



AMERICAN
PATRIOT



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On the other Hand

Sometimes a flag is all you need
when autumn flares or spring flares,

the presence of change and emerging color
against the evergreen evergreens

and the perfect white paint
and the perfect black shutters

and the lawn coming or going
so when the wind

breathes hard enough
through the neat yards

of the semi-privileged
to raise the ideal in the flag

so that we might believe George
cut down the tree, almost

forget the Abe was killed
and that red is for blood

and nothing else.
And it's only through

squeaky clean windows
that I can reflect on that

before returning to my own
backyard where there is work

to be done while it is still cool
in this American breeze.



Good Fences Make Good Fences

This summer you can hold a can of iced cold American in your bare hand. –Mary Bowerman, USA Today

Start any sentence with, *In America, We*
and you'll end up with a breeze full

of hot air. The pattern of the flag
the pattern of the fences. The pattern

of bark on a tree. The patterns of each life
and how they vary.

How many flags does a nation need,
does one yard need?

If we could all let the breeze just take us
like a flag, maybe we wouldn't worry

about what's in our wallets or how much
tread is on our tires. The ripple of a flag

in the breeze like sheets drying on the line.
If we could all just let the breeze take us

like a flag, maybe we wouldn't worry
about how high our fences are

and how much privacy they give.
The breeze that blows out candles

unfurls the flag. Protection
is a relative thing.



Gate for Short Patriotic Animals

An elephant, for example—
not a good gate for an elephant

despite the aggressive patriotism
of the elephant in American politics

it is not a native species
and would destroy

the ragged but beautiful arbor.
The small animals have a bounce

in their step when entering—
who can resist a little parade

strut when crossing that threshold?
Given the nature of things

the gate is largely symbolic
in repelling enemies.

Is the cat in the window
on guard, or a prisoner?

See, when it comes to symbolic
gates and flags, that's what

stops us short.



American Theme Park

Dick and Jane live in the house.
The alligator's eaten Spot and Puff
after they fell in the moat. The Tunnel
of Love collapsed in that mine disaster

no one talks about. You can sell your soul
for an all-day pass. The most popular ride
is Beat the Bushes. Rampunzel lives
in the attic and lets her hair down

never. The crocodile—did I say alligator?—
passes gas when you step on the secret board
and at other random times. Use your VIP Pass
to get to the head of the line of bridge jumpers.

Democracy was never about symmetry.
Yet someone trims the bushes daily
into the breasts of Lady Liberty. Step on
the secret board and the flag falls down.

The alligator ate the crocodile, like it says
in the constitution. Stick around for the lucky
number raffle and the striptease
of the sacrificial virgin. That's Tom Sawyer

peeing on the picket fence. Bottles of it
available in the gift shop. Wars start
when you step on the secret board.
Pick up your free gun at customer service.

Have your future told in the Dungeon of Love.
At the tollbooth on your way out, shed your
loose change and imagined freedoms
as you head back into the real country.



Don't Worry, It's Friendly

When your neighbor has to
hold down his chairs with bricks

to keep them from fleeing
even while his walls are

crumbling, when it is not
clear what exactly is for sale

but it's clearly not his patriotism,
when your neighbor will never

forget the sacrifices made
so he can erect his shrine,

when it's never been clear
why he has his own private

dumpster, when his lawn
is greener than it should be,

then well, just to be safe,
wouldn't a little flag

look nice—showing your colors
to make sure he sees.



Yellow Ribbon Shrine

All the chatter stops
when a family loses someone
defending their country.

We could talk
about degrees
of sadness

variations on sadness
reasons for sadness

but let's not.
Let's listen

to the silence
of each other

swallowing
loss.



Beware of Flag

Doesn't look like much,
little old thing behind the fence

but open that gate
and see what tears your leg off.

You have to approach
slow, give it the back

of your hand to sniff.
It's lived a long life

in flag years.
It's got an attitude.

It's been killing
all the grass

with its waste
but maybe that's the price

of protection.



DANCING GNOME
BREWING COMPANY

Lays

STOP

No Parking

Trade Mark

The stop instruction is specified with either an English STOP or local language legend in the United Nations Convention on Road Signs and Signals. The sign's distinctive design was developed and first used in the U.S. and later adopted by other countries and by the U.N. —Wikipedia

STOP: an internationally recognized symbol. We're all agreed on that,

more or less. How many hours were spent making those potato chips look so damn

scrumptious?

•

Dancing gnomes got up on full-moon nights and stitched the flag for Cinderlina so she did not

bite into the poison apple and guess the witch's name to turn the prince into a frog

and live happily ever once upon a time. As their reward, they each received

a lifetime of free potato chips, which kept them very thirsty and proved great

motivation to produce large quantities of Dancing Gnome Brew.

Thus, the eternal cycle of economic yin and yang.

•

Yellow curbs mean no parking. So STOP thinking about parking here.

How many hours do we spend arguing whether the street is one way or both ways?

How much added value do we get from Ye Olde Fashioned light posts?

Why not just go back to brick streets and slow everybody down a little?

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I live on the corner of Old Fogey and Pothole Avenue

in a basement apartment under a manhole cover

and only emerge under the full moon of a Lays Potato Chip.

•

By the way, the flag. Always a good investment to line your streets

with them. Flags and light posts. All the consultants say so

if you pay them enough. That's the American way.

Let the dancing begin.



American Electronic

It's a sign of the times
that the message is gone

but we can't help but look
at the crash site, the ragged

edges of what was once
somebody's dream:

plug it in and they
will come.

Now, a flag on a pole?
Pretty safe generally.

Barbed wire always
helps.

Though some have been
known to burn

with only temporary
consequence. Down

here, on the other hand
all the steel doors

in the world cannot
help us. The country

paints yellow lines
on blacktop

and we are encouraged
to respect them.

Yellow lines create
a flag of sorts. God

is in the neighborhood
as he usually is

when it comes to flags
but he didn't buy

whatever you once
sold, thus, sharp fragments

of a story that we can only
imagine, just another

unplugged dream.



In Recent War News

the U.S. has claimed victory
and retaken the Backfill Mountains
with only minor casualties

which have been sorted
into piles. What church
shall be built upon this rock

will be determined
by the Department of Afterthought.
Meanwhile, caution cones remain

to protect the captured
territory. The dark cloud
over governmental intentions

is considered temporary
though some say
it's always been there.

High hopes remain
in the distance,
as they always do.