

For My Mother

Who will, I trust, recall,

Instilling in her son a taste

For dreadful doggerel.

and thanks to my friends and family

for *not* laughing at my jokes.

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Nocturne

The sun has set. The orb of red

Is nestled in the West.

Awaken lazy slugabed

You’ve done your daily rest.

Uncurl that sleepy tentacle

And blink your purblind eye.

The muted wash of darkness will

Suffuse the evening sky.

The ﬂowers with fastened shutters droop

From supplicative stems.

Clandestine constellations group

To wink their stratagems.

Possess the Night! It is no crime

To seem to have things wrong:

To furl asleep at Matins time

And rise to Evensong.

Molluscotropism

A child with scientific bent

Can do this small experiment.

Performed with care it never fails.

THE AIM

To prove that plants need snails.

THE APPARATUS

All one needs

Are bell-jars, snails and legume seeds.

THE METHOD

Ensure both jars are clean.

Place each beside a growing bean.

A snail in one, its neighbour leave

As empty as an armless sleeve.

RESULT

The bean beside the vacant bell

Grows ramrod straight and vertical.

Its twin, the symbiotic bean,

In time towards the snail did lean.

CONCLUSION

Though snails hunt plants voraciously

The plants are happy.

Q.E.D.

Double Villanelle

I

The snail slides slow his burden slight,

His dappled dome of burnished gold,

Down darkened corridors of night.

Let lesser creatures curse the light

That softly fades as one gets old.

The snail slides slow his burden slight

And is no plaintiff ’gainst his plight

For grave and boundless space are cold.

Down darkened corridors of night

’Tis touch that surer is than sight

When twining lovers tend to hold.

The snail slides slow his burden slight

When if and but dissolve to might

And tales of trysting will be told

Down darkened corridors of night.

The days are long and far too bright

When twilight waxes, truths unfold;

Ihe snail slides slow his burden’s light

Down darkened corridors of night.

II

He ventures only out at night;

A predilection for the dark.

Inside his shell he has no light.

When black is there and rare is white

And desolate the dogs that bark

He ventures only out at night

When starshine shimmers silver-bright

And Moon’s a lantern in the park.

Inside his shell he has no light.

Avoiding every sun-drenched sight

He never hears the morning lark.

He ventures only out at night

When dearth of sunlight’s at its height

With crows of midnight screeching: “Kaark! ”

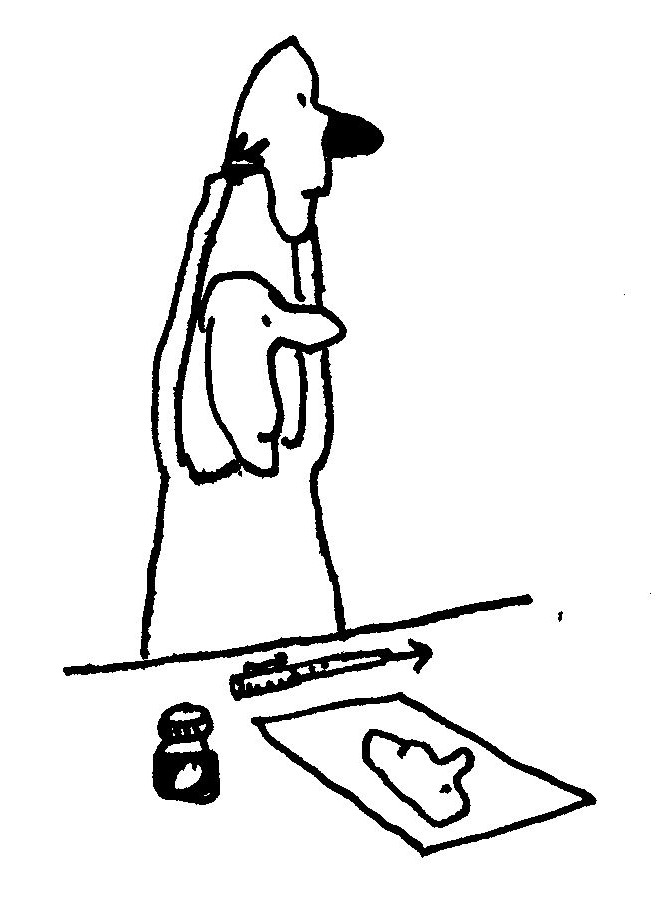
Inside his shell he has no light

Except, the gleam of smooth calcite;

The Sistine ceiling of his Ark.

He ventures only out at night

Inside his shell he has no light.



The Limacon GT: Road Test

*for Mac*

The traction’s great, the rubber grips

The road like pantihose hugs hips.

