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Two Sonnets, Two Found Poems, Manhattan

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## Robert Phillips

### Two Sonnets

#### HER LIFE AT SEVEN

And in the yard, before the open barn,  
 The girl would wait for Grandpa's Chevrolet  
 To turn, take her to town Saturday morn.  
 They'd shop, then have a chocolate nut sundae.

Sundays they'd motor to the family plot.  
 She'd note the dates of relatives long gone:  
 "There's Roy, and Floy, Hannah and old Charlotte."  
 Homeward she'd nap curled in the backseat sun.

Somedays her father came from the city,  
 Bringing his sad face and a stick of gum,  
 To tell her she was getting quite pretty,  
 Like her mother (who was in "a home").

No friends, no games, no sister or brother,  
 She grew up clear-eyed, herself or other.

#### CHANCE ENCOUNTER

If I should turn a corner of the street  
 And suddenly find you standing right there –  
 I'd grasp your hand, and see that our eyes meet.  
 I'd say, "How well you look. What lovely hair."  
 You'd say, "Are you still in the same old place?  
 Your writing – has it entered a new phase?"  
 All the while I'm memorizing your face,  
 The smile, create a parting of the ways.

A parting of the ways! When it did come,  
 Some fourteen years ago, it was as if  
 A hired assassin shot me with a gun,  
 Or a street urchin stuck me with a shiv.  
 I never thought I would get over it.  
 And I never let you discover it.

## Two Found Poems

### 1. GEORGE BERNARD SHAW TO H.G. WELLS

Charlotte died this morning at 2:30.  
 You saw what she had become –  
 an old woman bowed and crippled,  
 furrowed and wrinkled and greatly  
 distressed by hallucinations of crowds  
 in the room, evil persons, and animals.  
 Also by breathlessness, as the osteitis  
 closed on her lungs. She got steadily  
 worse, ending with double pneumonia.

But on Friday morning a miracle began.  
 Her troubles vanished. Her visions ceased.  
 Her furrows and wrinkles smoothed out.  
 Forty years fell off her like a garment.  
 She had thirty hours of happiness and heaven.  
 Even after her last breath she shed  
 another twenty years, now lies incredibly young,  
 beautiful. I have to go look at her again.  
 I did not know I could be so moved.

## 2. DAME EDITH SITWELL TO LADY PAMELA H. SNOW

I am so distressed to hear you have insomnia. It is horrible and one really suffers greatly. When in London, sometimes I only sleep two hours a night. If one could only rid one's mind, completely, of *words* during the night. It hasn't worked lately, because I have been too tired to sleep, but at one moment the following sent me to sleep –

To imagine oneself in a gondola floating through Venice and regarding, under a full moon – with no sound excepting that of an oar, and nothing near one – only the sleeping palaces as one floated on and on and on. On a more mundane note, a tumbler of *hot* beer in a bed can work – or indeed, cold, if it comes to that.

## Manhattan

*There are at least four days  
in the history of Manhattan. . .*

– Allan Gurganus  
*Plays well with Others*

At first it's a concept, like solving your problems  
By getting to The Emerald City by hook or by  
Crook. It hardens into an obsession – no one can  
Dissuade you. You dream, you save, you write for  
Employment, finally secure a few interviews.  
First sight, from tinted Greyhound bus windows, far

Grandeur than imagined: clamor, glamour.  
Historical skyscrapers. You're not in Kansas anymore.  
It marks the First Day in the History of Manhattan.  
Jittery throughout interviews, you're heartsick – you  
Kill every prospect. Just return home, abject. Then a  
Letter materializes, an offer of an "internship."  
Move to a Village apartment, Second day in the History.  
New York City – let the games begin! Ballgames,  
Operas (the balcony, but Dame Kiri nonetheless), the  
Philharmonic, MOMA, The Divine Miss M, the Hamptons,  
Qualudes, grass . . . A few years, the job gets boring.  
Relationships get harder. Everyone's full of attitude.  
Some nights you just pray for someone to hold you.  
There's no one here who doesn't love him/herself.  
Until one day, smarter, poorer, less intact, you  
Vacate, return to your origins (such as they  
Were). The Third Day in the History of Manhattan.  
Xmastime, years later, you create the Fourth Day. Before  
Yggdrasil, the Rockefeller Center tree, you adore the  
Zeitgeist, become the city's most humbled, seasoned tourist.