

recipes

clipped and saved since

she was twelve years old

some so crackly thin and

yellowed

they broke when handled

Her mother had maintained

a girl can't learn to cook

too young

it makes the family's health

and happiness

keeps them all together

DECEMBER 28th

I fear that Christmas
is slipping away from us
The little tree
is under sentence of death
by burning
in the alley
Its ornaments seem anxious
to hide away in the attic
for another year
The terra cotta Infant
in the creche
has just pushed away
a long string of tinsel
that fell across His face

DIET FOR ONE DAY

Uretha said I don't
care about tomorrow
what happens to
my diabetes
I've got to have a plate
of enchiladas with
a lot of cheese
a lot of cheese
I don't think one plate
will do it
figure on two

INSIGHT

Washing their car
Manny Gordon asked
his wife
Hon, what do you see
on this street
and she having learned
to read his thoughts said
Kids, dogs, junked cars
garbage, TV antennae
I see folks who have come
to the end of the line
with a one way ticket

JARED'S CANDY

Easy on old gums
the fat glass bowl is
always full of little
jellybeans
colored treats for
his blurring eyes
in red
white
pink
purple as in Easter
He stirs them around
and always finds
one bean of licorice black

LIBRARY

Mayda Greatbear
speaks slowly out of the
classic books of her life
I turn away
better than before
leaving a library housed
in flesh and blood
with a facade of gingham

BIRTHDAY GIFT

A Jean Naté bottle
sits on the coffee table
in a package that is far
more intriguing than the
cologne itself
three plump cherubs blowing
I didn't know
what time it was
out of golden horns

BATTERED STETSONS

Biff stood and cried
down his silk shirt
before we put
him on the plane for Dallas
He held his father's
old battered Stetson in a
plastic bag
said that was all he really
wanted
from the family estate

CHANGE OF CLOTHING

Johnny Bumalog
wears purple silk shirts
and smokes cigars
Keeps fighting cocks
and takes bets on them
biggest numbers game in the
entire Valley
been convicted a flat eleven
times
his expensive lawyer couldn't
get him off this time
He had to go to jail
and wear their drab blue denim

A FATHER'S INSIGHT

Mary McDade is easily
the most willowy
creamy skinned
long lashed beauty in our
town where pretty girls are
numerous
She shocked the populace
on Tuesday
when she announced with
no fanfare
I am leaving to join the
Order of Mother Teresa of Calcutta
Her father said
That's it
She will never change her
mind

STOOD UP

The meeting place
was Taco Bell
the time agreed was seven
at a quarter until
Teddy felt in his bones
what he had felt since morning
the Purvis boys had ditched him
gone on to Bakersfield

The sinking
in his stomach
called for more than a burrito
but he forced one down
and wanted to cry
ashamed when two hot tears
squeezed past his will
and mingled with pinto beans

SELECTING CHRISTMAS CARDS

I like a poor
simple card
hard to find nowadays
 recycled paper
 if possible
Christmas distilled
to the fact of The
 Incarnation

VISITORS

O, God
I can tell you right now
the men
from Harvard
Yale
 and yes, Cornell
look very poor to me
Will you please run that
other group past me once
again
the big Texans in their
sheep lined dreams

WARS

Okie Beavers lost
one arm in Korea
married a Japanese
doll
while he was going
through rehab
You wouldn't believe
that his only son
Yukio Beavers
lost both arms
in Vietnam

HEADGEAR

Winter is coming
and neighborhood
bets
are running high
Will Winona wear
a knitted cap
a mortarboard
a nun's cowl
A child who rang
her doorbell
at Halloween insists
she will
wear a witch's hat

WISHES

Miriam said All I want
in this world is
a white
rabbit coat
Melvin groaned and
reminded her
That is what you said
when I went in debt
for the imitation
squirrel

A WIDOW'S GAME

Our street is full of
one woman's voice
telling everyone how noble
her husband was
now that he is dead .

BARTER SYSTEM

A deaf person would
give the entire
silent universe
to hear what I am
hearing at this precise moment
The chattering
and rustling in our
dry rosebush
of 13 sparrows

JANUARY PASSAGE

The Christmas poinsettia
has dropped all but
seven determined leaves
The fallen
lie crisping on the
floor
until time to vacuum
up the old year

EXPENSES

Early rain
set them back
so strawberries are
expensive this year

So is life
at ninety seven

It costs old Della
so much pain
to sit up in bed
and hold the carton
of glistening fruit
and smile at her daughter

She manages to say
They sure are nice
and uses every cent
of energy
in her pocketbook

OBESE NEIGHBOR

It hurts me
to sit here on my porch
and eat ice cream
and watch Vonella on the
bench next door
I wish that she would go
to TOPS
or WEIGHT WATCHERS or do
something

She weighs three hundred
pounds
with a beautiful face that
is flushed peony
by the lingering summer
heat
Jammed into a sundress from
Lane Bryant
she shakes baby powder from
a can
and smooths around her neck
and her galled armpits
I wish she would do something

POOR STREET JOURNAL

Dogs and kids are more visible
than usual
Summer is definitely here
a blight has struck our only tree
the Modesto ash
that would have sheltered the little
friends of Jesus
Agriculture officials
say the blight was caused by dampness
and the condition will cure itself

LITANY

Rollo is a gentle man
and never cusses
even when his neighbor's
seven dogs
sweep through the alley
every morning
and knock over his garbage
can
just makes a weeping sound
and intones
If I had a gun
I'd kill me seven Mexican
dogs
sure as I am living

RITUAL

Riley and Betty Lou get along well
which surprised both families
considering their differences
which are considerable
Their greatest bond is pride in cars
they wash and scrub
and spray and wipe and wax
their separate Volkswagens in the driveway
each Saturday
like observing the Sabbath

ROYALTY

Bobby Hicks told the other
kids on Persimmon Road
I am gonna be your king
and he held court
in a royal cloak of purple
an old bathrobe
tied with a silver giftwrap
string
Tapped his friends with a
fairy wand
from the school play
turned Nettie Luke into a
princess
so beautiful
her buck teeth didn't show

MESSENGER

José painted a blue
angel
on the side of the labor
camp building
used to go out there and
sit and think
after work in the fields
One evening
the angel spoke to him
José
Leave this place tonight

PRISONER

Oh my Lord
Them nurses
taken my pulse
and they taken my
pants
and left me here
in jail

-- Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Tulare CA

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by

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