Suspension’s soft. I loved the ride,

An effortless and easy glide.

The headlights swivel and retract

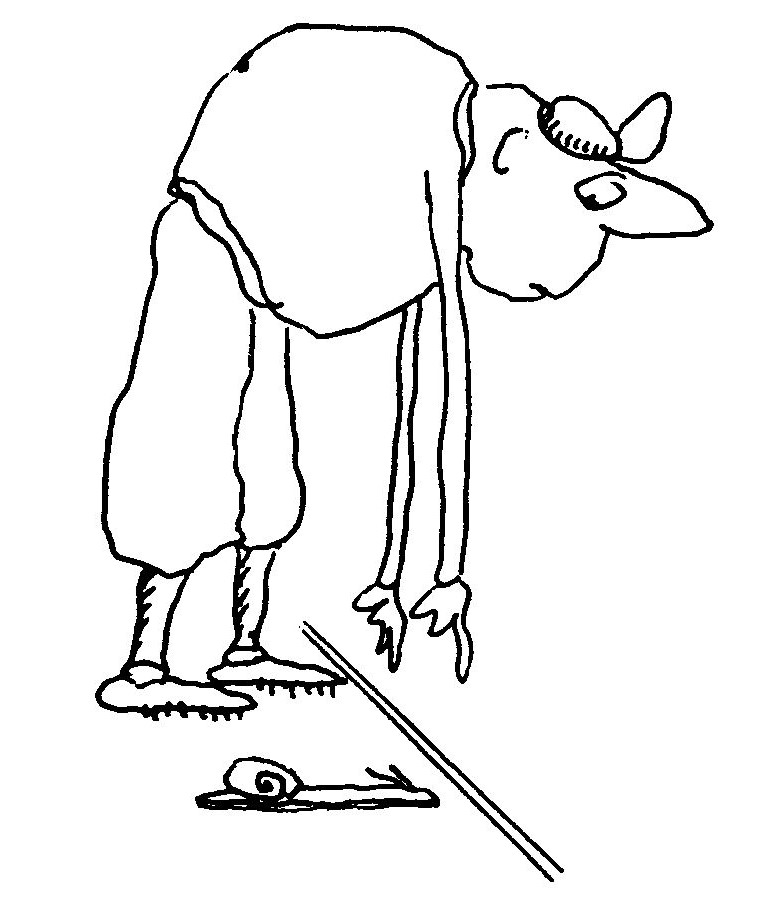
They cannot shatter on impact.

The form is streamlined, sleek and low.

Designed for speed and yet, so slow?

The slug flat out with monstrous power

Does comma one ﬁve Ks an hour



They’ve Nibbled the Leaves of my Napalm Tree

No snailophile would ever state

That gardening’s a Fascist trait

For gardeners must protect the ﬂowers

They’ve tended to for hours and hours.

But I feel sick each time I look

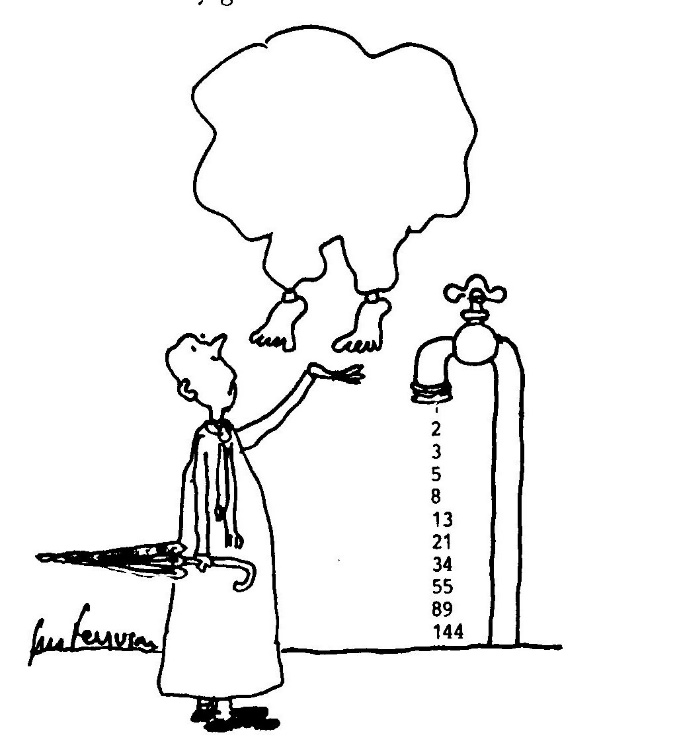
In any horticulture book

Which recommends for snailocide

That chemical: Metaldehyde.

Those gentle souls who talk to plants

Should surely give the snails a chance.



