



Caravan

IT SEEMS LIKE A LIFETIME AGO – which of course it was, all that and more. For a boy, life on the farm was idyllic, but for the young man I became, that very peace and predictability were stifling, unbearable. I had big dreams, and needed a big place to explore them: the whole wide world.

Near our village of Barrel Arbor, the steamliners touched down and traveled on rails along the Winding Pinion River toward Crown City. Watching them pass in the night, how I prayed to get away . . .

In a world lit only by fire
Long train of flares under piercing stars
I stand watching the steamliners roll by

The caravan thunders onward
To the distant dream of the city
The caravan carries me onward
On my way at last
On my way at last

I can't stop thinking big
I can't stop thinking big

On a road lit only by fire
Going where I want, instead of where I should
I peer out at the passing shadows
Carried through the night into the city
Where a young man has a chance of making good
A chance to break from the past
The caravan thunders onward
Stars winking through the canvas hood
On my way at last

In a world where I feel so small
I can't stop thinking big

BU2B

WE WERE ALWAYS TAUGHT that we lived in “the best of all possible worlds.” The Watchmaker ruled from Crown City through the Regulators; the alchemist-priests gave us coldfire for power and light, and everything was well ordered. We accepted our various individual fates as inevitable, for we had also been taught, “Whatever happens to us must be what we deserve, for it could not happen to us if we did not deserve it.”

None of it seemed right to me . . .

I was brought up to believe
The universe has a plan
We are only human
It's not ours to understand

The universe has a plan
All is for the best
Some will be rewarded
And the devil take the rest

All is for the best
Believe in what we're told
Blind men in the market
Buying what we're sold
Believe in what we're told
Until our final breath
While our loving Watchmaker
Loves us all to death

In a world of cut and thrust
I was always taught to trust
In a world where all must fail
Heaven's justice will prevail

The joy and pain that we receive
Each comes with its own cost
The price of what we're winning
Is the same as what we've lost

Until our final breath
The joy and pain that we receive
Must be what we deserve
I was brought up to believe

Clockwork Angels

THE PLACE I HAD MOST WANTED TO SEE – Chronos Square, at the heart of Crown City. I had seen many images of the city before, and Chronos Square, but nothing could convey its immensity – the heaven-reaching towers of the Cathedral of the Timekeepers, or the radiant glory of the Angels – Land, Sea, Sky, and Light – bathed in the brilliant glow of the floating globes.

High above the city square
Globes of light float in mid-air
Higher still, against the night
Clockwork angels bathed in light

You promise every treasure, to the foolish and the wise
Goddesses of mystery, spirits in disguise
Every pleasure, we bow and close our eyes
Clockwork angels, promise every prize

Clockwork angels, spread their arms and sing
Synchronized and graceful, they move like living things
Goddesses of Light, of Sea and Sky and Land
Clockwork angels, the people raise their hands – As if to fly

All around the city square
Power shimmers in the air
People gazing up with love
To those angels high above

Celestial machinery – move through your commands
Goddesses of mystery, so delicate and so grand
Moved to worship, we bow and close our eyes
Clockwork angels, promise every prize

“Lean not upon your own understanding *
Ignorance is well and truly blessed
Trust in perfect love, and perfect planning
Everything will turn out for the best”

Stars aglow like scattered sparks
Span the sky in clockwork arcs
Hint at more than we can see
Spiritual machinery

*Proverbs 3:5 [and In-N-Out milkshake!]

i - The Pedlar 1

A foggy woodland road, a crowded village square, the busy streets of Crown City – a wandering pedlar travels the land, uttering the ageless call.

“What do you lack?”

The Anarchist

WALKING AMONG THE PEOPLE – who are so content, so blind – the Anarchist hears the pedlar's call, and sneers derisively. “What do I lack? Ah ... vengeance?”

Will there be world enough and time for me to sing that song?
A voice so silent for so long
For all those years I had to get along, they told me I was wrong
I never wanted to belong – I was so strong

I lack their smiles and their diamonds; I lack their happiness and love
I envy them for all those things, I never got my fair share of

The lenses inside of me that paint the world black
The pools of poison, the scarlet mist, that spill over into rage
The things I've always been denied
An early promise that somehow died
A missing part of me that grows around me like a cage

In all your science of the mind, seeking blind through flesh and bone
Find the blood inside this stone
What I know, I've never shown; what I feel, I've always known
I plan my vengeance on my own – and I was always alone

Oh – They tried to get me
Oh – They'll never forget me

Carnies

I FOUND WORK WITH A TRAVELING CARNIVAL, and for the Midsummer Festival in Crown City, our games and rides were set up right in the middle of the Square, beneath the Angels. One night, amid the noise and confusion of the crowded midway, I saw a man working with wires and wooden barrels. He stood and turned – the Anarchist! – holding a clockwork detonator in his hand. I called out to warn the crowd, then suddenly he threw the device at me, and I caught it automatically – just as the people turned to look my way. I escaped, but in disgrace, and fled down the Winding Pinion River to the sea.

