

Poetry Series

**Tentative Poet**  
**- poems -**

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# Tentative Poet(18/06/1961)

A doctor in private practice who made the grateful discovery late...

# All These Words

Thawing my reluctance  
Melting down my insecurity

Till fear gathers  
A slimy puddle at my feet

I stand naked, wild-eyed  
Exposed, yet knowing somehow

With these words I am safe

Tentative Poet

# Burial

like fallen petals  
strewn over weeping loam  
scattered ashes□

□

adrift on tumultuous seas  
my heart-light shines  
haphazard upon the past

no more tears shall grace  
this solemn burial  
no wreaths, no eulogy

only the laid-to-rest  
final severance forever

Tentative Poet

# By The Canal

here, beside the slow brown canal  
where the sluggish water drags

discarded dreams away, where  
old men, bored with their winter

lives, throw baited nylon over  
the rusted guardrail and wait for

hours, not caring one way or the  
other, many have lived half their

lives in the same cramped unit  
of the same decrepit moldering

blocks, three generations in one  
place, pacing the old corridors

day by day, each one another tiny  
conquest.

Tentative Poet

# Fear

He's sure deep within  
As sure as if it were  
Stabbing his insides

This long sliver of doubt  
Driving an unnamed fear  
Through his heavy heart

No longer joyous  
Now ponderous and deliberate  
Unable to soar

The release he knows  
But dreads  
Approaching

Consequences will follow  
The rush of a fire-storm  
That shall scorch

All their lives  
And leave indelible marks  
Upon small hearts

His greatest fear

Tentative Poet

# Growing Old

Why does she look like that,  
My daughter asked at a dinner,

She meant the old lady who sat in a wheelchair,  
At a table across from us, her body askew,

Head lolling to the left,  
No expression on her face,

And, I think most distressing,  
Her tongue appeared swollen,

Stuck in her open mouth.  
A maid tended to her,

Leaning over talking softly,  
Tapping on the table with a chopstick,

Entertaining the old lady  
Whose unfocused eyes looked to the middle distance

Off to one side, as her relatives loudly  
Devoured their steamed grouper and shark's fin soup.

She's old, she's suffered a stroke,  
I told her, that's how growing old is.

My daughter, silent for a moment,  
Digesting the horror of that fact perhaps, sniffed,

Said, I feel like crying when I see her.  
I looked over at my little girl,

Who just turned the corner of thirteen,  
Her life ahead still full of vagueness and possibilities,

Forced to confront one such,  
Her sympathy for the old lady

Overwhelming, dragging a rare frown  
Onto her sweet young face.

On the drive home, she was silent, thoughtful.  
I wondered if she was

Weighing her mortality,  
Measuring her not-yet five thousand days

Against the old lady's five-times-hers,  
And finding it doesn't add up  
Quite as easily as the sums she does in school.

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## Haiku #1

Soon to be father  
Hard heels clicking linoleum  
-puffing sterile air

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## Haiku #10

Chopsticks clicking bowl  
Gnarled fingers under dim light  
-Lone porridge supper

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## Haiku #11

a sudden shower  
scrubs the green leaves in the trees  
-Nature's laundry

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## Haiku #12

many gaping mouths  
Earl Grey with sandwiches  
-breakfast by Koi pond

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## Haiku #13

dry brush on canvas  
sparse patches of white on blue  
-quiet evening clouds

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## Haiku #14

ringing the brass bell  
silent row of devotees  
-morning temple hall

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## Haiku #15

gorgeously clashing  
reds and whites and pinks and greens  
-sunday flower stall

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## Haiku #16

across the mirror  
the imperfect stares at me  
-i bow low to him

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## Haiku #17

formless and changing  
speckled light through glass windows  
-Zen at McDonald's

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## Haiku #18

falling from tall branch  
tiny yellow confetti  
-autumn is early

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## Haiku #19

humming to himself  
totally in the moment  
-little boy at play

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## Haiku #2

smooth flat river stone  
triple-jumps placid water  
-cold morning spring lake

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## Haiku #20

swirling tea leaves  
sinks slowly to the bottom  
-my mind settles

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## Haiku #21

chilly morning  
pale circle behind frosty leaves  
-the reluctant moon

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## Haiku #22

bank queue snakes  
trying to find poetry  
-easier to just smile

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## Haiku #23

fat plops  
tap on the shiny deck  
-rained out fishing trip

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## Haiku #24

dog barks  
surrounded by darkness  
-lamplit farmhouse

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## Haiku #25

dog barks  
calling out the time  
-sunday morning

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## Haiku #26

lifting spirits  
through morning window  
-birdsong

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## Haiku #27

playful-  
the moon hides behind  
my hand

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## Haiku #28

quiet Sunday morning  
accompanying the swaying branches  
-neighbor's muted piano

