

GRAB BAG Miscellany

Personal Accounts

Selected poems.

BY ROBERT PHILLIPS



The Mole

"There goes the Mole!" Mother cried.
 "You children look quick or you'll miss
 him!" It was Father, disappearing down
 the cellar stairs. Every day he'd retreat
 to his radio shack, stay past midnight.

He'd built a rig others envied, came
 from miles around to see. Every day
 he'd jam the airwaves, ruin the block's TV.
 Every day we'd hear him sit before the
 mike
 calling "CQ, CQ calling CQ" to whoever
 listened at the other end. He once
 claimed to reach Moscow. "Ralph's the
 handle,
 calling from W2CAT, the Old Cat Station—
 W-2-CAT-Alley-Tail." He was a handsome
 cat;
 Mother once adored him, I know.

But what I'll never know is, Why he'd talk
 to any stranger far away and not once
 climb back up the stairs to the five of us
 to say, "Hello . . . hello . . . hello . . .
 hello."

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 "Running on Empty" and "The Mole"
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Suburban Interior

Sun-streamed afternoons,
 your apartment is flooded

like the Grand Canal,
 the room a chiaroscuro.

Vermicular shadows slide
 the walls. Like Venice,

we are suspended in time,
 the only movement a drift

of motes, we two adrift
 within a vermeil glow.

There is no winged lion,
 no muscular gondolier,

but a consolation, church
 -bells in an empty piazza.

You never mind so much sun.
 When you draw the venetian

blinds, I take it as sign
 you want to make love. Segue

into dark, the interior
 of the Basilica of St. Mark.

The doves outside flutter
 into a single mass.

Running on Empty

As a teenager I would drive Father's
 Chevrolet cross-county, given me

reluctantly: "Always keep the tank
 half full, boy, half full, ya hear?"—

the fuel gauge dipping, dipping
 toward Empty, hitting Empty, then

—thrillingly!—way below Empty,
 myself driving cross-county

mile after mile, faster and faster,
 all night long, this crazy kid driving

the earth's rolling surface
 against all laws, defying physics,

rules and time, riding on nothing
 but fumes, pushing luck harder

than anyone pushed before, the wind
 screaming past like the Furies . . .

I stranded myself only once, a white
 night with no gas station open, ninety miles

from nowhere. Panicked for a while,
 at standstill, myself stalled.

At dawn the car and I both refilled.
 But Father, I am running on empty still.

ROBERT PHILLIPS has written poetry since junior high school and has 14 books to his credit. Last year, he received a \$5,000 Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and was one of 14 American poets invited by the National Endowment for the Arts to read at the Library of Congress. His most recent book is *Personal Accounts: New & Selected Poems, 1966-86*. Phillips, who earned degrees from SU in 1960 and 1963, works as creative director for Lambert/Dale Advertising in New York City.