Snail Christmas Carol

While shepherds watched their ﬂocks by night

All seated on the ground

A humble snail came sliding by

And made a rasping sound.

“Desist!” cried he, for cruel intent

Had made them grasp their sticks

“Forewarning of great news I bring

To you unworthy hicks.

“When tomorrow night the evening star

Is just atop yon tree

An angel of the Lord will come

To prophesy to thee.”

A sudden streak. The snail was gone,

His trail an after-glow.

“A miracle!” one shepherd cried

“Methought the snail was slow.”

Tomorrow came and was today

Hie shepherds got cold feet

And arranged that another shift

The messenger would meet.

That is why the gospel speaks

About the “mighty dread”

For unprepared were the bunch

That watched that night instead.

The tidings told, the shepherds ran

Deserting they their sheep

Across the hills towards the Inn

Their witnessing to keep.

The sheep relaxed. The angel stood

Conversing with the snail:

“It seems to me, my little friend,

We planned to no avail.”

“For man forewarned is man alarmed

E’en glad news is a shock.

The shepherd that is born this day

Must tend a timid flock.”

A black and white drawing of a person with a mustache and a beard

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Irony

O poor, defenceless land-locked snail

Your dwelling’s dull, your casing’s frail

Your water cousin’s calcite shell

Protects his body very well,

But on the land I have a hunch

Men tramp on snails to hear the crunch

But even gardeners shudder: “Ugh!"

If they should step upon a slug.

Encumbered Knight enclosed in steel;

Your shield is your Achilles’ Heel!

Snail mail

In old Japan a border guard

With one wet horsehair wrote

In microscopic characters

His wife a poignant note.

He called his favourite carrier-snail

And pinned it to his shell

And said: “Oh steadfast Samurai

Depart for home. Go well!”

The message read: “Should I survive

Then disregard this brief

But if I die this missive will

Remind you of your grief.”

A picture containing linedrawing

Description automatically generated

Not The Fairway

*for Rupert*

There was a golfer with the will

But not the skill to win,

It took on average twenty putts

For him to reach the pin.

He practised hard, read all the books,

Took lessons from the pros

But keenness is a handicap

As any player knows.

One day he ﬂung his golfbag down

Beside the seventh hole

And wept with rage. A passing snail

Took pity on his soul.

“Don’t cry,” he said in soothing voice

“You weep to no avail,

For don’t despair your help is here

I’ll be your caddy snail.”

From that day on his game improved

He soon was down to scratch.

With technique that was shocking

He was winning every match.

His awkward putts would wobble wide

And then would slowly stroll

With magical volition

Towards the empty hole!

But now the truth must be revealed

And I will tell it all:

His friend the snail was painted white

To emulate the ball.

Slugavad Gita

*or Why the Snail is Slow*

Lord Sri Krshna saw a snail

In contemplative trance.

It swayed upon a lotus leaf

In graceful tantric dance.

Krshna watched as time slid by;

The snail seemed unaware

Of the presence of Divinity

Or maybe didn’t care.

Then Krshna spoke: “O Svami Snail

Your strange aloofness might

In view of my attendance

Be construed as impolite.

“Yet my teachings tell: What seems to b

Is just an outer shell

And you resonate with purity

And vibrate like a bell.

“But I must hasten on my way

Although you’ll think it odd

That time is of the essence

To an omnipresent God.

“So I leave you benediction

But I reprimand you too:

Because you did not Hare me

I’l1 never Hurry you.”

The Slug that Came to Camelot

*or How the Snail got its shell.*

Antennae drooping with respect

He said: “O King, Divine Elect,

Though crept have I from very near

It took the best part of a year.

I live beneath a nettle thatch

Beside the castle cabbage patch

But stirring rumours of a Quest

Disturbed my dull, diurnal rest

And caused my sluggish blood to race

And doubled up my rippling pace.

I am mere slime. A speck of soot.

Unworthy, humble stomach-foot

But though I quiver I’ll not quail

When searching for the Holy Grail.

King Arthur smiled and Guinevere

Was seen to shed a single tear.

“Go on bold slug your heart is right.

Disdained creature of the night

I’ll wager that you are as able

As any Knight at my Round Table.”

The slug stretched up, dim eyes aﬂame

“O test me Sire. I won’t bring shame

To thee, O kind and gentle King

Whose rightful praises minstrels sing.”

King Arthur drew Excalibur

And said: ‘I dub thee, noble sir,

With all the might of Camelot.

Arise Sir Slug of Escargot.

Sir Slug was fashioned armaments

To fit his minute measurements.

His mail and chain was ﬁnely wrought

By silver-smiths at Arthur’s court.

