

On Steely Girth

A compilation of free-verse poems by
Damon Freed



A Dimension of Mind

Drawing the light from my bedroom in the ward,
Gifting my sight and effort to the Lord and to a
Man of whose name I cannot remember. Who was
Silent as a pinned in sheep. Who probably couldn't
Remember his own name in that place. A military
Man, whose name I've forgotten, who admired me
And I his way with words and bashfulness. His
Candor once he opened up! His savvy honesty or
So it seemed. He looked a little like Sal Williams at
His best. Yet he wrote like himself to the praise of
The people in cell block six. Or at least it felt that way
Once downstairs, actually down the hall eating three
Square meals a day. Or else, staying in your room, on
guard, eating snacks, like Gushers, and coffee, black
coffee from the machines. And night's mechanisms
came alive at night to the sounds of flight in the distance.
A courtyard at night where I was punched in the face
For disobedience of an unearthly and far fetched tone.
Where security should have stepped in to prevent the
Mishaps, but punishment comes and goes in ways unknown
To me. So as the red vomit and blood stew exited my face,
I stood firm in grace, yet ANGRY at her, this giant of a
Bitch. She was taken off into the hands of men, pinned in
For an extra 6 months afterwards. While I headed home
The next week into the arms of my parents' vehicle.

And sunsets come in all colors, but cyan and magenta is
Best at night after a fright from a snake that nearly died
From too much sun whose soul must have ascended days
Earlier. And truck drivers dodging Crows were assholes
In the daytime when all I wanted was to drink my coffee
And smoke my cigs in comfort, not next to machismo bone
Heads. But I've said it before and I'll say it again, the smoke
Bellows by the hands of gods in this place to be and I have
Dodged them like wasps in the sunlight of days behind the studios
Of gentlemen's artistry. Back home now. Eating and stirring
In the AM's. With them. My parents, them watching their television.

Yet, I turn now to the punch bowl as my lighter sits next to me
On my desk of writing! The freedoms are fierce, here. But not
Always, as the mind tends to drift into courtyards with fences
8 feet tall and chained, into bedrooms with single beds side
By side divided in between with older men shouting over and over

That they're not gay, and into shared bathrooms with spewing
Inmates, and into lunch lines of power, and into old ghosts of
Thoughtfulness from within them. Cheers, my friends, as I resume
My fighting for what is real and what is not in this world of men,
And women.

In this world of men, and women!

A Good Night

The night started with a text into a friend.
No response but he walks over and through
the door with a good looking blonde. She's
going through it bad, recent divorce,
so I behave myself. Good gal, nice jugs,
natural blonde, but, like I said, she's going
through it so I'm on my best behavior and so
is my friend for that matter. He hasn't seen
her in some time. Good friends. Known
one another for nearly twenty years. So I take
her around with my friend, show them the
work, the paintings, the studies; you know,
give them the run down. She's not too talkative
but shows acknowledgement of the task.
Respects it, and me, and I her and her situation.
And my friend offers everyone a beer, we
talk sales a bit, he offers to buy some work,
I say I'll give you this one, this one isn't for
sale, but these three are yours for fifty bucks,
plus the gift. Hard times monetarily. Art
market's in the shitter, no one understands
the good ol' days these days, the times
when you showed up to the gallery to view
the work in person, everything's online
anymore. Surface seeing. They're just
interested in the loud hits, the one offs.
No regard for the shows, the complete
concept, the whole story, the subtle sleepers
that are still hiding out in the corners and
in between the monsters.

John calls on the phone, another rarity these days, so I pick up. After my guests leave we talk. He says he's having people out to his parent's place in the country, having a small bonfire. Says he's got plenty of booze and weed for everyone. The weed doesn't interest me but I'm good for a drink and need to get out of the studio so I agree to meet him. When I get there, sure enough, there's booze, people smoking pot, and John has an old ex there that I know so I say hi. I excuse myself from the rest of the company to take a wiz, and the entire countryside, clean beauty, is there with me. It's cool out, especially where I am, the breeze has few obstacles. Anyhow, it's pleasant. A good piss.

After that, I head back to the company, take three shots, and John's out of smokes. He offers to buy my two dollars and seventy cents pack for five bucks. I agree. But, that puts me out of smokes so I take a hike back into town. The five John gave me and the single dollar in my wallet makes six, so, I hit the gas station to re-up on cigarettes. That makes two packs for me when I just had most of one. A good night.