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## Haiku #29

walking by  
the monk with a half-smile  
- NoThing on his mind

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## Haiku #3

Misted smoked goggles  
slicing blurry blue water  
-Pulling the last lap

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## Haiku #30

gentle tap  
of the temple bell  
- inviting silence

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## Haiku #4

wind swept thinning hair  
soft sad chirps against the sky  
-sparrows on lamp-post

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## Haiku #5

shiny folded leaves  
dripping bark on dead branches  
-late afternoon rain

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## Haiku #6

above and below  
autumn moons face each other  
-perfectly still lake

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## Haiku #7

rhythmic chiming bells  
milling devotees bow down  
-smoky prayer hall

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## Haiku #8

black spot against sky  
continuously circling  
-lone Brahminy Kite

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## Haiku #9

Eyes closed in repose  
Silent snow outside window  
-Old monk in zazen

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# Her

the pale sky cries.  
yes, it cries the cry of birds

lost their way,  
their direction twisted by

heavy clouds in the path.  
thickly the wind whips

their tired wings, chasing  
like anger unleashed upon

the unwary.  
innocent blood spilled

by ignorance, the seeking  
of misery her cross to bear,

the unholy course paved by  
dark footprints, each one

a stamp of pain  
immeasurable.

Tentative Poet

# Library

In the library this afternoon,  
while I sat waiting for my muse  
to sneak up behind me and  
touch me softly on the shoulder,  
I watch the other readers,  
bent over their words like Benedictines,  
and I thought I heard,  
above the whispers of turning pages,  
and the occasional clearing of throats,  
the patient sounds of quill-tips  
scratching upon yellowing parchment,  
and sniffed in the cool quiet air,  
a faint hint of sandal-wood.

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## Modern Fairy Tale - Nc16

Living happily ever after became such a chore.  
Their faces stiffened from all that smiling.  
Gray clouds chased away blue skies, and  
It rained so often they couldn't take walks  
In the enchanted forest.

At least they didn't have to talk to the wolf,  
Who only had one thing on its mind,  
Being obsessed with a particular-colored clothing,  
And such an old-fashioned one at that,  
Seems somewhat discomfiting to them.

Soon the gingerbread house began to moulder  
Under all that humidity, and there was a smell about.  
Stuffing themselves with pieces of furniture  
And fittings soon lost its novelty.  
They were yearning for some real food.

The Three Little Pigs moved away.  
They were running out of houses.  
The Big Bad Wolf went to work for the Crooked Man,  
Learnt how to operate heavy machinery,  
Came around with a tractor and chains.

A few days later, Mary came to the door, looking distraught.  
'Lost your lambs again?' they asked cheerfully, and  
She began to sob. No, not that, she met Georgie Porgie  
Outside the piman's, where Simple Simon now works  
Behind the counter, and he bought her a pie.

So she went with him down the lane to share it,  
Whereupon he grabbed her and kissed her,  
And even tried to put his hand under her frilly skirt,  
Where she wouldn't let him.  
'Oh, and it was horrid what he did with his tongue!'

'There, there,' Jill said. 'Whatever happened  
To you and Little Boy Blue?'  
'Oh, all he does is sleep, if he wasn't getting

All teary-eyed and crying about almost anything,  
And he was always shedding hay all over the place! '

'Why don't you come in and rest your feet?' Jack said,  
Not bothering to check with Jill, who glared.

'Why don't you serve up some of that delicious omelette?' he said to Jill.  
Turning to Mary, he explained, 'You see, Humpty Dumpty came to visit.  
He, eh, tripped over the threshold.'

