

It's Dangerous, Charlie

It's dangerous, Charlie
Last night as I slept
Thieves broke into my car
Parked out on the street
They went through all my things
The radio, the photographs of you in the glove box
And the toll road receipts
This morning when I went out
Everything had been
Put back the way I left it
It's dangerous, Charlie
But there's no way to quantify the theft

It's dangerous, Charlie
There was a man
He was just a boy
He stepped out of a doorway
And he had a gun
He held it to my head
But his hands shook and his voice shook
And then he ran away
Before he ever took my money
Well that might have cost me thirty dollars
A pint of my own blood
Is what that might have cost me
It's dangerous, Charlie
But there's no way to count what's lost

It's dangerous, Charlie
I was driving through an unfamiliar city
With a hand drawn map
In the rain, in the dark
And I lost my way
I must have made a hundred thousand wrong turns
And then I broke down crying with the hazards on
Double parked
A stranger pounded at the window
He said "That's dangerous!"
That's right
It's dangerous, Charlie
Goodnight

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Oh Tom, You Didn't Mean That

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
Even babies don't like grown up men who talk in squeaky voices
And come on apologetic

It's easier to act the fool
Than to acknowledge etiquette

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
You're too contemptuous to be convincing as a sideman
And you don't look good in red
You need a spotlight and that puppet
That has the wooden head

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
It was just a poem, just words for the sake of
Nightingales and thimblefuls and manliest and smartest
You have a way with words
Trust the art, don't trust the artist

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
All your efforts at grand gesture are predictably predictable
Banal and insincere
I mean, is this the Taj Mahal, Johnny's tattoo
Or Vincent's ear?

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
I know lots of guys who've put a baseball through the neighbor's window
And then lied about who threw it
And maybe you'll get away with it
But that doesn't mean you didn't do it

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
How many times can you rewrite the story of your life
Before you throw the pen away
And give up the life you thought would make you write
Like Hemingway

Oh Tom, you didn't mean that
You're talking in your sleep and I'm fool enough to listen
For something worth comprehending
But it's dark, summer's over
And the millennium is ending

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Anything Is Possible

It was a time when anything was possible
I took it on myself to talk you out of getting that tattoo
St. Francis of Assisi and his halo of flying birds
Although we were in San Francisco, I said, "Look at you
Your perfect body. You don't even have a scar.
How could you think that this tattoo
Will make you better than you already are?
And who are you to inflict this whimsy

On the man you're going to be in twenty years?"
Ooh, yeah, anything is possible

Pull back the sheets in a motel room in Mississippi
Or someplace with a thick dark history
And a TV, a blower blowing cold air
Four white walls, I said "We could be anywhere
But last night I slept in a farmhouse in Arkansas
Windows wide open, there were crickets and barking dogs
At dawn there was a rooster and a barnyard full of sheep
I could tell exactly where I was but I didn't get much sleep"
Ooh, yeah, anything is possible

There was a night at the house where you were born
Your parents' darkened bedroom. We tiptoed up the stairs
Like thieves, like cats, like grown up children
Whispered in your boyhood room among the wary glass eyed bears
You said "I'm like a kid with too many toys
Guess I'm still waiting for that one bright and shining choice
So clear and compelling
It makes every other possibility irrelevant"
Ooh, yeah, anything is possible

We stood on a bridge across Tecumseh River
Sun was going down and the moon was just a sliver
Semi flying past in a dust and diesel whirlwind
You said "When I look back at all of all my old girlfriends
The ones I really gave my heart to are the ones I couldn't hold
Just knowing they were going to slip away made me passionate and bold
There are words I'll never say and questions you can't ask
Just hold me like it was the first time
Or like it was the last"
Ooh, yeah, anything is possible

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Blue Dress

I used to like your blue dress and I still do but I used to like it more
When the belt wrapped twice around my waist and the hem dragged on the floor
It was silky and real as I'd tiptoe in your party heels
Looking down and thinking — so this is how it feels
To wear your blue dress on a summer night, 1963
That little girl is crying and she's hugging you around your knees
Reach down and take her in your arms, say, "Hey you'll be alright
You'll be okay," and you go out for the night
In your blue dress that fits me now exactly like it fit you then
There's still a ticket stub in the pocket, and your fountain pen
And I'm not sure I ever meant to grow into this dress for real
As much as I rehearsed it I still don't know how to feel
In your blue dress on a summer night when I turn the page