Under the gaze of the angels
A spectacle like he's never seen
Spinning lights and faces
Demon music and gypsy queens

The glint of iron wheels
Bodies spin in a clockwork dance
The smell of flint and steel
A wheel of fate, a game of chance

How I prayed just to get away
To carry me anywhere
Sometimes the angels punish us
By answering our prayers

A face of naked evil
Turns the young boy's blood to ice
Deadly confrontation
Such a dangerous device

Shout to warn the crowd
Accusations ringing loud
A ticking box, in the hand of the innocent
The angry crowd moves toward him with bad intent

Halo Effect

I HAD FALLEN HELPLESSLY IN LOVE with one of the performers. She was so different from “the girl I left behind,” and I was beginning to understand I had only pretended she was right for me. I pursued my beautiful acrobat obsessively until she let me be with her – then I suffered her rejection and contempt. Once again, I had created an ideal of the perfect soulmate, and tried to graft it onto her. It didn't fit. Such illusions have colored my whole life.

What did I see?
Fool that I was
A goddess, with wings on her heels
All my illusions
Projected on her
The ideal, that I wanted to see

What did I know?
Fool that I was
Little by little, I learned
My friends were dismayed
To see me betrayed
But they knew they could never tell me

What did I care?
Fool that I was
Little by little, I burned
Maybe sometimes
There might be a flaw
But how pretty the picture was back then

What did I do?
Fool that I was
To profit from youthful mistakes?
It's shameful to tell
How often I fell
In love with illusions again

So shameful to tell
Just how often I fell
In love with illusions again

A goddess with wings on her heels . . .

Seven Cities Of Gold

THE LEGEND HAD PASSED DOWN FOR GENERATIONS. Far across the Western Sea, where the steamliners could not fly, lay a wilderness land hiding seven cities of gold. I dared the crossing on one of the stout ships that followed the trade route to Poseidon, a tough port city. I worked there for a while on the steamliners that served the alchemy mines, then eventually set out into the Redrock Desert. The stones were sculpted into unearthly monuments, and the country grew cold as I traveled north in search of the most famous City of Gold: Cibola. Its name had sounded in my dreams since childhood.

A man can lose his past, in a country like this
Wandering aimless
Parched and nameless
A man could lose his way, in a country like this
Canyons and cactus
Endless and trackless

Searching through a grim eternity
Sculptured by a prehistoric sea

Seven Cities of Gold
Stories that fired my imagination
Seven Cities of Gold
A splendid mirage in this desolation
Seven Cities of Gold
Glowing in my dreams, like hallucinations
Glitter in the sun like a revelation
Distant as a comet or a constellation

A man can lose himself, in a country like this
Rewrite the story
Recapture the glory
A man could lose his life, in a country like this
Sunblind and friendless
Frozen and endless

The nights grow longer, the farther I go
Wake to aching cold, and a deep Sahara of snow

That gleam in the distance could be heaven's gate
A long-awaited treasure at the end of my cruel fate

The Wreckers

NARROWLY ESCAPING A FROZEN DEATH IN THAT DESERT, I made my way back to Poseidon, and found a berth on a homeward ship. Caught in a terrible storm, we seemed to find salvation in an unexpected signal light. Steering toward it, we soon learned it was false – placed by the denizens to lure ships to their doom on the jagged reefs. They plundered the cargos and abandoned the crews and passengers to the icy waves.

I was the only survivor.

