

# *Thunderbolt Blooming*



*Poems of 1994*

*by Alan Harris*

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**The Perpetual winks.**

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## **As Far Beyond As Here**

Perhaps your mind, when still, has reached a brink  
Beyond which bottom, top, and sides release  
Their hold, immersing all you are and think  
In boundlessly profound, peculiar peace.

Set free, aware, and only slightly caught  
Within the web you've spun of tickling flesh,  
You feel you understand why you were brought  
To live within earth's tantalizing mesh.

What sage or mystic ever wrote a line  
Containing more than hints of what you feel  
And almost know to be the life divine  
Which tinglings from the vast unknown reveal?

Experienced have you this thunderbolt?  
And savored have you since then every volt?

# Ventilating the House of Knowing

Knowing is stowing;  
*unknowing is flowing.*

Building a house requires intricate knowing;  
*living in it will tap a rich, dangerous stream not charted in the blueprints.*

To study someone's horoscope numerically builds up a house of concepts;  
*to cry with someone is to surrender to an indescribable flowing.*

Financial expertise is a product of keen attention and experience;  
*heartfully allocating resources can be done by a three-year-old giving his dog a biscuit.*

To gather straight A's in college is an obedient harvesting of the known;  
*later upheavings may lead to sleepless, fathomless nights that drain away diplomas but open one's heart to a fresh humility.*

Knowing is a keen memory of all the chess openings, over a neatly squared chess board, with well-behaved pieces;  
*unknowing brings one to a bewilderment in midgame from which a victory may spring.*

Knowing within a religion can spawn rickety beliefs, defensive fears, or exclusive duality;  
*to avoid naming the nameless, or believing in the heard, or excluding the "other" can admit a universe into the mind, and release the mind into a universe.*

Experience leads to knowing; knowing leads to more intense experience;  
*then perhaps to a shambles; from which may emanate a steady awe of the flowing.*

The known manifests as forward motion;  
*the unknown as a gentle, inscrutable smile.*

The knower has developed a system for success, having created a perfect tinker toy windmill;  
*his fragile fabrication already tosses precariously on an unseen boundless sea.*

Many know their appetites, preferring a certain spice or sugar;  
*the mysterious source of all flavors is unknown to them but controls their dining.*

Professors in universities want to increase and perpetuate the known;  
*the Perpetual winks.*

Knowing is to have a well-kept lawn;  
*flowing is to have nothing but everything, to leave it right where it is, and perhaps to care for the lawn too.*

(Continued)

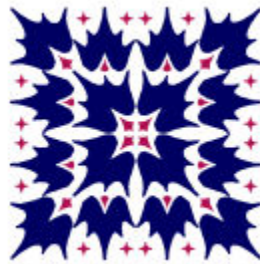
A brilliant nation converts a billion dollars worth of knowing into a Stealth Bomber;  
*to sit at one's dinner table is to fly imperceptibly fast on a planet, free of charge, without need of a target.*

Knowers worry about dying, which might destroy their tinker toy windmill;  
*the imponderable is immense and welcomes windmills of all designs.*

A violinist knows his part; a conductor knows his score; a composer knows how to notate his emotions;  
*in concert all of them yield their knowings to the fountain source of music, with exquisite results.*

The known is of great price;  
*the unknown is priceless.*

Assertions have been made herein as if known;  
*a puff of wind from no direction will soon scatter them without loss.*





## Within Our Keep

What is this stillness in the stable?  
What glow is here within our hearts?  
Who lies so small between us?

Far more seems given us in this bed  
than infant pounds and length—  
how weigh, how measure possibilities?

Although just now our baby sleeps,  
his waking eyes reveal an inner light—  
some holy mystery within our keep.

We bow.  
We love.  
We are silent.



## Listening to Christmas

Have you ever heard snow?  
Not the howling wind of a blizzard,  
not the crackling of snow underfoot,  
but the actual falling of snow?

