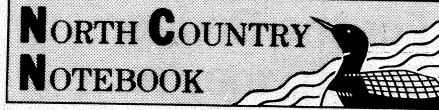


# The Meter's Running

The Hungry Poet offers verse for Thanksgiving.



BY GEORGE VUKELICH

**S**teady Eddy was saying that the Hungry Poet stopped by the other day to barter some poems.

"The way he put it," Steady says, "he's giving me food for thought. I'm giving him food for his stomach. He also said that considering the time of year, he's trading some of his turkeys for some of mine. I could see it, but I told him I wasn't doing the restaurant anymore. Fine, he says. 'Just do the turkey and I'll come to your house.'"

So, Steady says, that's the deal. A Thanksgiving dinner for a Thanksgiving Folio.

"We'll all have a little something," Steady says with a smile, "to chew on. Try some. They go good with the red wine."

There was that day when I was small we walked the oak woods in the fall. We did not see a squirrel at all My father left me to hunt alone. He disappeared over the hill. I wanted Something to kill not knowing one day I would have my fill.

I sat down to wait, to wait on a stone. I did something then I have never confessed.

I fired point blank at the high squirrel's nest.

I lied to my father but he knew the rest.

I remember the blood. I remember the bone.

I watched my son, hands in pockets, talking of frogs, talking of rockets. His eyes near rolling from their sockets.

Talking of wart hogs fleeing the lions. Ratfish were eaten by elephant seals. Lake trout bled dead by the lamprey eels.

Accepting of all this killing for meals,

I awaited his discovering the Mayans. His hardest question to my mind was: *Why is there a humankind?* Yet, watching him made it easy to find God in the eons, God in the ions.

What if it is as Some have said, those Some Few who refuse to be dead, that we have all been here before. Remaking our lives. Remaking our bed. Were you a soldier? Were you a whore? Were you once hidden behind the locked door?

Were you sometimes slayer, sometimes slain?

Have you died with a whimper, then with a roar?

Was there an Eden and did it have rain? Were you once Abel and then also Cain? Were you once me and have I been you? Have we been mad and are we now sane?

Is what they call Karma eternally true? Are we now simply getting our due? Was Justice here when this world was new?

Did we laugh at that when this world was new?

Old woman, we will sit a spell

and listen to the November wind speaking slow and haltingly of buried things, of wedding rings. We lean to catch the murmurings. Scuttlings in the silent barn. Some are rats, some are bats, some are nameless in the boards. *When we began, we had two teams, four horses and just the two of us. Together, we worked.*

*From the seeds of our loins, from the seeds of our lands, our harvest of years. The years like leaves, all blown away. The farmer buried beyond his house. Now, a rustling in the window ferns. Old Grandma, listening and far away. His rocking chair: Empty always and deathly still. The wind is rising. The rocking chair stirs.*

I want to know the books you read How many hungry do you feed? How many bodies have you forced to bleed?

How many sent down to the grave? I care not for your battalion flags How many children are left in rags? How many soldiers in body bags? Why are you called Home of the Brave? Do you speak Peace and yet wage War? Do you lock the poor outside your door?

**YOU ARE NOT TO MOCK THEM ANYMORE!**

Now. Show me the things you expect to save.

"The poems are untitled," Steady said. "Except that last one. It's called 'The Accounting.' Enjoy your turkey." ■

*George Vukelich reads selections from North Country Notebook Sunday nights at 11:30 on Wisconsin Public Radio, WHA (970 AM).*