



Oct. 7, 1993

Dear Tom,

I've been trying to justify myself in terms of Bill Stafford's death, as you know. Thought I would send you the final word. . . epitaph? At any rate I wrote lament in anguish, editorial in tribute. Perhaps the enclosed is the poem. At any rate it seemed more in keeping with the man, quiet, secret if one did not also be quiet and offer secret watch. I know the badger has a reputation for being pretty crusty, but its place among reverential animals for native Americans seemed to make it not entirely unseemly in connection with Bill. And then he did speak of it, as I include.

So I'll say no more on that subject. Why say at all, knowing you are busy with plenty of your own troubles? One has the need to speak of such things. Here, we are busy with the terror of the sentence fragment, the gravity of the computer committee, etc. Bill Stafford was some sort of personal consolation in all of that, for me. So nothing much seemed to square with my private sense of priorities, of what is truly valuable. Well, Bill Stafford was out there, alive in the world, and he had his head on straight, and he would be along again, one fine day. Not so, says the world. Even so good, nothing survives in the end. Well, he would certainly not countenance such whining, such despair. But I look around these <sup>days</sup> and I feel little that offers me any personal consolation. Either I never understood where I was (entirely possible), or the world I thought genuine is long gone.

Take care of yourself,

*Steven*

But let me begin a lighter note, having just read the preceding page here this Thursday morning in my cubicle. My daughter sent me a copy of a short story she wrote in a fiction class at Ku. I was just astonished. She hasn't shown me any "creative" work since a poem about "the little windchime" when she was about eight. "A Diamond is Forever and Other Impossibilities" set me back just as her little poem did scrawled in crayon. The kid is a natural. I know Vonnegut and others have used the reverse movie metaphor/joke, so it's not that she invented it, but she did it so deftly, and with something I know, had almost forgotten--but not Emily. <sup>lost</sup> Be one of those upon whom nothing is wasted... who said that? Thoreau, Huxley?

This protagonist is pushing a grocery cart through a store in her dream/nightmare:

". . .strangely I felt more troubled with the desertion of my cart. Surely I had breached some civic responsibility. Perhaps I could empty it out, like my parents' home movies in reverse, when Dad takes the wedding cake out of Mom's mouth and magically seals the slice, pink frosting roses and all, with a bladeless knife." and later...earlier I see now: "But I was obligated to return to reality, to find another lover, and to live as a character on TV, satisfied but gaunt, eternally happy, capable of forgetting, forgiving."

I thought of Updike and his uncanny insight into our mundane moments, documenter of interpretations...of you as well. The point being I couldn't help but think as I read, I do wish she could have taken fiction writing with Tom Averill. But she does make her own way in the world. So long for now, my friend.

S. H.