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# Muse

perhaps it's the way  
the towel hangs  
    just so  
on the stuck-on hooks

how the toothbrushes  
in their cups  
    all point in  
different directions

or the mirror of  
the medicine cabinet  
    reflecting the light  
in a particular way

does she enjoy residing  
in this small cramped space  
    framed by  
square white tiles?

does she love  
the intriguing acoustics or  
    how the cistern gurgles  
as it fills after a flush?

i hear her best there  
when i sit myself daily  
    alone with some  
anthology of poetry

or brushing my teeth  
at the mirror  
    minty white foam  
all over my grin

even standing  
under the shower  
    washing off  
the worries of the day

she speaks loudest  
from that corner  
    where a spider has  
weaved his web

she presses against me  
her lips to my ear  
    her voice clear over  
the splashing of the water

at times she whispers  
as i wipe my body dry  
    crackling like static  
with each run of the towel

i close my eyes as  
her honeyed voice echoes  
    in the deepest corners  
of my mind

my heart flutters  
in Morse its rhythm  
    spelling out the mysteries  
she reveals to me

then as she departs  
ever so swiftly  
    i stumble out gasping, grasping  
for my spiral notebook

Tentative Poet

# My Name

my true name is latebloomer:

i never strike when the iron's hot  
or catch the early worms  
i doze when opportunity knocks  
on my door

i only stir when the moon is high  
then my eyes burn with joy  
and a wild energy

when the night cruises free  
i pull cobwebs off my mind  
and awaken to  
myriad opportunities

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# My Window Frames

A lone swallow  
Twisting turning  
Against gray sky  
As I put on  
Morning suit for  
My best friend's  
Funeral

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# Ode To The Fork

You taste the meat before me  
    Feel the medium-rare texture of  
The steak, its juices oozing

All over your tines  
    Its aroma reaches you first  
My culinary ambassador

I like your odd shape  
    Your elegant curved-back neck  
Almost like a swan's

I love your shine as you  
    Lay quietly among your brothers  
Awaiting our beck and call

To team with the others  
    The knife and the spoon  
And serve us a good meal

Look how far you've come!  
    Wasn't your grandfather long  
and sharp and pointed?

Thrown through the air  
    To bury himself crudely  
In the flanks of animals

Tasted the blood  
    Of enemies, then  
Raised in victory

Then there's your uncle  
    Does good work on a farm  
Pitching hay to cows

You, a poor shadow  
    Domesticated  
Like the household dog

Civilized

Now you stab dead meat  
Now you pierce roasted flanks

O you fork,  
you

At least fare better than  
Your distant cousin  
The skinny toothpick, whose

Sole mission is to skewer  
Tiny pieces of fruits, or pick food scraps  
From between teeth

Tentative Poet



# Passion

I feel you pressing against me  
the heat of your passion scalding  
where mine has fled the scene  
turning the body automaton  
metallic beneath skin that glides over yours  
rhythmic movement all angles and joints  
my eyes see you blinded by your joy  
the way an emptiness yearns for the filling  
a blackhole reeling in too-near galaxies  
to their ultimate devastation

Tentative Poet

# Playground

The fading colors of the playground,  
Cries out to be abused,  
Oh, with such inviting sounds,  
How can anyone refuse

To climb up the dusty ladders,  
Stomp all over the hanging bridge,  
Then jump off to land like a feather,  
Like a warrior off a ridge.

In the afternoons, the place is filled  
With children out of school,  
Who scream and shout in voices shrill,  
Run around playing the fool.

And, as evening gently arrives, and dinner calls are cried,  
The children wind up their games, and to the playground say goodbye.

Tentative Poet

# Please Don'T Rhyme

It is certainly not a crime  
If your poems do not rhyme  
As a matter of fact it's now thought  
It may be better if they not

Unless they come without haste  
And fall naturally into place  
It is neater, there's no doubt  
Simply just to leave them out

Iambic meter or otherwise  
Not rhyming is never a vice  
It may even be seen as awkward  
Unless employed in a formal sonnet

Especially if you try to force them in  
Although that's not exactly a sin  
The present participle is just too much  
If used repeatedly as a crutch

'Vers Libre' is the way to go  
As most current poets know  
Don't get caught up in the past  
Write yours modern, make them last

Tentative Poet

# Pleasure

The sounds you make, my darling, each time we get our kicks,  
Shall make our neighbors envious, should they get to hear them.  
Your screams and cries of pleasure, the way your sweet voice pricks  
Straight into my ear canal and trembles my tympanum.

How you love to thrash around, and wiggle that behind,  
I love how you look so serious, and how you grip so tight.  
The room would get right steamy, and I'm just glad you're mine,  
Cause I like how your wet hair clings, when we really get to fight.

I know you like to dominate, but sometimes please let me win,  
So I can hold my head up high, when I tell my friends,  
That more often than not I am on top, and I'll say it with a grin,  
And then declare my being on bottom, will never be a trend.

So, darling, clip on your Wii remote, and let us get to it,  
This time I know I'm gonna win, so don't you throw a fit.

