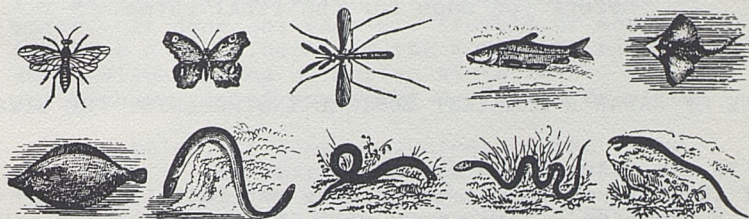


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ONE OF THE WORLD'S FIVE MOST EXCITING PROFESSIONS

"There are only four jobs in the world worth having: an actor, a rock star, a jet fighter pilot and President."

-- Tom Cruise's flight instructor

To these, Tom, you may add a fifth:  
poet.

As you leave the house  
on a very daring and very devilish  
mission, a small crowd waiting across the street  
sets off a cheer and overwhelms you  
for your autograph.

At a reading, a shot  
sings past your ear and you tactfully retreat  
behind the lecturn.

Danger?

You are used  
to it. No one knows the risks  
a poet runs.

You walk a tight and slippery  
metaphor but your fans see only the grace,  
the bravura, the incredible act  
of balance.

It takes guts to be a poet.



It takes more than talent and a pretty face.

Tom, you have to work hard, you need drive  
and charisma and a kind  
of gallant ruthlessness.

When you reach the heights,  
the future fits the palm of your hand.

The climb  
was hard but the view is worth it: the earth  
spins below, dizzying and brilliant, as you loop  
up once

before you zoom for the final rhyme.

# ONE OF JAPAN'S EARLIEST MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, THE BIWA

In the illustrated scroll  
of The Tale of Genji, we see the man bent  
over the biwa's figgy form with its two  
crescent eyes bobbing up back-to-back  
in a pulpy sky, mirroring precisely  
the arch of the man's brows, but more seductive.  
The woman's face crouches in a crack

of her kimono, so sleek  
and so fat, a soybean popping from its husk,  
beanlike in expression, beanlike in beauty.

Persian poets invariably fit  
the lover's face with a moon, but here I will  
praise the man's face for its mooniness, stuck fast  
to the pasty shoulder like one bit

of rice cake mounted upon  
another. Here in the twentieth century  
we have learned to smile at the biwa's buzzing,  
rather lemony notes, and as slips  
glide like fingerlings through your grasp, I observe  
how, even though the biwa's sound-holes were meant  
to copy human brows, yours eclipse

the biwa's eyes in the way  
they magnify your laughter. You do not fret  
when your touch loses its foothold on a fret, but  
something mimic and wry monkeyshines  
your face, gladdening me that the waxed and wooden  
ways of love are of the past. Your fingers plunk!  
and plunk! just so, on the silky twines

in the same way that you pluck  
my chords. Then, when the song is done and we lose