And step into a photograph of you when you were my age
For all the time gone by and everything I've grown into
Sometimes being me feels like pretending to be you
In your blue dress

I used to like your blue dress and I still do, but in a different way
I like the inkstain on the skirt and how the hem is frayed
I see it on a different scale and from a different angle now
Than when I'd look up at you looking down
In your blue dress on a summer night, going out for the evening
Well, I still cry sometimes when I think about you leaving
Me
Your blue dress

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100 Miles From Music City

I go back to the old place after many years away
Imagine all the time I spent here just a hundred miles
From Nashville and never made the trip
Of course Nashville was a different place then,
Yeah the Grand Old Opry was platitudinous and corny
Country music was still hackneyed and banal, not young and hip
And anyhow, we'd play our own music in the shade of the old oak tree
When the afternoon became too hot to work but not too hot to play guitar
And old John Walters would come down the road,
Sing the old song a capella in his strange keening falsetto
Drink too much of what he carried with him in that mayonnaise jar
And tell us how they found his father in the bathtub on the day
When he was through with wondering when his lungs were going to take him
And then John would sing a song so pretty
We'd all grow quiet for a long, long time
While the sun sank towards the chicken barn
A hundred miles from Music City

I go back and the old place is just forty miles from mammoth cave
Just forty miles away and all the time I lived so close
I never even had the urge to go
I guess it's hard to see yourself give up and play the tourist
When you're close to home and anyhow
The hills behind the house were full of caves you wouldn't even know
Were there until it snowed and only then by where the snow was melted
Back from where the rock was open wide enough to slide in on your belly
Until you found the place
It dropped down to a room so big we all could turn our flashlights off
And sit in darkness so complete
That all your other senses were on fire and you had to taste
The lips of someone next to you and breathe their Doctor Bronner's soap
And wood smoke
And the only sound was the ssssss of your down parkas touching

And you felt so giddy
You drop your flashlight, listen while it rolls beyond a ledge then falls
Forever until it hits the bottom
Forty miles from mammoth cave
And a hundred miles from Music City

I go back to the old place; no I never went to see the greyhounds racing
Even though the track was only fifteen miles
From where I woke up all those days and went to sleep as many nights
Without the wish to see those greyhounds race around the track
Like an unhappy metaphor for life, if I had ever lived that way
And anyhow, I had a yellow dog and he was smart and irreproachable
In all that time I never put him on a leash or made him wear a collar
And he only ran off twice. First time he was gone two days and nights
And I have never felt so lonely as when I was walking
Through the hayfield and hollering
And hollering and bleeding from the barbed wire fence,
But there he was two mornings later
Peppered full of buckshot
And the second time he ran away, well, that was it, he
Never did come back so I can't kneel beside his grave
Fifteen miles from Coleman Racetrack
Forty miles from Mammoth Cave
And a hundred miles from Music City

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A Million Ways

Winter in the midwest, bitter cold, bitter cold
But a crowd gathers anyhow, in hats and scarves and boots and hoods
And you're shouting into a microphone on the steps of Angell Hall
Half your words are lost in the biting wind, but we cheer as one,
Just like we'd understood
And maybe it was the way the storm drew everybody close
Maybe it was your delivery, or the rime ice in your beard
But when you called for a meeting later on at your house
I volunteered

I was good with a paintbrush and you set me to work making signs
"Nice big letters" you said "make it easy to read
Don't lose the message behind the design"
And you sat on your threadbare sofa with the other guys
Making notes and talking loud
You looked so fragile in your worn out t-shirt
I couldn't imagine you were the same guy I'd seen
Shouting to the crowd
Of course we fell together. Right away we were so close
The line between us blurred
We were like two halves of the same person
We wore the same clothes, ate off the same plate

Spoke the same words
And every morning waking twisted in your blanket
Your breath would smell like ash
You'd say "If this war is ever over
I want to travel to Bangladesh"
And there would be someone asleep on the sofa
Someone in the kitchen making watered down orange juice
Someone at the door, someone on the phone
And a million ways to be of use