A Hiss and a Kiss

After killing my Father,
I really hope it wasn't a bother,
But the deputy, not the sheriff,
Pulled up and gave me a ride.
He transferred me to security
At the juncture of security
And they asked me what I
Wanted? I said, put on the music.
Cuffed, ankles and wrists, they
Took me away. And as the music
Played I wondered what I had done

As thoughts poured like coffee into
My head. And so, we rode off through
The mountains and I slept with
The children beneath me, and slept.

About when the music stopped
Playing the deputy talked and spoke.
Front to back Jabberwocky spewed
From his lips. And thus, his Vorpal
Blade slayed the dragon, and I had
A chuckle because my Dad showed
There back in the day, at a gallery in
New York. I had an inner smile of
Great innocence. But, of course, the last
Laugh I had was at the end, when
Joy surrounded all in the poem.
And the driver was a lady, and shadily
I flirted. And, I made much headway
Into her smiling soul, any common man
Would have mistaken me for dead,
But I thought and felt instead, therefore
I wed her on the way to the hospital.
Then, into confinement and bed I
Crept and slept once more. And once
The chore was neither here nor there,
They mistook me for dead.

You choose, but I prefer poetic deaths
With good endings. So, the real story
Goes like this; it ended with a kiss.
And that, good miss, is my kind of poetic
Bliss. A hiss from a snake led to holding
My fork from a plate! God love her.

Little Kiss

I'm back. My spirit is up. My fingers
are tapping. My anger is napping.
And I'm looking for a story to write.
One I can't quite remember, one
that needs some cracks filled by
a factual imagination. By the opposite
of desecration. By the invention of
polar opposites within the mind, like

some homemade duck blind to a factory
prototype. Like a sculpture to a drawing.
Like an innocent pact to an evil spawning.
This is how I do it... just roll with it
and see what comes out.

But you've got to be in the mood, unless
you're looking for some clunky brood.
Something ugly and ill inspired, like,
"What the fuck was that thing – dude!"
But if you're doing it right, every artist
can turn the day into night. Or the night a
little bit brighter. It helps to have friends
though, it helps to be a fighter. Ones you can
count on for inspiration, and family that helps
to express the incantation. It's coming to an
end though, this moment of exaltation, so, I
will leave you with this –

...a soft little kiss!

A Memory of Three White Blooms

I'm sitting in my chair behind the studio and would like to write a lazy poem about a potted plant. It hardly graces my vision to the left. My glance is distracted by, one: some kind of machinery of which the elongated tendrils of the plant spill onto, and by two: the abrupt sound of the air conditioner that cools the studio to a perfect 72 degrees.

Regardless of these distractions I will continue. The air conditioner should turn off soon.

The potted plant, being a plant with a pot, is potted. The pot itself is a deep rich brown with maroon undertones. It offers some good contrast to the plant that is green, yellow, brown, white, purple, and pink.

The plant, having been slaughtered by the sun's rays like cleavers to calves, it lies on its side, nearly dead, but not dead, from an overabundance of light. Too much is too much, like my friend tells me in Alaska, this time of year it's noon all day – 20 hours' worth of pure uninhibited daylight. It's torture he says, and if this plant is proof of the neglect of ill-moderated things he's right.

The plant is in bloom though, and that, aside from its withered limbs, pleases my retinas for a moment. The white blooms stand out untainted by the sun or by the plant's dehydrated carcass. Yes, a trinity of white blooms pure as the driven snow against the dying calls forth, to my mind, the little girl's red dress amongst an otherwise black and white film in Schindler's List. Only, later in the film she is found dead wearing that same dress, still glowing, just as the blooms will die, yet live on in memory.

A Sure Sign I'm Getting Older

Been listening to classic 60's & 70's tunes, a station called Vinyl, in the studio. Now, these hits were some real good ones. Guitar thick, drums to make you strut and kick, with solid messages in the lyrics, on the voices, the real voices of the people, the singers. Rock & Roll in its heyday. Imagine, by John Lennon. Me & Bobby McGee, by Janis Joplin. Friends, by Led Zeppelin. All the Carole King hits. Credence and Jimmy.

Who knows, I could be wrong, but we've lost something. The warmth is missing. That human touch. The spacing, the timing, it's all so much more condensed and layered. Except it doesn't feel layered, it's flatter.

Faster, Faster, Faster!

Digital patterning like wallpaper for the masses. All these vibrating colors and psychedelic gasses make your eyes quiver, but what slows you down these days – nothing! It's ridiculous!

A Win

I remember hiking my first trail with a girl,
We had sex in the dirt and leaves a third of
The way in

I remember when bubble gum sticks came
In a package of baseball cards and when candy
Was my life, my fix, which it still is on some days

I remember sex in a field, on the hood of a car, in
Bathrooms

I remember spontaneity in life outside of my practice

But most of all I remember two nights ago, the feeling
Of her ass through that slick fabric, and the taste of
Her lips on mine.