A thimble size cuirass was built

And round its edge inlaid in gilt

The Motto: PERFICTE CRAS

IN TARDITATE VERITAS. \*

A picture containing linedrawing

Description automatically generated

\* PERFECTLY TOMORROW, TRUTH IN SLOWNESS

Retreat

*for Nicky*

Cloistered here for contemplation,

The only noise I choose to hear

From those that buzz and fret my ear

Is wind in trees. Soft crepitation.

By monastic meditation

My mind is still -— a limpid well

My inner self shucks off its shell.

Sudden freedom from fixation.

And thoughts of you, my love, prevail

(I must avoid this rhyme with snail).

Diagram

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Two Snail Tanka

I

The snail, as twilight

Trims the sky, extends one eye.

A tentatively

Shy one, two, three, four, ﬁve, six,

seven, eight, nine tentacle.

II

Stuck in a traffic,

Jam: How pedagogical

To see a snail steam

Serene and placidly in

The opposite direction.



Resonance

I strolled along the lonely strand

With shells clamped to my ears.

I hoped to hear and understand

The Music of the Spheres.

I listened conchientiously

*(Il suono blu e serio)*

But all I heard, incessantly,

Was just the sea in stereo.

A drawing of a person

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Vigil, Witsands

*for Tom*

The tide rolls in.

The headland steams

Beneath a pall of drifting cloud

Out to sea (or so it seems).

I wait at the window

(With bread and jam)

To wave goodbye

To Swellendam.

Pebbles

*for Sandra*

Impetuous, anarchic sea.

Untamed, implacable and free

Or monstrous calm, no ﬂurried fuss

You seem to us ambiguous,

For Time-trapped men can seldom guess

Your harassed lack of Timelessness.

With currents, backwash, Spring and Neap

Your schedule’s diﬁcult to keep

And Mistress Moon just loves to see

Her serfs enchained by fealty.

But at the strand we can observe

Some evidence of cracking nerve:

A ﬂustered tide that rolls and kneads

Its oceanic worry-beads.

Ephemeris

The Master’s calligraphic hand

With brush of wind and wash of sea

While limning changing constancy

Erases footnotes from the sand.

Each breaking wave, a slap of zen,

Repeats this lesson every sough:

The Transient is quite enough.

The foaming crest is hanging ten.

When tide is high the seabirds soar,

But dauntless in the tide’s retreat

Extending careful etchers’ feet,

Swoop, stop and drop upon the shore

To sprint or strut and, inter alia,

Imprint their ﬂeeting Marginalia.

The plover — Plettenberg Bay

*for Gus Muller*

I think the bird is called a plover

Who seems, frenetically, to hover

Above the shore in search of cover.

But needle eyes espy the feet,

The spindle shanks so deft and neat

That pirouette and sprint the beat

He plies between the sea and land

A crazy crisscross of the sand.

A hurried, frantic saraband.

At earth and water’s interface

With silent movie jerky pace

He lifts impatience to a state of grace.

Bird Watcher

Invisible to the casual eye,

Well camouﬂaged and very shy,

I spied it in its thicket nest.

The black “H” marking on its breast —

Front-jointed legs — grey dappled coat —

A lateral beak. I made a note

To add this species to my list:

An Urban Ornithologist!

A Few Haiku

1.

CHAMELEON

Cautious

With his delicate clawses.

Hesitates.

Before he pauses.

2.

Sporting springtime buds,

Logs trucking to the sawmill

Hopeless optimists!

3.

At night my neighbour’s

Cicada is this stridulating

Typewriter.

Monday in Eden

A gardening lady came to tea

And said, between her sipping:

“That lovely Monday-morning tree!

I’d like to take a clipping.”

Its foliage is fabulous

And varies with the clime.

To weather it’s impervious;

Like drought or wind or rime.

This paradigm to peach and fem,

So pleasing to the eye,

The seasons visit each in tum:

Our perennial Twirldry.

Now Adam bore one leaf of ﬁg

And Eve, I think, wore three.

They simply tweaked a clothespeg twig

And four fell from the tree.

This useful garden washing rack

Which decorates my premises

Can trace its antecedents back

To Chapter Three in Genesis.

The Myth of Vicarus

Upturned was every head to watch

Two leaf-green doves in ﬂight.

They soared above the cabbage patch\_

The Cabbage Brothers Wright.

Transmogriﬁed from plant to bird

They tumbled through the blue

And every cabbage strained its roots

To get a better view.

“At last!” they cried “They’ve broken free

The fetters of the Ground.

If they can do it so can we!”

Then came a rushing sound;

On tiptoe every cabbage thrashed

Its leaves with fiendish force.

In vain, of course, some dust was raised

But none budged from its source.