Who can say what happened?
The war ended, meetings lost their focus
Everyone drifted apart
You took a job at a downtown bookstore
And I told you there was a baby
I swear to god it was true
But I lost it, I lost my heart
And I lost you
So I was going back to classes
Studying for my incompletes
I don't even know how much time went by
But I almost walked right past you
When I saw you on the corner of East Liberty and Main Street
You said you were fine
You were going out with a business law professor
I said, "so that's how we're going to change the world?
Join forces with the oppressor?"
You said, "Hey, you can live in that little world
With your naïve politics, my god
Like it matters who got arrested
For the cause of fearlessness in the face of the riot squad
As if all that soybean soup you ate at midnight
Because it took that long to cook and it was cheap
Ever fed a soul in Bangladesh
Or helped some guy in a foxhole sleep
I mean, pick a cause, any cause is going to work just as well
If what you do it for is how it makes you feel
About yourself"

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All the Girls

All the girls who brought to you
What you found no reason to refuse
They bent back beneath your weight, oh
Should you be so surprised
That they loved you with such confounding complexity
It made you tired, you were riddled with excuse

But it's not hard for a man to make himself unavailable
In the name of worthy enterprise, oh

All the girls were splendid and pale
They had elbows and knees, elbows and knees
And such soft and lovely voices, oh
And they were in love with you
In love with you in love with you in love
And you were quiet, vaguely uneasy
But you trade their gracious passion for your affable indifference
As if you thought that would ever be enough, oh

All the girls had tender intentions
And pretty eyebrows drawn together
They cried so easily, oh
But they believed the words you said to them
And they were understanding
And that endeared them to you once they'd gone forever
And your big heart beat with a flood of love and admiration
Love and admiration and relief, oh

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Saint Fido

You can leave your dog, Saint Fido, with the girl you love when it's convenient
Travel to the city as a prophet and a tourist
And everyone you'll meet is either famous or else planning on
 becoming famous overnight
Unless it's morning first
And you say, "Oh youth, you're just promise and illusion"
You contemplate your own fading image in the mirror
And settle on an attitude half wizard, half legend
And half washed up relic of a halfhearted career, do do do

I saw you by the cold light of morning
Saw your broken glass and the litter in your gutter
Saw lipstick on your collar
Saw you spilling dirty water in the alley
And I didn't look away

So it's sometime after midnight at one all night bash or other
And the boys have laid out every minor triumph they can chalk up
That pretty dark eyed girl who wants to be a mermaid
Is splashing in the bathtub in the kitchen of this Soho walkup
And you say "Ah, New York, how can your ancient plumbing
Take another generation?"
You let a younger man walk his fingers up her back
While you go off in search of the I.W. Harper
And someone you can argue with about something abstract, do do do

I saw you by the cold light of morning
Saw your broken glass and the litter in your gutter
Saw lipstick on your collar
Saw you spilling dirty water in the alley
And I didn't look away

So it's your last night in the city and it's snowing, snowing, snowing
And you're standing by a streetlight with that pretty dark eyed girl
And the way the snow is catching in her hair reminds you of a hairnet
That your grandma used to wear with tiny plastic pearls
And you say, "Ah, at least I've got a story for the priest"
You bend down to kiss her knowing she won't stop you, not tonight, no
Not while the snow falls like pearls in Manhattan
And you have a ticket in your pocket for a morning flight, do do do

I saw you by the cold light of morning
Saw your broken glass and the litter in your gutter
Saw lipstick on your collar
Saw you spilling dirty water in the alley
And I didn't look away

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Flood

When it rains like this you know for sure that river's going to flood its banks again, because where else is the water going to go but wide, spilling across my little apron of land here where the river takes a jog, going wide and deep until it seems one more drop and my whole world's going to wash away, that's how close, that's when it stops, the sky clears, floodwater all runs downstream and overnight something miraculous happens, wake in the morning to a profound miracle, like the time I woke and looked out and it seemed like my whole riverbank was paved with shimmering silver, well, I grabbed my boots, ran down there in my nightgown and what do you think it was but millions of tiny little fish, beaching themselves, gasping out their last words, little "O"s of surprise, well, what could I do but go and gather up all my buckets and my wheelbarrow and go down there and pick them all up, the ones the crow hadn't already got to, and go through my garden with a basket of seed corn and a long stick, planting just like Squanto taught the Pilgrims to do the year they had that first Thanksgiving, you know, one seed, one fish, one hole? Of course it took me the best part of a week, and wasn't I glad when the last of those fish had a proper burial, but that corn grew to be the tallest anyone around here had ever seen, ten, fifteen feet tall, some of it, with ears like watermelon, and folks around here still talk about the year I grew that corn so tall, but I never told them how I did it, I never gave away my secret because it kind of felt like a pact, or maybe a test, and maybe I passed it, because the next time we had a flood, the morning after the water went down, I looked out and my riverbank was all shimmering silver again. Well, this time I got ready. I got dressed, gathered up all my buckets and my wheelbarrow, went down there and as I got closer I saw that, no, that wasn't any fish. That riverbank was covered with twenty-dollar bills. Can you imagine? And all I could think was-well, aren't I lucky that I have all these buckets and this wheelbarrow? And I filled them all up, two, three times over, some of them, which is a lot of twenty dollar bills, it took me the best part of a week just to wash the mud off them there in my kitchen sink, and rinse them, hang them out on the clothesline with clothespins to dry, run the iron over them because they got a little wrinkled, but when I was done, they looked as good as new, and I had a stack of twenty dollar bills enough to stuff a mattress with if I wanted to, and maybe I wanted to, maybe I didn't. I'm not saying that's what I did with them. Just that the next time it started raining like it wasn't ever going to stop, I got that kind of Christmas feeling, like you know something really wonderful is about to happen and you know you might