We heard it one night in Wisconsin  
quite unexpectedly  
while walking up a hill  
toward our cabin in the woods,  
a soft whisper between footsteps.  
We stopped, switched off our flashlights,  
and just listened.  
All around us in the darkness  
we heard the gentle fall  
of snow on snow.  
No wind, no sound  
but the snow.

Have you ever heard Christmas?  
Not the traffic noises in the city,  
not the bells and hymns and carols,  
beautiful as they are,  
not even the laughter of your children  
as they open their presents—  
but Christmas itself?

Have you been by yourself  
and just sat and listened to the silence within,  
patiently, without letting the mind  
race to the next Christmas chore?

Perhaps if you have,  
you felt the pulse of all humanity  
beating in your own heart.

Perhaps you noticed  
an outflowing of love  
for all your brothers and sisters  
on the earth,  
a soft sense of Oneness  
with all that lives.

In the silence of a snowy night,  
listen intently, holding your breath,  
and you may hear snow on snow.

Serene, alone,  
undisturbed by thought,  
listen to the silence in your heart,  
and you may hear Christmas.



## Deep Coffee, Alone

Suburbs (proud arks upon a primitive sea)  
leak.

Today a female heart has gone funny—  
funny like the strangest way a heart can feel  
and still beat.

Quiet on her white couch,  
drinking gourmet coffee,  
she wrestles with inner intrusions  
not covered by her insurance—  
uninvited bass notes  
are troubling her treble reality.

All is in place outdoors—  
sunshine properly warming her acre,  
fertile lawn greenly framing  
her sporty car aglitter in the driveway,  
white patio furniture gleaming  
from acceptably jaunty angles.

But indoors, wallpaper blurs near the couch.  
She cries—longly, profoundly cries.

Her architected home has no ears  
for such snappings of heart,  
nor is her healthy lawn  
in sympathy wilting.

Her white couch, red car, green lawn,  
and petite palace of prepared comfort  
seem like checkers, smart but alien  
on a board whose game has fallen  
deep into chess for keeps.



Coffee and courage by now cool,  
she meekly questions the silence:  
“What is happening to me?”

Body, calm.  
Mind, thoughtless.  
Heart, electric.  
Silence, holy.

(Cup needs rinsing.)

## Another Dance

Where are all the little nothings  
I spoke to you  
when we were young?  
I want them back.  
You were so precious,  
sitting there on the porch swing,  
letting me put my hand up under  
the back of your blouse  
to feel the smoothness  
of female skin.  
Where is the femininity  
that I gave you through my fingers?  
I want it back.  
Where is the bitchy grouchiness  
that I gave you?  
I want it back. Give me it.  
I gave you my tools  
and now you do all the work  
and give me your laziness  
and bitch at me for it  
with the bitchiness I gave you.  
Take your laziness back.  
Give me back my tools,  
and go get your own.  
This is a dance we are  
dancing,  
and I don't want to have  
to step on your feet,  
so watch carefully  
as I lead you into leading me  
to lead you.  
This is a dance we are  
dancing.  
Oh, now it's over.  
Clap, clap, clap.  
But there'll be another.

## **Electric Heart**

Wherein does the heart  
get its authority  
to pick up the mind  
and take it for a rolling ride  
through a countryside  
of gallant impossibilities?

My heart has leapt me  
to a moon for no more reason  
than it had to, on the chance  
a fireman's net would be  
back on earth to catch me.

My heart, no longer  
trifling with blood,  
pumps pure electricity  
because I merely  
breathed for eight months  
the crackling of  
someone's lightning mind,  
now gone.

Nothing is left me but to thunder  
and wait for the ozone to clear.

## Feathered Ephemera

After I had set up the bird feeder  
and filled it with seeds,  
the past entered into my lungs  
like an old friend in a gray overcoat  
coming into the house out of November.