But, the hurricane the effort caused

Surged upward through the air

Catching Icarus and Daedalus

Completely unaware.

Green wings were torn to tatters

Two hearts came crashing down

And all that really matters

Smashed senseless on the ground

The moral of this tragic tale

Is taught in every patch:

Ordained amongst us some must ﬂy

The rest are blessed to watch.

The Sap Rising

The insurrection in the breeze

Is whispered softly to the trees

Who agitate their green-gloved fists

Like apathetic anarchists.

Chameleons in camouﬂage,

Intent on subtle sabotage,

Advance on dialectic feet

To politicise branch elite.

The propaganda pigeons coo:

“Uhuru . . . Uhuru . . . Uhu . . .”

But all in vain. Suburban twigs

Are bourgeois, fascist, kulak pigs!



Cyclops

*for Bruce*

The dusk like gauze is falling

The day is fading fast

And homeward I am crawling

In hope that light will last.

As remnant shots of daylight

Are shuttled through night’s loom

I pedal apprehensive

Beneath the waxing gloom.

Myopic in the twilight

I peer from left to right

As cars from all directions

Scud blind towards the night.

Ecologists of the human race

List this amongst your theses:

That Cyclists of the Crepuscule

Are endangered as a species.

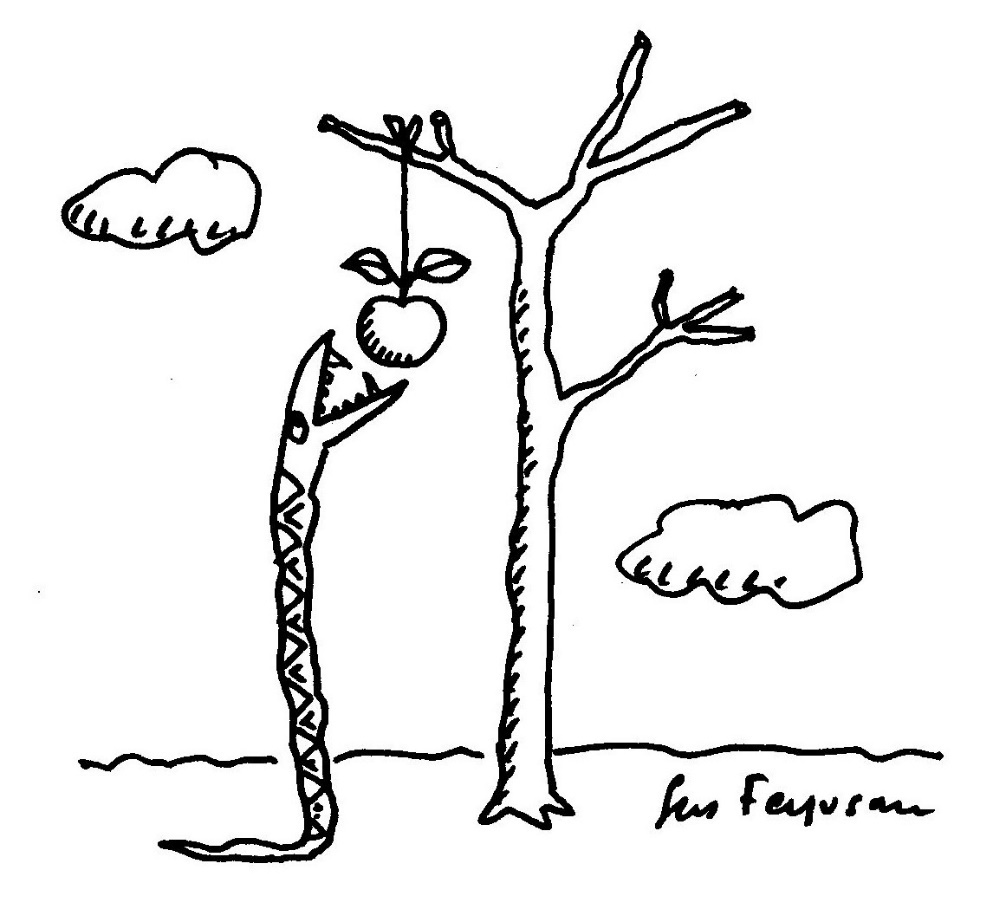
Dallas Ditchwater

I wonder what Miss Ellie, Jock

And all the rest are doing.

I will ﬁnd out on Tuesday night

It’s called: Compulsive Ewing.



Riddle

My first is Inferno in one.