A Woman's Touch

All the beauty in the world stems from a touch, but I didn't understand until now exactly how much. And if you're blessed with all your senses it may be hard to tell, that a single caress can outdo the sound of thirty bells. But likewise, a vision, a grandiose sight, doesn't compare to the feel of a woman's unparalleled might. Nor can the smell of your favorite flower relate, to the touch of your lover on your very first date. And should you one day even taste the blood of Christ, I dare you tell me that her existence felt less nice.

Amanda

We drink wine and eat brochette.

We discuss life and all its beauty.

I take her virginity gently.

She smiles.

You were the right one she tells me with a whisper.

The years pass.

I never let her in, not all the way.

You're a bastard she thinks, but never tells me.

I think of her often.

My God she could dance, and what an ass!

We're too different her and I.

She's friendlier and sensitive where I'm not.

I'm focused on myself and obsessed with accomplishment.

I blew it long ago.

She got married a few years back.

I cried in anger.

I threw things piss drunk on scotch in solitude.

I never told her this.

I was too upset with myself.

I'll send her this poem, I think.

You see, I never have the balls to commit.

Not to anything outside myself.

I'm less interested in others than I am in myself.

It's a disease I think.

A fucking nightmare, but it's starting to work out.

I'm delusional enough finally.

I think I'm a genius.

I think I'm God's gift to humanity.

I feel too.

I feel like I've at least been myself.

Like maybe a loving relationship wasn't in the cards for me.

Like it was my first dream,

But that God took it from me to see how well I could manage alone.

Like maybe, I was born to do this, to come up late every time.

To write it down, to paint it out.

And That Was That

I've known one Hasidic Jew in my life,
his name was Max. He struck me at first
like most New Yorker's do, a bit skeptic.
I was looking to rent a loft space from him
in Brooklyn, my first real apartment
outside the shelters of my education.

He had a real-deal accent, tall black hat,
and long curly sideburns like they do.
I mean, this guy was a cool cat, didn't
ask many questions, a straight shooter.
You know, just enough of the shyster
in him that I trusted him right off.

We haggled over the price for about
three seconds – he said a price, I said a
price, he came back in the middle
somewhere and it was a done deal.
On top of that he had a real-good handshake,
the best I've known, honest you know.

Solid. Firm. And I remember
when he asked my name – he just lit
up! "FREED", he said, "Is that Jewish?"
I told him I didn't know, that maybe
it was Pennsylvania-Dutch or something.
It didn't matter. I was Jewish to him.

The months got on like they did after that.
And let me tell you, he was a good man, just
like his handshake said, assertive and firm,
yet patient. And many things happened
in that apartment, good and bad. There
were loyal times and hard times and in-
between times.

And I never lied to Max, even though
he wouldn't shake my girl's hand.
And it offended her, but he couldn't.
He was married and it was against his

religion. And I thought, damn, that's a man, faithful to the end.

And I never understood why my girl was offended until the end when she said, "You never really loved me, did you?" And I said, "You'll never understand a man's need for discipline, will you?" And she just stood there, and that was that.

Bella

When I walked in you were standing with your head down on the counter top running it back and forth side to side and moving there like a drugged-up numbed-down child. Split personalities is what you said you had – Jennifer and Bella. And that was your diagnoses but we both know how wholly unique you were. So, when your games run out, your pose to the world, I'll be here knowing you and who you were in that ward, and me, well, you know I told you something that night about yourself, and that it was wrong of me, but, it's my way to educate others and after all you were the younger of us two. You danced for me that night, I was in love with it, the whole thing – you, yourself, and the others. And you fell for me there, innocent and all, but I've been down that road and we were ten years apart, so no, not again will I fall for the ruse, or the innocence of a child. You loved me, and I loved a part of you, that part that was on stage for myself, giving and loving and discovering the wild youth inside of me. And we were ugly, but together we made beautiful vibes without a care for who was watching or interrupting our selfish delights. And I'd watch you through the window on your smoke breaks lying there, face toward the sun with eyes closed with limp wrist holding your cigarette there in the grass. And how young you were, and how many afternoons you must go before trying again. And you wore nonchalant like a dress and held up you were by that place in so many ways walking like a rubber band from side to side. And I let you go then, off into the atmosphere of the hallway moonwalking to and from that night, that last night, zig zagging with grace and smooth moves into eternal rest.

