

THE AWAKENING

Lee Evans

A poor man, homeless for the night,
Lay down upon a rubbish heap
Beside the city harbor, where
A Titan's statue cleft the air
With upraised torch that gave no light.
He drifted into dreamless sleep.

One would have thought, to see that man
Lie sleeping there, that he had died
Sometime before, and had decayed,
Like all the refuse where he lay.
The table scraps and rusted cans
Seemed fragments of his shattered mind.

The dawn rose up above the sea
Next morning, as the garbage fled
Your homes toward the city dump.
And one huge load backed slowly up,
And shifted all of its debris
Upon the sleeping vagrant's bed.

Oh, what a rude awakening
For one so dead to all the world!
The seagulls screamed; an avalanche
Of putrid offal left to chance
Did gag the hobo's mouth and sting,
As out he coughed the wretched swill.

"God damn you!" When the man could speak,
He scrambled up the stinking mound
And stammered curses at the sky—
Where Liberty still flourished high
The torch of freedom for the weak
And the oppressed to rally round.

Anon the poor pariah cried
In prophecy for all our sins,
As reeling on that jagged crest
Of reeking trash, he shook his fist:
"If Freedom is the answer, why
Does all its refuse bury men?"

“I stumble through the wind and rain,
And break my back to build your homes.
Upon my broken knees I crawl—
Although you promise Light to all,
And refuge from the tyrant’s chains.
Oh, how much longer must I groan?”

But righteous wrath must soon be spent,
When nothing can restrain its thrust
With outlets for its energy.
The pauper sank upon his knees,
And gasped for breath upon the bent
And bloody wreckage of a bus—

But not to pray. He felt the sleep
Ascending from his worn-out shoes,
Along his tattered trousers’ seams,
And through his abdomen, beneath
His rib cage—where his heartbeat grew
Too heavy to sustain his grief.

Across the sky the sun went down
Toward the western wasted land,
And all about the Titan’s feet
The waves that washed the harbor leaped—
While still within the hollow hand
The lightless torch loomed o’er the town.

“The Awakening” © 2006 by Lee Evans

Contemporary Rhyme Vol. 2 No. 3 2006