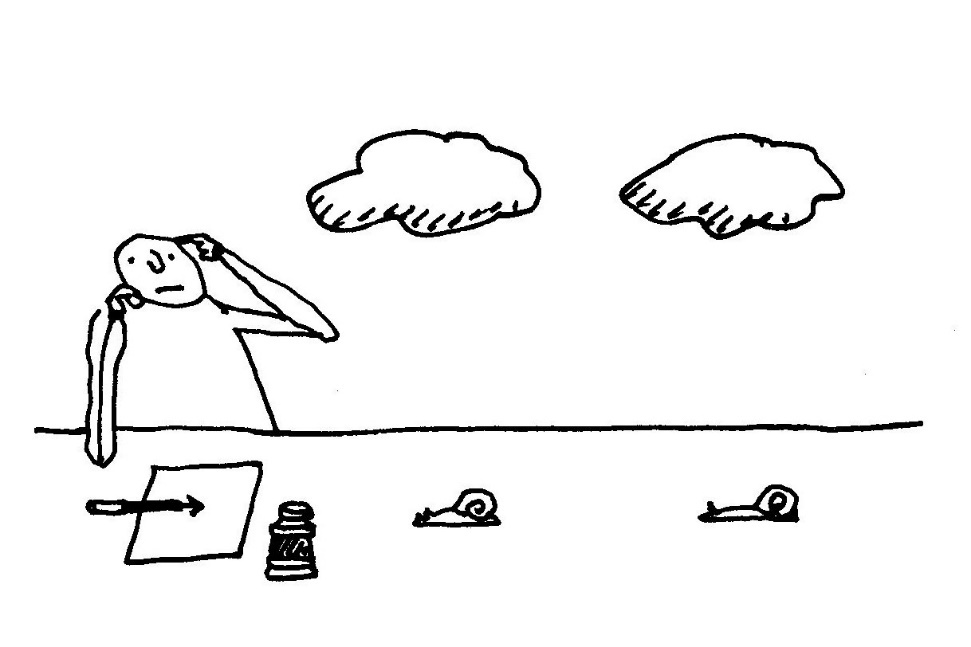
My second is nothing (a pun).

My third on a lady is velvet and gorse.

My last is an ovum minus the horse.

My whole you can’t buy for silver and gold

It tortures the young and comforts the old.



Past Applegarth in Radiance

My Sunday morning

Genuﬂections

Are made with bending knees

While sun spokes stroke

Across the road

And fire the fallen leaves.

