

LYING AWAKE IN A BED  
ONCE SLEPT IN BY  
GROVER CLEVELAND

One night, this bed was the Ship of State. It sank  
In the middle as deep as its hard slats  
Under the burdens of office  
Which, pound for pound, were seldom greater,  
Sir, than under you. In the midst of panic,  
You kept your dignity tight as your fob pocket,  
Not throwing your weight around but thinking  
Slowly, so slowly they said sometimes  
The problems went away while you pondered  
Mighty issues, harboring grave doubts.

I picture you that night, on your back  
( Giving free sway to your personal corporation )  
As if lying in state, with the State  
Of New York lying six feet below,  
Mulling again the disasters of the body  
Politic, making up your mind  
After the fact like a teacher grading a newspaper—  
Homestead, Haymarket, Pullman, Coxey's Army.

Mr. President, a man like a bed can stand foursquare  
For seventy years and have no more  
To show for it than a plaque.  
Last night, I put myself in your place,  
Out flat, my feet jammed at the footboard  
Trying to slow things down. Outside,  
Beyond a bay window, the same State of New York  
( Which had dead bushes and leaves all over it )  
Was crawling out from under winter so slowly  
I couldn't see it move. Nobody asked me  
How to do anything. I wasn't required  
To nod or shake. Did the riots happen?  
What did I decide? The newspapers haven't come yet,  
So I don't know whether we made it through the night.