scare it off if you think about it too much but it's really wonderful and you can't stop thinking about it and you know you might scare it off if you think about it too much but it's really wonderful and you can't stop thinking about it and you know you might scare it off if you think about it too much but it's really wonderful, you know that feeling? Well, that was the year it rained and rained and rained. Days and days of rain and high water, my back porch steps walked out into a little eddy for days and days and days, and me feeling all Christmassy and wishing I just knew the end of the story and it would be over for days and days and days and days and days and days. Finally there was a day when my back porch steps walked out into dry land again and that night was the longest night of my life. That night was as long as most weeks would be if you went a week without sleeping, but I waited. I waited until I could see that the sun was up full and shining on that riverbank before I peeked open the blinds, looked out and what do you think it was sitting there on that riverbank looking just like in the showroom except for a little water running out the bottom of the doors, but that blue Pontiac. Same one you see sitting in the drive. Not a scratch on it. North Carolina plates, figure that out. Key in the ignition. Started right up. Of course it was the best part of a week before the mud firmed up to where I could budge her but after that I drove that car everywhere, probably would be driving her right now if it weren't for that flat tire, but no matter, radio works fine, I like to sit in the car and listen to the radio, get the weather report, but you know when it rains like this I don't need a weather report to know for sure that river's going to flood.

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Hard Work

She was born a fairy princess you know
Blessed at birth with charm and grace
Oh, let her live a fairytale life
Give her perfect bones and an angel's face
Child of opportunity, pretty ballerina
Someone moved aside the furniture so you could pirouette
Nothing's going to stand in your way, you can move mountains
It's just the mountains haven't moved quite yet
Pretty dancer, born to magic and dreams
Just waiting for a chance to shine
There is no magic, there is just hard work

Check the mirror, life is not as it seemed
At ten or twenty or twenty-five
No magic road, no straight lines
And the city is going to eat you alive
What about your dreams? Opportunities?
What about magic? Look in the mirror
Say, "What's the fuss? I'm going to be young forever"
Or, "How did I get here
From there, and how am I going to get back?"
You can dim the lights and hope for signs
There is no hope, there is just hard work

Dreams shine like little lights in the dark
Put them out and get some sleep
What have you ever had that's better than being left alone?
What else is yours to keep?

No one's going to pick you up and dust you off this time
No one's going to open doors
You're still doing pirouettes in the mirror
For the man on the white horse
Chase that fairytale like it was real
Believe in dreams and silver platters
Well, it's too late to have a fairytale life
Getting by is what matters
You're one in a million, maybe two million
All waiting for a place in line
There is no place, there is just hard work

There is no place like home, there is just hard work

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Cowboy

I don't know much about that cowboy
Strong back, smell of leather
Scar runs the length of his left arm

Sun was up when I got home
Crows laughing in the garden, I say shoo
Anyone can drive a rusty red pickup truck
Anyone can have a dog named Blue

I don't know much about that cowboy
Crooked jaw, four day stubble
Tattoo, "Mary," above his heart

Storm blew in while I was sleeping
Hard rain flattened the nasturtiums, I say heck,
Anyone can wear a belt buckle shaped like a conestoga
Anyone can tie a rag around their neck

I don't know much about that cowboy
Calloused thumb, gold incisor
Dark blue road map on the back of his hand