For a few moments  
I (not seemed) was an earlier adult,  
vibrant with hints and smells,  
living younger in this aging body  
as forgotten feelings blazed up  
in the tangy wind.

Today, sparrows are flitting about the feeder  
enjoying seedy morsels that heat them  
against crackling winter mornings.

Cheerio, sparrows!  
Each wiggly one of you  
betokens a forgotten coloration  
in the cup of my soul.  
Cheerio! Eat your fill  
before the neighbor's cat  
eats his.

## **It All Rises**

Slicing the mountain  
with a cool silence you can smell,  
slivers of pink light  
rub and brush the crags.  
My ribs thrill out past the horizon.

Weaving this sunrise  
of mind,  
heart,  
spirit,  
we immortally must kiss  
from across a smiling distance.

The euphoria I feel  
embracing your possibilities  
proves underneath all doubt  
there is a yes  
of stranger stronger scentedness  
(sleeping fifty million winks a second)  
than possibly any manufactured no.

## A Retreat Ahead

Here's to Blaine and Jean Harker, those lovable two,  
with joy so contagious and counseling so true.  
A mourner in grief is a magnet to Jean,  
since few are the pains she's not suffered or seen.

At the parties they give there is greatness of table,  
and every last diner eats more than he's able.  
Jean's food pantry likewise, for the hungry and poor,  
was much like her heart—a wide open door.

Their lives are committed to lifting the fallen,  
through talkin' and workin' and sweatin' and bawlin'.  
An unspoken concern here is needful of saying—  
for Jean's own self-healing we are fervently praying.

While Blaine may have yet to get milk from a cow,  
in spite of the Amish folks showing him how,  
he's mastered the art of infectious laughter  
that shatters the silence from floor-joist to rafter.

They've moved to the country near Old Shipshewana,  
but they can't quite move in yet, as much as they wanna—  
while waiting for lodgers to kindly dislodge  
they have set up their home in a large upper garage.

We honor the Harkers today, Blaine and Jean,  
and the Power behind them, so strong yet unseen.  
May God bless their home, the retreat of their dreams,  
granting laughter which heals, and the grace which redeems.

## Aroma of Duty

Easter lilies gladden  
(and teasingly madden)  
the kitchen atmosphere  
as I perform and pay income tax  
duties  
on vocational gettings  
(because everybody  
needs some of what  
I never quite received).

Gift-giving, I notice,  
pleases the law  
and reduces the obligation.  
“Give and thou shalt deduct.”  
As a man receives for himself,  
so must he give to us all.

Around Easter tide we set right  
every least account  
with the mighty US  
and hope no mistake  
will cloud our reputation  
or shrink our havings.

IRS laws embody  
a sprawling neo-Bible,  
rife with moral assumptions  
(teeth implicit and feared)  
about divorce,  
child support,  
medical expenses,  
the rich man’s burden—  
tradition all hard-wired.

Inexorably the Old Covenant  
is infiltrating my Easter  
as potted lilies  
perfume my reluctance.

As for Christ, how often  
I am invoking him  
as these tedious tax forms  
dance about under my fragrant lilies!

## **No Darkness, No Diamonds**

If life is going well,  
don't write.  
Know why?  
'Cause you can't.

Know why?  
'Cause your creativity  
is all clogged up  
with contentment.

Writing amidst blessings  
is bleeding without wounds.

Why even read?  
Blow a tin whistle  
or talk to your uncle.

It's OK.  
Very OK.



## **Sutra Salad**

If contentment is enlightenment, then a cow is Buddha.

The kindly man in the mountain cave spoke but briefly: "Search for a way to stop searching."

Ecstasy may have to sweep the floor tomorrow and hate it. Joy works long and lightly.

Life is a backwards meal. We are born with a full plate, getting the dessert first, and we end it with the broccoli and woody asparagus.

The difference between an evangelist and an egotist has yet to be discovered.

Do the holy ones desire desirelessness so that they can do whatever they want to?

