

Robert Rehder

OPEN LETTER TO THE SECRETARY OF THE SWEDISH
ACADEMY

Dear Sir,
Please send me a Nobel Prize.

I have completed the enclosed coupon
And attach three Quaker Puffed Wheat box tops.

The newspaper said that Mr. Heaney's prize was
Over a million dollars.

That would be satisfactory.
We could use the money.

Katherine wants a new horse,
Caroline would like to enlarge the kitchen

And I have this crazy idea
That I would like to live in my own country,

And since the UN Commissioner for Refugees
Is taking a long time

To get to my dossier,
I would spend some of the money to do that.

As the recent prizes for literature have been awarded
For political reasons,

I thought it would make a nice change
To give one simply for the poems,

And my poems are as simple
As I can make them (look at this one!).

The insouciance and naive charm
Of these notebook-aged compositions

With their toasty-oak nuances, supple tannins,
Sceptical overtones

And wild blackberry finish
Would doubtless be enhanced

By the award of a prize.
I would be happy to accept the prize for physics.

Reading Richard Feynman was the occasion
For one of my best poems—

As far as I know,
The first poem ever written about a tea bag—

And no other poet in his own life
Has so exemplified chaos theory.

Feynman, as you remember, shared the prize in 1965
For his theory of the interaction

Of charged particles in a radiation field.
If, like most people's, your budget's a bit tight,

I would not object to sharing a prize,
Medicine, for example, which is often shared,

Since my poems make people feel better—
And think.

If there was money left over
I would like to buy several square miles

Of rough pasture and woods in which to walk,
Maybe along the Cedar or Iowa rivers.

Every poet should possess a bit of wilderness.
You will have noticed that I have not said anything

About writing more poems.
Although some people say that the work of the winners

Deteriorates markedly
After the award of their prizes,

It's a risk I'm prepared to take.
Frank says that in his experience

The easiest life crisis to cope with is success.
Anyway, you cannot write poems for money or prizes,

You can, but somehow they don't last.
I'm hoping to go on as before,

But who knows what they're going to do next?
I write poems because I become restless,

Bad-tempered,
Depressed

And difficult to live with if I don't,
There's not another reason.