The breakers roar on an unseen shore
In the teeth of a hurricane
We struggle in vain
A hellish night – a ghostly light
Appears through the driving rain
Salvation in a human chain

All I know is that sometimes you have to be wary

Of a miracle too good to be true
All I know is that sometimes the truth is contrary
Everything in life you thought you knew
All I know is that sometimes you have to be wary
'Cause sometimes the target is you

Driven aground, with that awful sound
Drowned by the cheer from ashore
We wonder what for
The people swarm through the darkling storm
Gather everything they can score
'Til their backs won't bear any more

The breakers roar on an unseen shore
In the teeth of an icy grave
The human chain leaves a bloody stain
Washed away in the pounding waves

All I know is that memory can be too much to carry
Striking down like a bolt from the blue

Headlong Flight

THINKING BACK OVER MY LIFE, AND TELLING STORIES ABOUT MY "GREAT ADVENTURES" – they didn't always feel that grand at the time. But on balance, I wouldn't change anything. In the words of one of our great alchemists, Friedrich Gruber, "I wish I could do it all again."

All the journeys
Of this great adventure
It didn't always feel that way
I wouldn't trade them
Because I made them
The best I could
And that's enough to say

Some days were dark
I wish that I could live it all again
Some nights were bright
I wish that I could live it all again

All the highlights of that headlong flight
Holding on with all my might
To what I felt back then
I wish that I could live it all again

I have stoked the fire on the big steel wheels
Steered the airships right across the stars
I learned to fight, I learned to love and learned to feel
Oh, I wish that I could live it all again

All the treasures
The gold and glory
It didn't always feel that way
I don't regret it
I never forget it
I wouldn't trade tomorrow for today

I learned to fight and learned to love and learned to steal
I wish that I could live it all again

ii - The Pedlar 2

The ever-wandering pedlar.

"What do you lack?"

BU2B2

THOSE FATEFUL WORDS. "What do you lack?" spark an inner monologue about all that I have lost. No more boundless optimism, no more faith in greater powers, too much pain, too much grief, and too much disillusion. Despite all that, I realize the great irony that although I now believe only in the exchange of love, even that little faith follows the childhood reflex that "I was brought up to believe."

I was brought up to believe
Belief has failed me now
The bright glow of optimism
Abandoned me somehow

Belief has failed me now
Life goes from bad to worse
No philosophy consoles me
In a clockwork universe

Life goes from bad to worse
I still choose to live
Find a measure of love and laughter
And another measure to give

I still choose to live
And give, even while I grieve
Though the balance tilts against me
I was brought up to believe

Wish Them Well

VICTIMIZED, BEREAVED, AND DISAPPOINTED, SEEMINGLY AT EVERY TURN, I still resist feeling defeated, or cynical. I have come to believe that anger and grudges are burning embers in the heart not worth carrying through life. The best response to those who wound me is to get away from them – and wish them well.

All that you can do is wish them well
All that you can do is wish them well

Spirits turned bitter by the poison of envy
Always angry and dissatisfied
Even the lost ones, the frightened and mean ones
Even the ones with a devil inside

Thank your stars you're not that way
Turn your back and walk away
Don't even pause and ask them why
Turn around and say goodbye

People who judge without a measure of mercy
All the victims who will never learn
Even the lost ones, you can only give up on
Even the ones who make you burn

The ones who've done you wrong
The ones who pretended to be so strong
The grudges you've held for so long
It's not worth singing that same sad song

Even though you're going through hell
Just keep on going
Let the demons dwell

Just wish them well

The Garden

LONG AGO I READ A STORY FROM ANOTHER TIMELINE about a character named Candide. He also survived a harrowing series of misadventures and tragedies, then settled on a farm near Constantinople. Listening to a philosophical rant, Candide replied, "That is all very well, but now we must tend our garden."

I have now arrived at that point in my own story. There is a metaphorical garden in the acts and attitudes of a person's life, and the treasures of that garden are love and respect. I have come to realize that the gathering of love and respect – from others and for myself – has been the real quest of my life.

"Now we must tend our garden."

In this one of many possible worlds, all for the best, or some bizarre test?
It is what it is – and whatever
Time is still the infinite jest

The arrow flies when you dream, the hours tick away – the cells tick away
The Watchmaker keeps to his schemes
The hours tick away – they tick away

The measure of a life is a measure of love and respect
So hard to earn, so easily burned
In the fullness of time
A garden to nurture and protect

In the rise and the set of the sun
'Til the stars go spinning – spinning 'round the night
It is what it is – and forever
Each moment a memory in flight

The arrow flies while you breathe, the hours tick away—the cells tick away
The Watchmaker has time up his sleeve
The hours tick away – they tick away

The treasure of a life is a measure of love and respect
The way you live, the gifts that you give
In the fullness of time
It's the only return that you expect

The future disappears into memory
With only a moment between
Forever dwells in that moment
Hope is what remains to be seen