Once

Once there was a boy who
wanted to be beautiful
and a girl who
wanted to be strong.
The boy was worried
that he wasn't beautiful enough.
The girl was worried
that she wasn't strong enough.

One day they went out to seek
their fortunes.

But there was nothing.

There was nowhere for them to go
Nothing for them to see
No one for them to meet.
There was no story for them
to be in.
They couldn't even meet each other.
You may have thought they had already met
but they hadn't
because there wasn't anywhere
for them to meet.

Until you came along
and decided that you can do
something about it.

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Attack

I was in a public toilet
when I was attacked by a hair-dryer.
PHOOOOOO!

I had walked past it calmly.
I hadn't said anything provocative.
I didn't stare at it.
I didn't disrespect it
I didn't say, 'Look at you stuck on the wall
Nowhere to go, nothing to do
Who are you? Johnny No-mates?'

I did none of these things.

But still it leapt at me
Pumping out hot air:
PHOOOOOO!
Roaring in my face:
PHOOOOOO!
Roughing up my hair:
PHOOOOOO!

I said, Excuse ME!

And it said:
PHOOOOOO!

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Where Broccoli Comes From

Not many people know
that broccoli grows in the armpits
of very big green men
who live in the forest
and brave broccoli cutters
go deep into the forests
and they creep up on the
very big green men.
They wait for the
very big green men
to fall asleep
and the broccoli cutters
get out their
great big broccoli razors
and they shave the
armpits
of the very big green men.
And that's where broccoli
comes from.
Not many people know that.

Just thought I'd let you know.

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The Child Who Was Wild

Once there was a woman, a young, young woman
She ran from the city, the old, old city
She ran to the woods, the deep dark woods

She wasn't seen for days. Days, weeks and months.
She came out of the woods, the deep dark woods
She came with a child, a child who was wild.

She brought the child to the city, the old, old city
He grew and he grew and he grew and he grew
Out of his hands grew shoots: green shoots and leaves
Out of his shoulders grew the lily and the rose
His hair was the blossom that blows in the wind,
He stood in the city, the old, old city
with the leaves and the flowers and the blossom
falling, falling, falling on grey, grey gravel.

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The Difference

In Glasgow
The hotel gave us something called
'Soap'.
In Edinburgh
The hotel gave us the same stuff
and it was called: '
Skincare Bar'.

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The Lift

At the second floor
the voice inside the lift said,
'Second Floor, going up.'
But the Second Floor
was the top floor.
Where was the lift going?

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The Seagulls Think We Live at the Seaside

The seagulls think we live at the seaside:
the tower blocks are their cliffs,
they swoop for fish in the gutter
but happy that it's last night's fried rice.
They stand about talking on the pavement beach and ride the
sea-breezes pumped out by the cinema air-conditioning.
They hover over the waves of cars
and if you stare at them
wondering what they're doing so far from home
they stare back:
"This is our home now.
That kebab
Is a crab."

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Jack II

In this pocket, beans that grow into palaces
where a giant woman will do all she can for you.
In this pocket, a needle that will sew your finger
back to your hand, when an axe chops it off in the forest.
In this pocket, the hairs from a bald man's head
which will make you a scarf when the frosts come.
In this pocket, a chain that will lock up the jaws
of the man who tells lies about you.
In this pocket, crumbs of black bread
that will find you friends who will never leave you.
In this pocket, sea-shells that will sing you songs
sadder than your grandmother's grave.

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FIRST GRADE by William Stafford

In the play Amy didn't want to be
anybody; so she managed the curtain.
Sharon wanted to be Amy. But Sam
wouldn't let anybody be anybody else
he said it was wrong. "All right," Steve said,
"I'll be me but I don't like it."
So Amy was Amy, and we didn't have the play.
And Sharon cried.

* * *

"First Grade" from *The Darkness Around Us Is Deep*. Copyright © 1993 by the Estate of William Stafford

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About the Teeth of Sharks

The thing about a shark is—teeth,
One row above, one row beneath.

Now take a close look. Do you find
It has another row behind?

Still closer—here, I'll hold your hat:
Has it a third row behind that?

Now look in and...Look out! Oh my,
I'll *never* know now! Well, goodbye.

John Ciardi, "About the Teeth of Sharks" from *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1962). Copyright © 1962 by John Ciardi.

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