# **Classic Poetry Series**

# **Richard Jones**

- poems -

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## **How Did You Meet Your Wife?**

Swimming the English Channel, struggling to make it to Calais, I swam into Laura halfway across. My body oiled for warmth, black rubber cap on my head, eyes hidden behind goggles, I was exhausted, ready to drown, when I saw her coming toward me, bobbing up and down between waves, effortlessly doing a breaststroke, heading for Dover. Treading water I asked in French if she spoke English, and she said, "Yes, I'm an American." I said, "Hey, me too," then asked her out for coffee.

Anonymous submission.

## Letter Of Recommendation From My Father To My Future Wife

During the war, I was in China. Every night we blew the world to hell. The sky was purple and yellow like his favorite shirt.

I was in India once on the Ganges in a tourist boat. There were soldiers, some women with parasols. A dead body floated by going in the opposite direction. My son likes this story and requests it each year at Thanksgiving.

When he was twelve, there was an accident. He almost went blind. For three weeks he lay in the hospital, his eyes bandaged. He did not like visitors, but if they came he'd silently hold their hand as they talked.

Small attentions are all he requires. Tell him you never saw anyone so adept at parallel parking.

Still, your life will not be easy.
Just look in the drawer where he keeps his socks.
Nothing matches. And what's the turtle shell
doing there, or the map of the moon,
or the surgeon's plastic model of a take-apart heart?

You must understand -he doesn't see the world clearly.
Once he screamed, "The woods are on fire!"
when it was only a blue cloud of insects
lifting from the trees.

But he's a good boy.
He likes to kiss
and be kissed.
I remember mornings
he would wake me, stroking my whiskers
and kissing my hand.

He'll tell you -- and it's true -he prefers the green of your eyes to all the green life of heaven and earth.

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## **Sacrifices**

All winter the fire devoured everything -tear-stained elegies, old letters, diaries, dead flowers. When April finally arrived, I opened the woodstove one last time and shoveled the remains of those long cold nights into a bucket, ash rising through shafts of sunlight, as swirling in bright, angelic eddies. I shoveled out the charred end of an oak log, black and pointed like a pencil; half-burnt pages sacrificed in the making of poems; old, square handmade nails liberated from weathered planks split for kindling. I buried my hands in the bucket, found the nails, lifted them, the phoenix of my right hand shielded with soot and tar, my left hand shrouded in soft white ash -nails in both fists like forged lightning. I smeared black lines on my face, drew crosses on my chest with the nails, raised my arms and stomped my feet, dancing in honor of spring and rebirth, dancing in honor of winter and death. I hauled the heavy bucket to the garden, spread ashes over the ground, asked the earth to be good. I gave the earth everything that pulled me through the lonely winter -oak trees, barns, poems. I picked up my shovel and turned hard, gray dirt, the blade splitting winter from spring. With hoe and rake, I cultivated soil, tilling row after row, the earth now loose and black. Tearing seed packets with my teeth, I sowed spinach with my right hand, planted petunias with my left. Lifting clumps of dirt, I crumbled them in my fists, loving each dark letter that fell from my fingers. And when I carried my empty bucket to the lake for water, a few last ashes rose into spring-morning air, ash drifting over fields dew-covered and lightly dusted green.

Anonymous submiss	sion.		
Richard Jones			

## The Road

I, too, would ease my old car to a stop on the side of some country road and count the stars or admire a sunset or sit quietly through an afternoon....

I'd open the door and go walking like James Wright across a meadow, where I might touch a pony's ear and break into blossom; or, like Hayden

Carruth, sustained by the sight of cows grazing in pastures at night, I'd stand speechless in the great darkness; I'd even search on some well-traveled road

like Phil Levine in this week's New Yorker, the poet driving his car to an orchard outside the city where, for five dollars, he fills a basket with goddamned apples.

#### Tree

When the sun goes down I have my first drink standing in the yard, talking to my neighbor about the alder tree rising between our houses, a lowly tree that prospered from our steady inattention and shot up quick as a weed to tower over our rooftops, where it now brandishes a rich, luxuriant crown. Should we cut it down? Neither of us wants to -we agree that we like the flourishing branches, shade like thick woods. We don't say it, studying our tree in silence, but we know that if the roots get into the foundations we've got real trouble. John goes back inside. Nothing to be done in summer -not to those heavy branches. I balance my empty glass on top of a fence post. In the quiet early dark, those peaceful minutes before dinner, I bend down to the flower beds I love and pull a few weeds -something I've meant to do all day.

## What Do You Do About Dry Periods In Your Writing?

When the writing is going well,
I am a prince in a desert palace,
fountains flowing in the garden.
I lean an elbow on a velvet pillow
and drink from a silver goblet,
poems like a banquet
spread before me on rugs
with rosettes the damask of blood.

But exiled
from the palace, I wander -crawling on burning sand,
thirsting on barren dunes,
believing a heartless mirage no less true
than palms and pools of the cool oasis.

Anonymous submission.