

Eastside Works and Days

Charles Shere to his Grandchildren

Christmas 1998

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Song to Sunrise.

Already in my shorts, I rise
to verify the morning skies.

My socks, untouched by human hands,
Slip on my feet like rubber bands.

Then I pick up yesterday's shirt
Where it lies rumped in the dirt,
Button it tight, draw on my pants,
And stand on one foot, in a trance—

What can be next? Ah yes! My shoes!
But are they mine, or yours, or whose?
At last I'm dressed, and greet the day.
It's hard. There is no other way.

Breakfast.

I want my coffee in a bowl,
With heated milk, but not a roll.
My toast, however it is made,
Must always come with marmalade

I'll start a morning that is cold
With Bog-Man's cereal, stern and bold.
If it's a Sunday, I'll play host
To pancakes, omelet, or French toast.

Perhaps one morning out of ten
I'll have an egg, straight from the hen.
With it, some bacon, curled up tight.
I like it thus. It is my right.

The Morning's Work.

Then I sit down—it sounds grotesque—
And spend the morning at my desk.

The words come, several at a time,
At measured pace, and all in rhyme.
I stare at my computer screen
And wonder what on earth they mean.

I wonder how the words will look
If I should put them in a book,
And whether folks will find them there,
And, if they do, whether they'll care.

Or if they'll throw them, if they tire
Of reading them, into the fire.

Elevenes.

Eleven! Time to have our tea.
I hear sweet Lindsey call to me
And gold-crowned sparrows out the door,
And frogs, and hummingbirds, and more—

Whether it's raining or there's sun,
I don't think there is anyone
With whom I'd ever trade my place.
What could be nicer?

Well, if Grace

Or Simon, or Franny could call,
And play a game of bocce ball,
And let me win, that would be nice.

(I wouldn't need to win but twice.)

The Meal at Mid-Day.

A bit of reading; then our lunch.
What might it be? I have a hunch
It's bread and peanut-butter. Well,
That's no surprise.

You all could tell
Lindsey would make our lunch of that.
With it, a glass of milk. Non-fat
Of course, and several carrot sticks,
Maybe some celery, to fix
Whatever's wrong with me.

Oh, please,
I'd like a glass of wine, and cheese,
Salami, olives, sliced beef roast—
Grandfather, stop! Your health counts most.

Tea with the Girls.

Tea-time again! It's after four!
Emma and Eve are at the door,
The pot's a-boil, the cookies out,
And Lindsey calls me with a shout
To leave my work, if I am able,
Come and join them at the table.

Two pretty girls are all I need
To take me from the books I read;
Two clever girls, whose wit and grace
Always bring smiles to my face—
We're lucky, my sweet wife and I
To have such pleasures so close by.

The Feast of Love.

Four hundred cookbooks, maybe more,
Are there beyond the study door.

Full of curious things to eat,
They're shelved so orderly and neat
Reminding us of trips we've made,
Where we've eaten, where we've stayed
With friend or family, for a day
Or for a month — the Ile de Ré,
Prague, Tahiti, Holland, Rome,
Santa Fe, Verona — home
Is always with us.

Ah my friends!
Love, like our eating, never ends!

Outing.

If it's a Saturday, you know,
We might get in the car and go
Up Pine Flat Road, where Isabel
And Henry and their folks can tell
Us what they have been busy at,
Up in their mountainous Pine Flat,
With geese and goats and cats and dogs
And rattlesnakes and wild hogs.

Sometimes there's lots more people there.
But we can always find a chair,
A cup of coffee, or a bowl
Of soup, to freshen up our soul.

Nuisances.

Then we drive home. Lindsey does hate
to have to open our old gate!
We had to build the fence, it's clear,
To keep away the hungry deer.

What else can we complain about?
The driveway! Going in or out
The car sinks nearly out of sight.
It's bad by day; it's worse by night.

Then, when we're finally in the house,
We're not surprised to find a mouse,
Or else the telephone's gone dead.
It could be worse. Let's go to bed.

Envoi.

Thank God! I've finished with all this.
I send it with a Christmas kiss,
And hope that you will read it through.

You'll find some things that aren't quite true.
For instance, though you may not care,
I don't sleep in my underwear;
And, though it's rarely on my plate,
I like my bacon fairly straight.

Not all my writing's done in rhyme;
Nor do I work quite all the time.
I wish the girls came every day.
Sometimes they don't. That's just their way.

But I can tell you, now I'm done,
If I have fibbed, it was in fun.

Seven grandchildren!
Though you're far and near,
I wish you all a wonderful New Year.

much later...

Now fifteen years have slipped away—
Where they have gone, I couldn't say:
Nor how, nor why. Grandchildren, too,
Have moved far off, which makes me blue
When I think of it too much. Still,
It's good to see them grow up, fill
Their own maturing lives, and find
New children join those left behind
Those fifteen years ago and more.
Eight grandchildren, now, and one
Great-granddaughter has joined the fun.
We count our blessings gratefully,
Thankful to live in such a family.