

Classic Poetry Series

Wesley McNair
- poems -

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Wesley McNair()

For My Wife

How were we to know, leaving your two kids
behind in New Hampshire for our honeymoon
at twenty-one, that it was a trick of cheap
hotels in New York City to draw customers
like us inside by displaying a fancy lobby?
Arriving in our fourth-floor room, we found
a bed, a scarred bureau, and a bathroom door
with a cut on one side the exact shape
of the toilet bowl that was in its way
when I closed it. I opened and shut the door,
admiring the fit and despairing of it. You
discovered the initials of lovers carved
on the bureau's top in a zigzag, breaking heart.
How wrong the place was to us then,
unable to see the portents of our future
that seem so clear now in the naivete'
of the arrangements we made, the hotel's
disdain for those with little money,
the carving of pain and love. Yet in that room
we pulled the covers over ourselves and lay
our love down, and in this way began our unwise
and persistent and lucky life together.

Wesley McNair

Goodbye To The Old Life

Goodbye to the old life,
to the sadness of rooms
where my family slept as I sat

late at night on my
island of light among papers.
Goodbye to the papers

and to the school for the rich
where I drove them, dressed up
in a tie to declare who I was.

Goodbye to all the ties
and to the life I lost
by declaring, and a fond goodbye

to the two junk cars that lurched
and banged through the campus
making it sure I would never fit in.

Goodbye to the finest campus
money could buy, and one
final goodbye to the paycheck

that was always gone
before I got it home.
Farewell to the home

and a heartfelt goodbye
to all the tenants who rented
the upstairs apartment,

particularly Mrs. Doucette,
whose washer overflowed
down the walls of our bathroom

every other week, and Mr. Green,
determined in spite of the evidence
to learn the electric guitar.

And to you there, the young man
on the roof turning the antenna
and trying not to look down

on how far love has taken you,
and to the faithful wife
in the downstairs window

shouting, "That's as good
as we're going to get it,"
and to the four hopeful children

staying with the whole program
despite the rolling picture
and the snow - goodbye,

wealth and joy to us all
in the new life, goodbye!

Wesley McNair