Bliss

At thirty-nine years of age I'm finding it harder to get myself into the woodshop at nine o'clock on a weekday night. It's the first of the new year and the joints ache just a little from the ten-degree weather outside. It takes a little longer to stand up after bending, but after stretching a six-foot canvas on the floor one feels like a teenager again, the reward is fulfilling, but it is fleeting. And then there's the opening of the jars of paint, the elbow pain, but the canvas staining is taming to the

annoyance. I'm getting older and the painting, in some ways, is harder. Many inspirations that as a younger gentleman I would have acted on get sidestepped for better, more realistic ideas. But what of angsty experimentation, the blistering mind of my younger self slashing and pushing on the canvases every which way I knew how to? What of Saturday nights and painting? Music blasting in the studio at unreasonable volumes to get away from it all, to chisel out some mental space and a time frame away from the world outside when the utter connection was real to all that was so angsty and deviant! Ohhh the feeling of raw youth! What it is to be young again sitting here typing, resting with the adrenalin tunes coming from the computer! How high can one get, how happy can one be in an instant of bliss? Very high.

Bone Black Paint

There is little in this world that I cherish more than black paint!

Sparingly, oh, black paint!

Oh! Sparingly! Black Paint!

And it goes on transparently but with two coats it is dark and opaque and black as the night echoing the speech of a dream!

Oh yes, my Bone Black Paint is great and I wield it with the might of two men!

Charred animal's bones from what I'm guessing to be creatures gathered from this Earth after having died with grace on this Earth . . . what I hope to have been righteous deaths.

Sparingly, oh Black Death!

And who would have you die for me?

And who would grind you ever so slightly?

And who should, with caress and care share your once lived to their fullest, I hope, bones?

Who turns the grinder crank and bemoans, but who then yields thee brush and bones mighty with black after they crack?

And who would rather use the crushed remains of us to do some injustice to humanity's righteous cause of care, he would, Adolph Hitler, sitting atop his bone encrusted throne of skulls and chair.

But, between my four fingers and thumbs it is I and we painters who wield the faintest hum of a brush, not he.

For we do not rake the surface in order to kill, or to cause fear, or anguish, or to will some demonic spirit from the Earth that could chill a once warm spirit of its worth.

It is we whom with care and faintest touch lift up thine warm spirit as much as we can to do some good!

And it is I whom would do so in the face of DEATH!

Boys Will Be Boys

I'll spare you most of the details, but it was my second time with this girl and I wasn't going to screw it up. She was as tall as me, even taller with heels on, (my God she was hot) and voluptuous, hippy, like some women, and had the most possessive electric blue eyes – they owned at will.

Our first time was an utter failure. It lasted all of one, maybe two minutes. She did fine, of course, but I was tame as a lapdog, really scared. So I thought, damn, I really screwed that up.

But I said something at the end, like, I think we can do better than that, and she just grinned. She took it as a challenge and I knew it was on after that. And that I better show up next time.

So next week rolled around, about mid-week or so, and I invited her over. My room was at the end of the hall. She walked in with confidence and there was little chatter. She was down on all fours and I was giving her hell. I mean, everything I had.

Well, once we finished and after she said something like, time to take the walk of shame, which we both laughed about, and my roommate, the shy hermit type, who kept strictly to his room, who hadn't probably been laid in three years, if ever, actually spoke up and said something like, what the hell, man!?

And with a slight grin I looked at him and just said, guess what? He smiled. I thought to myself, then. Love heals all, even a celibate appreciates the sound of a good ass slap!

Brew the Coffee

I wake up, go downstairs without brushing my teeth, no shower.

I deadhead into the kitchen after a piss, brew the coffee, butter my bagels, open the sliding glass door onto our back porch, and sit.

I smoke my first cigarette with the angle of the sun blasting both my eyes, the humidity causing me to sweat, the stench of my armpits from the day before all twisted up with the smoke.

Enough of that, I turn the overhead fans on, both of them, and move to the lower back deck, grab my chair, and I sit.

The trash men off in the distance. Is there no peace? The garbage truck gargling down the allies!

The trash truck *slowly* gargling down the alleyways with two men on their backs, with their backs against the wall of dumpsters. I think to myself, you know, those men could make a lot of money if they wrote a book about themselves. A lot of money!

It's a difficult life. Oh, and the stench of it all going up in money.