My spinning chainwheel’s

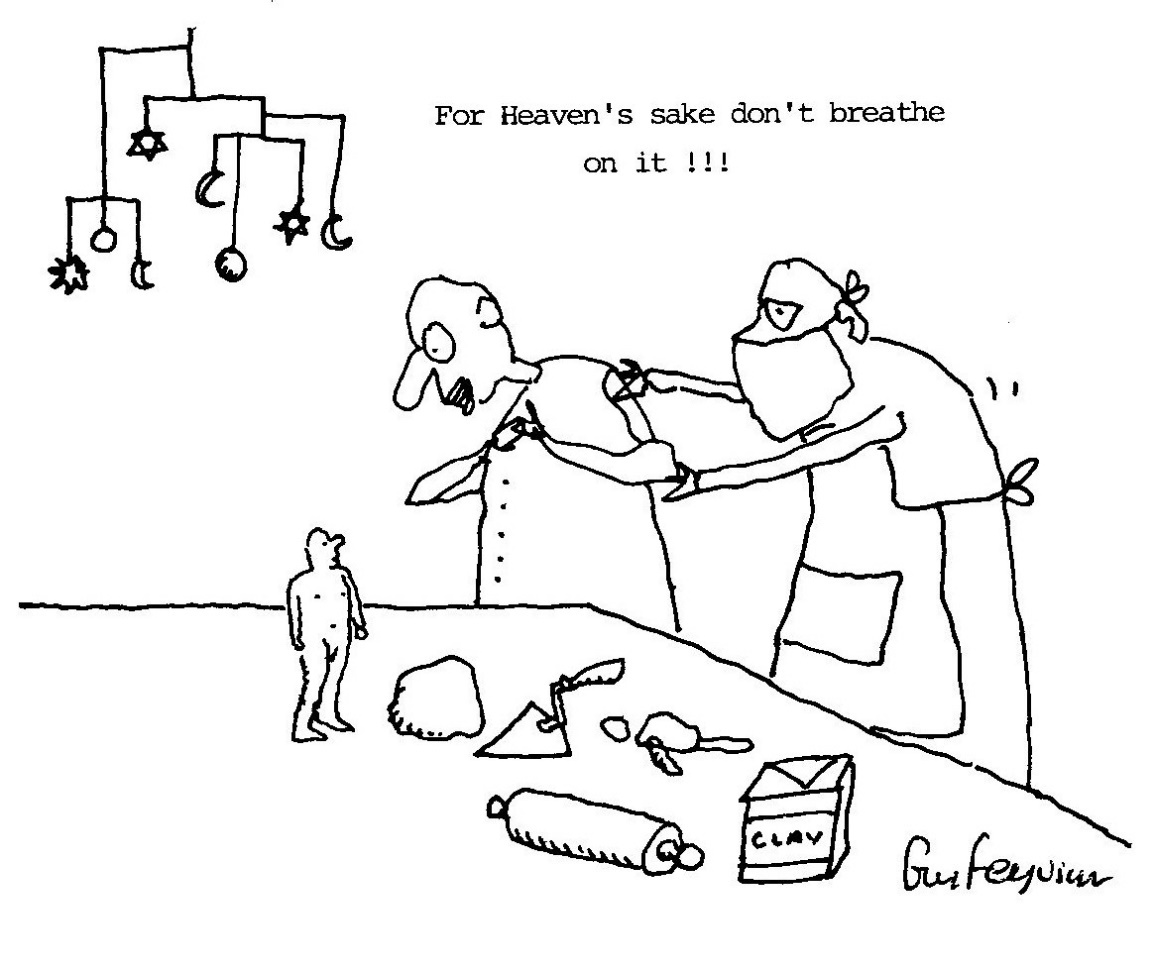
Starred reflections

Whirr upward through the trees

And glinting from

My streaming cold:

The snailtrails on my sleeves.



The Satori Story

A merchant on his way to Delhi

Toting his portentous belly

Stopped beneath a Bodi tree

To refresh himself with rice and ghee,

The shade was cool, the air was scented,

He fell asleep quite contented,

Until startled by an eager youth

Asking about Cosmic Truth:

“Master, can you tell me what

The Universe is all about?”

The merchant merely mumbled: “um”

And gazed intently at his tum,

In truth, to answer he was frightened,

But the boy cried out: “I’m enlightened.”

“You must be THE Gautama

Who opens portals to Nirvana.”

Disciples came in scores and throngs

With yellow robes and wooden thongs

And asked most obsequiously;

“What happened ’neath the Bodi‘ tree?”

The Buddha smiled: (Their thirst was slakened)

“Nothing much, I was awakened.”



Cornerish

In ancient Greece a baker man

Devised inventively to plan

Euclidian eclairs & symmetrical shapes

For sausage rolls or plane canapes.

His customers, it must be faced,

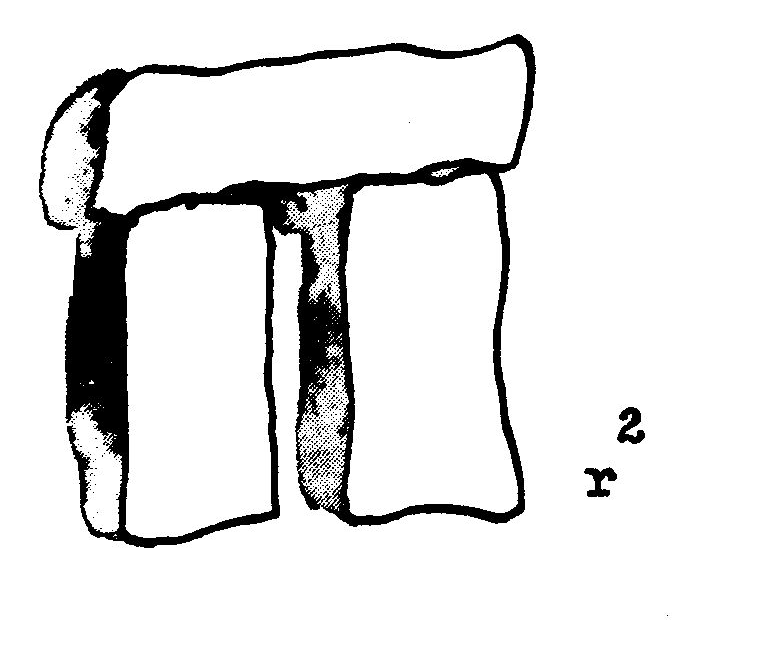
Lacked basic mathematic taste

Until he made, one day, a tasty

Quadrilateral pasty:

Pythagoras passing, stopped and stared,

“My Gosh!” he cried. “This pie are squared!”



Starting from Scratch

Consider the case of the fortunate ﬂea

Who leapt from the bedclothes into my tea:

As aloof as a god I gazed from my height

As he frantically flailed with all his small might

And each desperate thrash in the tea made its wave.

Overcome by compassion I decided to save

Him. He sat on my finger and shook himself dry

And then bounded off in the wink of an eye.