Why do I like certain people more than others? Because I see a glow of divinity in them? Because they smile and give me things? Because my weaknesses are their strengths?

Gambling dies a little every time somebody throws away an unopened letter from Publisher's Clearing House.

Like a dog chasing its tail, I struggle toward peace.

Prayer is a boy throwing his ball at the moon and hitting it.

### **The Guru Scam**

1. Here's where you are.
2. Here's where you want to be.
3. Here's what I can do for you.
4. Here's how much you pay me.

The purest forgiveness is not to have noticed. To forgive, therefore, is not to.

A philosophy is a well-dressed metaphor waving from a limousine window.

A religion is a philosophy with a fence around it.

Unless it's just fun to do, helping blows up the helper's balloon a bit.

## Music from Hannah

When Hannah comes over to visit our place,  
She fetches our old violin from its case  
And places it under her chin to be played  
With its missing E-string and its horsehair all frayed.

Under Hannah Moore's unafraid, amateur touch,  
The violin squeals and scratches so much  
That sooner or later some listener will say,  
"Oh, Hannah, let's please put the violin away."

Pretty soon she snaps open the old trumpet case,  
Tries out the three valves, puts the mouthpiece in place,  
And blows such a blast for a trumpeter's call  
That the pictures all rattle and sway on the wall.

When Hannah brings over her flute, however,  
We can sit here and listen for nearly forever  
To her musical phrases both smooth and staccato  
Which pleasantly shimmer with a heartfelt vibrato.

She has listened to Mozart from A to Z,  
And she loves any Beethoven symphony;  
Carmina Burana, the Nutcracker Suite—  
The best compositions to her are a treat.

Our piano's been host to her musical fingers  
Playing Mozart sonatas with feeling that lingers.  
Just give her an instrument, fancy or poor,  
And you'll soon hear some music from Hannah Paige Moore.

## 18 Rules

1. Love truth.
2. Welcome folly.
3. Distrust goals.
4. Laugh deeply.
5. Farm money.
6. Die daily.
7. Give forgetfully.
8. Digest adversity.
9. Bury ambition.
10. Scrutinize motives.
11. Carry silence.
12. Befriend nature.
13. Work restfully.
14. Touch hearts.
15. Trust emptiness.
16. Avoid advising.
17. Break rules.
- 18.

## Free of Verse

jet lag of the soul

as free as habitual wishes

cosmic popcorn for the mind

brushes my cheek

executives at pomp in the pompground

whisper while you whisk

bless this up until now pagan food that we may remain asleep in holiness

billions of internal collisions today, and the city burps in the dark

help reduce the national debt—buy US Savings Bonds

politician without a tongue, please—rare

wolf and fox a-smile

sweet encrypted mummies

smelling a buxom face

## **Messages from Beyond**

**(Deceased persons have somehow carved their own epitaphs onto their gravestones.)**

I like it here. Nobody ever telephones to sell me siding or insurance.

Why did my nurse let in that old-timer with the scythe?

There were errors in my life review. Why me? I'm suing.

Wow! Great near-death experience. Let's go back now.... Hello?

Hell isn't so bad. It may need work, but it's better than Chicago.

My life was a waste, but I did donate my ashes to science.

Harps sound pretty, but not a billion harps at once. I'll take hell.

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

Some idiot ahead of me in the tunnel turned off the white light.

## Short & Sour

An ounce of silence is worth a pound full of dogs.

For later flowers, if we but endure,  
Misfortune makes a good manure.

He seemed warm and open, sort of like an armpit.

### Thanksgiving Blessing

Thank you, Lord, for what we've got.  
The turkey's dead and we are not.

Loudest laughter may snarl after.

To retain his professorship, he published a cemetery of dead ideas with footnotes for headstones.

**Infatuation:** love so intense, beautiful, and brief as to be unachievable by the secure.

If thine eye offend thee, pluck out the plug on thy TV.

