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Oh! Golden Round!

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Oh! Golden round!
Rippled sponge-bark lies all-pungent,
Stinging-sweet smell,
Rich!
Fine linen undergarments
Torn, laver by loosened laver,
In silk-ribbon tatters
Ghostly white!
Half-moon brothers
Perfectly matched and laid
In one unending row
Each different,
All the same!
(Turn you so, all in,
Facing common heart,
Or each outward,
A smile to every compass-point?)
And yet, touched rightly,
Fall you one from another
In gentle beauty of clinging films,
Separating sheernesses:
Two halves, and then
Each, smiling, lies alone,
Golden,
Moist-but-not-moist
In my gray-pink palm!
Oh! Mystery
Of tiny juice-sacs made of water-skin
Packed and bundled
In misty cocoon-silk
Tumbled and plucked,
Unbroken,
From each ruptured crescent-case!
But oh! and flavorbust!
Bittermellow
Tartsweet
Coolwarm and
Fullfresh!
A golden glow of nose and mouth, 
Alive! 
So lived you all these many years, 
Summer, winter, spring? 
So rolled you on shelf-slopes, 
Sat you in tins 
Snowy bins 
And lattice-crates, 
All counted, weighed, delivered 
By steel things 
To eyes and lips who knew you so well 
They knew you not at all? 
And spring you forth on trees 
With roots in this same earth 
And leaves in this same sky 
In lands of constant summer-sun? 
My father knew you--

What madness? 
What madness drove my father on? 
Away?

Here, great gleaming metal beasts 
Bear men through air and sea and space; 
Their voices, their faces cross the nothingness! 
Smooth and shining stand palaces 
Where rivers run and breezes blow and stars shine 
and countless privies sparkle 
--indoors!-- 
and man makes summer spring and winter fall!
Here, men live together 
Against the stifling solitude of wilderness 
And sing and dance and laugh and eat and talk and work 
and shout their aliveness to one another!
Here, tiny, windowed boxes do in half-a-breath 
What my mother did for half-a-life 
On smoky fire and deep-grooved cutting-board! 
Here, men work quietly from dawn to midday 
Or midday to dusk--

And save the softness of their hands 
For touching feeling holding life 
As children, always. 
And the magic here 
Is brighter, quicker, more alive 
Than my father ever told!

What madness? 
What madness drove my father on? 
Away?

There, Winter grips the land; 
Behind frail walls, fragile fires they huddle 
From snows and blasts, 
And in the warmer winter-of-the-sun, 
When coldness descends into the Earth 
And hearts of trees 
And gathers into hail-clouds, 
They dug and scratched in fields 
And fought the very hardness of the frozen earth 
For food. 
There, loneliness laid silence upon the homestead 
Hard drudgery laid age upon their heads 
Cold deprivation laid despair upon their hearts 
The world they loved became an enemy! 
Young, oh! young! my mother died, 
Her life worn down with scrubbing pots and 
spinning warps and 
weaving cloth and 
washing floors and 
baking bread and 
churning butter and 
hard-milked cows.

There lies my father, 
Restless still, beneath a ton of dirt, 
Beside the house built of young hands and 
Beside the field into which he poured his 
A libation to the thirsty soil.
And save the softness of their hands
For touching feeling holding life
As children, always.
And the magic here
Is brighter, quicker, more alive
Than my father ever told!

What madness?
What madness drove my father on?
Away?

There, Winter grips the land;
Behind frail walls, fragile fires they hid
From snows and blasts,
And in the warmer winter-of-the-sun,
When coldness descends into the Earth
And hearts of trees
And gathers into hail-clouds,
They dug and scratched in fields
And fought the very hardiness of the frozen Earth
For food.
There, loneliness laid silence upon their lips,
Hard drudgery laid age upon their heads and shoulders,
Cold deprivation laid despair upon their hearts.
The world they loved became an enemy!
Young, oh! young! my mother died,
Her life worn down with scrubbing pots and
spinning warn and
weaving cloth and
washing floors and
baking bread and
churning butter from
hard-milked cream!

There lies my father,
Restless still, beneath a ton of dirt,
Beside the house built of young hands and stone,
Beside the field into which he poured his life:
A libation to the thirsty soil.
So in the dull midmorning I stood,
Leaning on his rough-handled spade,
His image in my mind:
  Tangled spider-web stuck to his skull,
  Bony shoulders jabbed forward from his bed,
  Glazed eyes lost in their wrinkled pits,
  Withered fingers clutching, twitching,
  Pursed and trembling lips sucking, sucking at the
  woolen blanket of death.

So died my father.
  Sweet-herb boiled on wood-fire,
  Flesh reddened and rotted with sick-sweet musk,
  And then the body sighed its last lost relaxation--
  Its hope of long years--
  In bitter stink of urine
  Sharp reek of last loose stool
  Stale odor of final out-breathing:
  Jetsam before the final foamy channel--
  Beyond, the vast calm sea.

Then, the warm smells of salt sweat and dank earth,
And I stood with his grave-dirt on my hands.
By noon, they were at last alone,
All one,
The two buried lovers,
The sister who died before I knew what sister was
And the land.

What madness?
What madness drove my father on?
Away?

Here, five minutes from one's bed,
Foodsellers wait for hungry men
Sixty minutes out of every hour.
Daytime they replace bought foods on shelves
  stack tins in gleaming pyramids
  stamp purple prices on boxtops.
Nighttime they sweep floors up narrow aisles
  stare out lettered windows for customers
  maybe watch the late-late show.

For a quarter anyone can buy a treasure
From Earth's other side,
Well-kept,
gently-handled,
Pure-packed,
Fresh-brought for his table and his ton
  Olives from Greece.
  Tea from China.
  Wine from Rome.
Rich, red meat tastes of life and stren
Smooth, brown chocolate melts in softne
Clear, amber whiskey tingles the mouth,
  throat, glows the mind.
But you, Royal Commoner!
King of Fruit!
Morning-sun plucked from tree-branch!
With all else,
Deprived of you was I!

What madness??
What madness drove my father on?
Away?
That coldness counselled him
To bring me into his dark world?

Here, where man is buffered from the ea
Here, where man is fed more richly than
Here, where man is served by machines a
Here, where man is cared for by the go
Here, where man is embraced by throngs
Here, where man is civilized and free,
Here will I bear my sons,
The daughters of my loins.
And, golden fruit,
They shall ever know you!

What madness?
What madness drove my father on?
Away?
For a quarter anyone can buy a treasure
From Earth's other side,
Well-kept,
gently-handled,
Pure-packed,
Fresh-brought for his table and his tongue.
  Olives from Greece.
  Tea from China.
  Wine from Rome.
Rich, red meat tastes of life and strength.
Smooth, brown chocolate melts in softness on the tongue.
Clear, amber whiskey tingles the mouth, warms the
  throat, glows the mind.
But you, Royal Commoner!
King of Fruit!
Morning-sun plucked from tree-branch!
With all else,
Deprived of you was I!

What madness??
What madness drove my father on?
Away?
That coldness counselled him
To bring me into his dark world?

Here, where man is buffered from the earth,
Here, where man is fed more richly than by the earth,
Here, where man is served by machines and tools,
Here, where man is cared for by the goodly state,
Here, where man is embraced by throngs of other men,
Here, where man is civilized and free,
Here will I bear my sons,
The daughters of my loins.
And, golden fruit,
They shall ever know you!

What madness?
What madness drove my father on?
Away?

/ Steve Garwood /