Tentative Poet

# Poem For A Friend, Because He Did Not Ask For It

Because he would be horrified  
If he found himself inside one  
He is such a serious fellow  
He discusses the state of the world  
And certainly does not indulge in mere rhetoric  
As I do

Because he thinks poems mere words  
Generally meaningless ones at that  
A poet no more than  
A day-dreamer  
Useless to society  
As he had variously stated

Because he would be secretly pleased I think  
As I shall place between these lines  
Instead of his wife  
The alluring actress he's always talking about  
She shall be his partner and they shall dance  
In a secret garden whose location only I know

Because my friend  
So loves to name-dropp Italian Romantic composers  
Such as Rossini and Paganini  
I shall have them dance to Kenny G and Liberace  
The latter playing for the them in the flesh  
With candelabra and sagging cheeks

Because I want to see his reaction  
My written friend  
When I make the actress seduce him  
Press her warm soft body against his skinny chest  
Whisper her desires to his ear  
Cup his ego in her expert hand

Because I can  
Since these are mere words  
Nothing important or serious  
I shall have him in his excitement

Spout poetry  
And do it awkwardly

Tentative Poet

# Questions

Why is this happening?  
She asks the wallpaper,  
A patch of sunlight  
Caressing its surface.

How did we ended up like this?  
Directing this at the stove,  
Steam bubbling from the pot,  
Noodles for the boy's lunch.

I thought it was forever, not like this!  
Speaking down at the broom and  
Dustpan filling with dirt,  
Finishing up in the bedroom.

Why doesn't he love me anymore?  
The table does not answer,  
Neither do the stalks of cut flowers  
Stuck into the green sponge.

We hardly ever talk,  
Addressing the pile of clothes  
Waiting their turns  
Upon the ironing board.

It's always the kids these days,  
Packing up her students' assignment,  
Never me or at least us,  
Almost ripping the zip of her handbag.

Sometimes I wish,  
She checks herself in the mirror,  
That things weren't so complicated,  
Making sure she has all her notes.

Why can't we sit down,  
Turning to check the traffic's clear,  
And have a good heart-to-heart,  
She signals the cab.

Must remember to do that,  
Reaching out for her change,  
Better note it in the filofax,  
She steps quickly towards her office.

Tentative Poet



# The Morning Sun

Slantly filtered through frosted glass  
Defines pastel walls, rumpled pillow cases  
The solid black of the headboard  
The tower of books by the lamp

Makes glow the smile of a little boy  
Whose joy at the new day infects  
Even the morose and tired soul  
Dread to face a fresh beginning

Reflects from the pale pages  
Of a novel handled with reverence  
By a girl enamoured with words  
Who devours them

Tentative Poet

# The Wind

the trees outside my window  
know my name

their leaves whisper secrets only rains know  
their branches squeak to the wind ancient messages of hope

the trees tell me why  
the sun and how

they fill me in about  
the ebb and flowing of seasons

when the wind  
    blows joyous  
        the trees dance for me

Tentative Poet

## They Remember...(Dedicated To Teachers)

The man sits, angle-poise on a low table  
throwing light, dim orange, onto the book  
he holds in his bony fingers.

He leans forward, forehead furrowed,  
left hand lifting his reading glasses,  
squinting his eyes.

Pausing, he scratches with right index  
a spot on his cheek, picks up the cup of tea,  
takes a noisy sip, the luke-warm of the liquid  
slipping down his parched throat.

He touches his index to the tip of his tongue,  
touches the corner of the book, picks up the page,  
flips, the finger slow sweeps across the glossy surface,  
stopping as he recognizes a face here, another there.

Leaning back, the cup empty, he sees  
the photo-frame sitting on the coffee table,  
a sad smile curling the corners of his lips,  
the pretty face looking out still makes him catch his breath.

Why must it be you, Jean, why not me,  
who's old and more ready to leave?  
And after our wonderful plans, just as I can finally take  
a long break to give all my time to you.

He wonders if he should go make another cup of tea,  
maybe have a biscuit, or the left-over pot of porridge,  
yet he did not feel hungry, haven't really been  
ever since he lost her.

He left soon after her death, his leaving quiet,  
briefly announced, a small party in the staff-room  
solemn and awkward.

As he cleared his things off the corner table,  
the cardboard box brimming twenty-year-old memories

they watched from the corridors, fresh young faces,  
curious and troubled.

He had not planned it that way, did not want to leave them,  
so near to their finals, had wanted to finish what he started,  
wanted to bring them right to the end.