### Quack?

A New Age healer  
may improve on your luck,  
but listen well  
to your inner duck.

A sperm can find an egg quicker than you can find your slippers.

She sued the mirror for visual abuse, and a lenient judge upheld it.

### Exec

His expensive suit, his teeth so flossy,  
His wrong decisions at his desk so glossy,  
His colorful charts less gainy than lossy—  
Could it be that he is a lousy bossy?

**Base:** what businessmen are always touching and covering.

**Dysfunctional family:** a discontented container containing the uncontainable.

**Mountain:** a failure of air to occupy a high altitude.

**Calendar:** a device for scheduling the unpredictable.

**Television:** square thing in the corner that sucks in brains and spits out giggles.

Every Christmas the uninformed buy the unnecessary for the ungrateful.

The spouse who loved the caterpillar may hate the butterfly.

There's something about food that rubs off in you.

Behind his smile, agendas.

**Infra-babble:** what meditators hear sometimes, deep inside.

Higher education trains the mind to feel good later by making it feel terrible now.

Overachievers start out restless with a heart of worms, and may end up friendless with a heart of snakes.

### What If?

What if scant truth be known,  
And no disciples knew this?  
Their gurus they'd enthrone,  
Who'd smile and let them do this.



## About Alan Harris

When Alan Harris was born on Sunday, June 20, 1943, his father, Keith E. Harris, was piloting a B-17 in bombing missions over Europe while his mother (Margie) worried about Keith lovingly from Illinois.

Schooling in Earlville, Illinois (Alan's home town) was interesting, useful, and generally free of creativity (do what the teacher says, get the good grade). From 5th through 12th grades he played the trumpet in the school band and enjoyed the contest trips. His father drove a school bus as part of his living (farming was the other part), and if Alan happened to ride on his father's bus, he had to very much behave.

Illinois State University was where Alan became chagrined over how a student with a full class load could possibly keep up with all of the assignments given in said classes.

He felt he was a pawn in a game, but with judicious time-shuffling and corner-cutting he plowed along and made respectable grades amidst all the worries.

A bright spot at ISU was taking a contemporary American poetry class with Dr. Ferman Bishop. Through him Alan discovered depths in poetry that he had never dreamed of while in high school. E. E. Cummings took him for zingy flights of in-your-faceness. T. S. Eliot, whose symbols even had symbols, fully baffled him. Robert Frost was slyly charming. Emily Dickinson's mastery of rhyme and meter for conveying soul and spirit made the young poet's heart go funny. Alan started "being a poet" in his sophomore year (1962) at ISU. Poetry had been previously unneeded in his life but now was available to contain parts of his soul that he hadn't realized were there.

After graduating from ISU in 1966 there was the little matter of having to earn a living, which took the form of two years of high school English teaching, three years of tuning and repairing pianos, and (after a 1976 MS in Computer Science at Northern Illinois University) about 25 years of computer work (mainly programming, in-house computer teaching, and Web development—for Commonwealth Edison Company in Chicago).

During most of that vocational stint before retirement, Alan continued to write poems. Even with the whirl of commuting it was still possible to emote at home. He launched his current Web site ([www.alharris.com](http://www.alharris.com)) in 1995 with a few poems, and eventually has populated it with almost everything he has written. As a poet, essayist, story-writer, and photographer he has spurned the print publication route, having seen the excruciations gone through by other writers trying to make a big name and big money for themselves via magazine and book publishers. With the Web, there's instant publication, moneyless communication, and a worldwide potential audience. Of course, the literature has to stand on its own feet to get readers, but it's always there for those who seek it, or just happen in, or get sent in.

Alan met his wife Linda at ISU in 1962 and they were married in 1966. Linda has worked as a school speech therapist, insurance medical office worker, and medical transcriptionist, in addition to being a conscientious wife, mother, and grandmother. They have a son, Brian, who is a percussionist.