I lost my keys, I couldn't find my shoes
Flies buzzing in the kitchen, I say, sure
Anyone can take a room by the week at the Pine Knot Motel
Anyone can move as if their bones were sore

I don't know much about that cowboy
Sidelong squint, one raised eyebrow
Tiny slow twitch at the side of his mouth

There's his truck at the Cloverleaf Cafe
I circle around the block, then I just drive past
Anyone can rock their chair back on two legs and look right through you
Anyone can grow up and have no past

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Circle

I don't mind sleeping in the straw
Or washing in the pony's trough
And I don't miss the life I left
I've no regrets for running off
There's endless work behind the scenes
It's dirty and it's hard
I spend far more time in ripped up jeans
Than in my sequined leotard

But nights when everything goes right
I stand in a circle of heat and light
And I have the power to change the dreams
Of everyone in this shabby tent
Make them believe, if not in magic,
In money well spent

I'm not the best in the business
But I earn my applause
There are risks you know, these tigers have teeth
But no claws
And right away I was so good with them
I never thought of going back
I could smell the anger in their sweat
I could coax them to attack

And nights when everything goes right
They leap through a circle of heat and light
With the power to change the dreams
Of everyone in this shabby tent
Make them believe, if not in magic,
In money well spent

We were driven out of Beaumont
When the Lazy "J" complained
And we tore her down, packed her up
In a stubborn Texas rain
And standing by the trailers
While the dogs and roosters load
I think about a dark-eyed poet
I met along the road

But nights when everything goes right
I stand in a circle of heat and light
And I have the power to change the dreams
Of everyone in this shabby tent
Make them believe
In magic

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Flight

I caught a flight to New York City
Pilot was a New York cabbie
It was white knuckles all around
Passengers all broke into spontaneous applause
Once we were safely on the ground
"You have to trust the radar," you told me once
We were flying through the clouds into New Orleans
I said, "I could move east, we could be together"
You said, "That isn't what I mean"

There were always stories
You were above suspicion
You'd kiss me on the corner just like you'd lost your mind
But there's never enough money, enough motion, enough passion
Enough patience, enough vision, enough comfort, enough time
"I'll try to catch you" you said to me
Calling from a phonebooth with a pocketful of dimes
So I flew across the country just like I could fly
Then dropped like a rock at the New York City skyline

I thought I'd lived too long to love like this again
Thought my skin and bones had turned to leather and stone
But you gave me back my grace, you knew what it was worth
When you mirrored my attention just as if it was your own
And I flew above the city, I said, "I can't get lost this time
My veins are a streetmap, all roads lead to my heart"
Then I crawl out of the subway, blinking in the bright lights
At the noise and commotion and I don't know where to start

If it was different there would be roses
You'd have a story and a name to love me by
And I would have a history of knowing who could love me
I'd still believe my honesty would crowd out every lie
And our children would have fine bones, fine feathered wings
And when they flew too quickly, I'd cry out, "Wait
I love you," or whatever you say
When you're trying to hold on and it might be too late

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Sweet Good Nature

I love your fast car
And the way you drive slow
In the center lane with the windows rolled down
Traffic going around you like a river around a stone
And you're smiling
This day is yours forever
I press my hand against your forehead
Like a benediction, like checking for fever, I say

Never grow old
Never grow angry
Never lose your sweet good nature

You put on some weight
Then you took it off
Cut your hair short then grew it out long
That's how I know that time went by
And you left me
Then you took me back
I believe in my heart I might not ever know why

Never grow old
Never grow angry
Never lose your sweet good nature

It's a miracle
When the sun comes up again
And you're sitting in the kitchen with the morning paper
A cup of good coffee and a bowl of sweet cherries
And I love you
Just to feel you here beside me
Is a mystery and it's powerful and holy
And perfectly ordinary

Never grow old
Never grow angry
Never lose your sweet good nature

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Anything Is Possible (Reprise)

It was a phone booth in the middle of the midwest
It was raining like the devil. I was depressed
I watched a pickup truck slowly float by with its hazards blinking
Windshield wipers slapping, I said "I keep thinking

If I can hold it all together just one day maybe two
It'll all make sense and I'll believe it's really true
I wish I could take comfort in steady slow improving
But I'm scared most of the time. I don't feel safe
Unless I'm moving"
Ooh, yeah, anything is possible

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