So now when I bear the mark of the flea

I know I am victim to any but he.

My faith as I scratch at those itchy red bites

Is that I am Saint Androcles friend of the mites.

Limerick

There once was a fierce feminist

Who said to her man: I insist

As my conjugal right

Every Saturday night

To go out with the girls and get pissed

A black and white drawing of a person with a mustache and a beard

Description automatically generated with low confidence

Liveware blues

Machine! You have not blood nor gland.

Your tongue no man can understand.

What Poem, Sonnet, Song or Ode

Can be expressed in Binary Code?

Pedestrian your rhythms run:

O one, o one, o one, o one.

We covet your complacent skill.

Those rapid circuits Digital,

Without remorse or grief or pain

Repeat-repeat each task again.

Your functional memory just wipes clean

The slightest trace of Doubt or Dream.

You’re never bored, but can’t regret

Not wanting what you cannot get.

A picture containing linedrawing

Description automatically generated

*Homage to Fromage*

Limericks

1.

There once was a jogger called Quail

Who trained with much pain and travail.

His doctor said: “Go

Exceedingly slow

And run round the block with a snail.”

2.

There was a sweet person called Pat

Who would talk to the flowers at her ﬂat

Said Pansy to Rose:

“She’s kind -I suppose

But I’d much prefer Compost to Chat.”

3.

THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR

When comes the revolution night

I’m sure that I will be alright.

I should survive the heat.

I have been quite discreet.

I’ve told no-one that I’m white.

Kamikaze

Like forty million crack dragoons

Stood battle trained spermatozoons.

The captain spoke in solemn voice:

“Although I know you have no choice

And little chance, you have permission

To volunteer for this emission.”

Not one comma hesitated:

“YES!” They all ejaculated.

A picture containing text, outdoor

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Energy Crisis

His demise was sudden

(Aortal constriction)

While watching a programme

On fuel restriction.

His cremation was cancelled

For a reason no worse

Than the ration on petrol

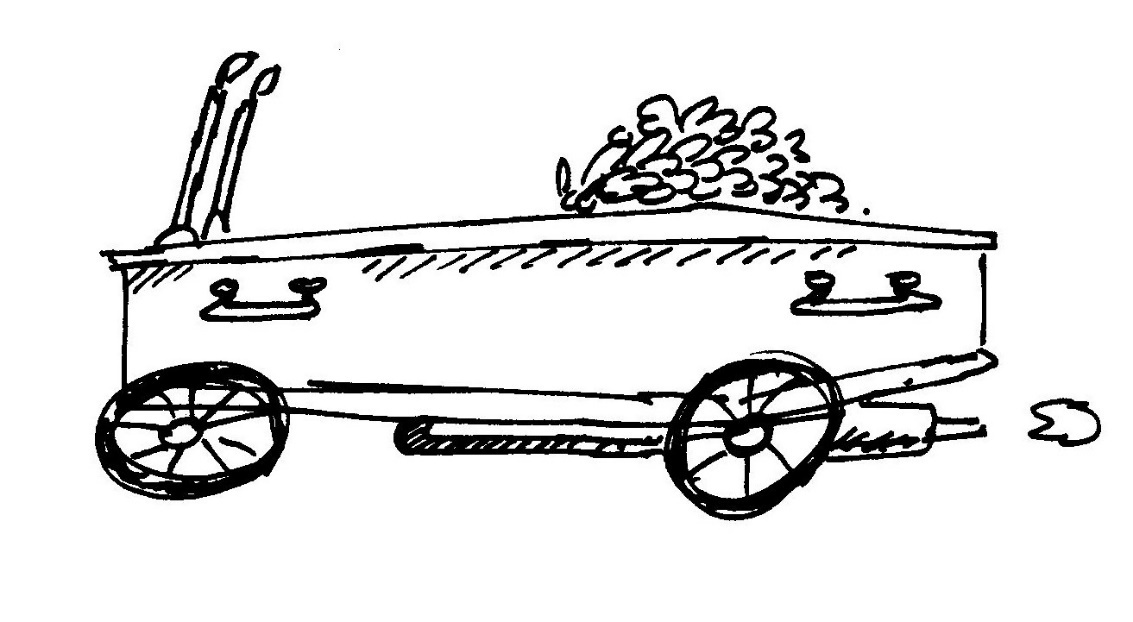
Applied to the hearse.

But all was not lost

Though the irony’s cruel.

His dried out old body

Made fine fossel fuel.



Glimlag 26/12/81

Came yesterday from outer space,

Nine ninety-one light years away

This message to the human race:

(In Hebrew, cognoscenti say)

“We’ve heard the news! We wish you joy!

Congratulations on a boy!”