But there was no way to explain his loss,  
too soon to discuss how his heart was torn,  
his life wrenched out of orbit.

So he walked out, after three years  
with this lot, abandoning their warm familiarity,  
not even a goodbye, not sure if he could face  
their disappointment

The calendar on the wall shows him a year later,  
shows him it's a day past the day he used to cherish;  
he sees them in his mind, their photographs  
in the dusty annual a reminder

Where are you now, my children?  
how Jean used to laugh at that, some of his 'children'  
heads and shoulders above him.

You must have forgotten old Mr DeCruz,  
who understands, how could I not,  
after what I did?

Walking in to get another Digestives,  
he remembers the small pile of letters  
sitting on the kitchen table,  
left yesterday after he made tea.

He sifts through them, one catching his eye,  
blue envelope, neatly printed address,  
his name in bold, something very familiar  
in the handwriting.

Carefully slicing through with letter-opener,  
he stops in mid-nibble, afraid suddenly:  
what if it's not what he thinks it is?

Unsteady fingers unfurl crispy blue paper,  
he perches his glasses, begins to read:  
'Dear Mr DeCruz, We miss you! We understand why....'

The man sits in silence for a long time,  
his shoulders shaking, his dead wife's photograph  
on the table a blur, as white Kleenex grows on its surface

They remember, Jean:  
they remember

Tentative Poet

# To The Old Man Who Overtook Me...

I address you, old grandfather,  
You who drove past me, a day since.

I gazed upon your crown of white,  
Your grizzled countenance, grim determination

In the grip of your jaw, the tighter grip of your hands  
Upon the steering wheel, as you ploughed the road

In that green gray Corolla, unwashed paintwork peeling,  
Number plate announcing its vintage, a fifteen year old

Carrying a sixty year old-I'm guessing here, you could be older-  
Still full of fire both it seems, your attempts to pass me

On the inside thwarted by circumstances beyond your control-  
And the minivan 'hogging' that lane.

I was amazed, to say the least, to see such life in an old man.  
I guess you wouldn't be sitting in the park too often,

Smelling roses is not your game, and certainly not  
The gentle sipping of Earl Gray by the Koi pond.

Strolling will bore you, I can tell, seeing how you  
Swerved from left to right, and back again

Looking for that spot, that gap which you  
deemed existed between my car and the curb,

And that glare you gave me, when eventually you past,  
As I edged into the inner lane for you,

Your eyes were full of youthful fire, and  
That signal you flashed me, the one no one

Will misunderstand, anywhere in the world.  
I think it's called 'the middle finger'.

## Tentative Poet

# Tree Of Life

Instead of sitting under  
the Tree of Life,  
contemplating its meaning,

we should get up  
and shake its trunk,  
or climb it to lounge  
among its branches,

pluck its fruits and  
savor their juices,  
wipe them purple sweet  
off our chins,

then lick our hands clean  
for good measure.

Tentative Poet



# What Good Is Poetry?

To awaken us,  
Show us the honest beauty  
Of our souls

To amuse us, to entertain,  
Focus and centralize the variegated attention  
Of us, poisoned by MTV, and shows of reality

To revel in the presence of mystery,  
Expose the veiled layers of meaning  
Our entangled lives keep hidden

To render helpless, to induce to smile,  
Refresh our antiquated views of  
How to live life vigorously

To reveal, to hide, to mystify and over-ride  
The mired muck of our desperate lives,  
Sweep clean tainted sensitivities

And wipe dry the muddied screens of mediocrity  
To allow us, if lucky, a privileged glimpse of eternity,  
In words rearranged, refreshed, revitalized,  
And offered honestly

Tentative Poet

# Windblown Words

the wind blew in through the window  
scattered the words i was arranging

i got down on hands and knees  
scoured about on the floor

i rooted under the sofa  
i found 'everlasting', 'interminable'

i searched behind the cupboard  
i found 'clandestine', 'obscure'

under the dining table, shifting in the breeze  
there was 'fragmented', 'rend', 'disunite'

right across the room, hiding in the corner  
i saw 'nook' curling next to 'recess'

i heard a soft brushing sound, followed it to  
find 'seduction' rubbing against 'tantalizing'

i reached under the shoe-rack  
almost got cut by 'honed' and 'peaked'

i gathered all the words i found  
spread them on the table

rummaged as i might, i knew i'll never find again  
'skedaddle', 'dissipate', 'recede' and 'perish'

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