Candy and Chores

I grew up on candy, candy and chores. And once my chores were done I'd run and I run. Often, if I was at home, it was off to Bill & Pat's for some Now And Laters and Garbage Pail Kids. And it

was through the backstreets and yards with my brothers and my sister. And this was freedom so we'd make a real go of it, taking our time like a sommelier in a wine shop to taste and to savor the new brands and flavors. Or, if I was downtown we were off to Pirtle Evans, two doors down from my dad's studio for a bold selection of sweet treats! Ring Pops, Laughy Taffy, and Sprees. Chocolate was rarely my bag, and is rarely my bag even still. But, you hand me some Big League Chew and a Blow Pop and I'm yours. And have you seen the prices on candy these days, like a dollar fifty for a roll of Sweet Tarts! Crazy! And I won't recall the old prices, but I will tell ya, mowing the lawn meant four dollars worth. And back then, once that brown paper bag was in hand, this little boy was the happiest on earth!

Cigarette Break

So I'm outback smoking a cigarette
on what may be the last warm day for a while –

I look down at my feet and see a grasshopper,
one of those big suckers all brown and motionless –

I look out further across the concrete slab onto
a whole colony of the bastards, huge and dead –

About then a harsh chill runs up my spine
and I think, damn, better get a jacket on.

Dilettante, for Lisa Davis

A teacher told me once, I'm right
and you're wrong!

Jesus Christ, I thought, how am I
wrong, it's art school for God's sake!

This isn't foundational math!
This is the place where $1 + 1 =$
3, or 4, or something, but not 2!

I was a talker during critiques, not too
much of one, but you know, I had thoughts
about things. But after that, I bowed out.

I'll teach her, I thought, so I ignored all
discussions during critiques for a week.

The sea began to part. People took sides.

Some were silent as the air, some as the rain, others as the thunder. Anyhow, I eventually began to participate again little by little.

The discussions got real. I recall when it was finally my time to present my drawings again, and I mean, I was ready for battle.

I was to open the discussion with specific thoughts on what my work was about, which irked me! I thought, if the work should speak, let it speak!

But anyways, when it came my time I opened up with very ambiguous statements about the work and possibilities therein.

She got to interrogating me, called me a dilettante and it really dug in. She thought I hadn't a clue about a thing, like I was pretending to be an artist, or something.

So she asked me one more time what it was all about and I simply asked her, What happens to us when we die, Lisa? Finally, that bitch had nothing to say.

Doubt II

A machete that cuts through hope
The grout beneath my feet that causes me to slip like a dope
In the warm sunshine of late summer heat, I mope
Because ice forms upon a slope with an under crust of doubt
And I slip back down to the sea of dust particles so rich as to
Cut again through hope with my true blade made to make
A bold man cry

I die and I die here on these pages again and again
The hope boils over and back down to doubt once more, ten
Times over the boiling point of disaster of days gone by, sky

And coffee sweet sticks to my tongue, cigarette tar to my lung,
And denim to my thigh –
And hope to the forceful strike of the drum, then, as it fades out,
The sound, it bleeds into atmospheres of second guessed visitors

And once more it returns finished by the division between
A yearn and a yawn, and it's gone. The sound, the division,
The whole enchilada stomached by the boredom of anticlimactic
Grey pigeons high on a rooftop wanting to but not able to fly.

Yet, this one pigeon lingers in my memory, and the clap of his wings
Roots me on at least until another spring has come and gone.

It gets difficult, these words.

Coming up with new ways to live, to die, to try, to give.
But on days the sieve opens and closes, he, Moses, offers up a cup
Of sea like eternity and we part then, at the water's end.

East Village 2003, for Betsy Baker

The perfect weather is about 47 degrees
and we have good heavy jackets on. It's
nighttime, just after dinner, and all the lights
are glowing and magnificent. The car lights
and the warm tungstens bathing the streets
from the interiors and the reflectors on
the bicycles are there. And the lamplight
and the smell of hot food from the good
restaurants, and there's the smell of fresh
chocolate and the wafting of street food
on the corners. And it's cold out, but
we're hugged up and she's holding on tight
and we just might stop for coffee then go to
St. Mark's bookstore for some affordable
haughty entertainment and deep conversation.
I'll look through the philosophy section and
read her a poem before we leave, maybe
something wise from Emerson, or a
passage from Plato on love. She'll look through
the design books and I'll kiss her for it. And we
stroll and we stroll just getting lost in that
steamy city air. And the sirens are dampened
in the distance and the train cars roar but it's
a roar of passion and your spit mixes with her
spit and your blood mixes with her blood and
it's enough to set the whole damn majestic
city on fire. And you love it, but you love

her most. And you miss it, but not too much.
Because it's still so very alive in your soul.

Easy Money

With soul, and one hand out holding
a tin cup sing it to yourself...

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Yeah, he had soul alright. Every
morning and every evening he had
soul. And I don't know if he's still
kickin', this man, but he had soul.
And this destitute ol' boy earned every
single penny, nickel, dime, and quarter
he had comin', unlike the bums.

And that's the distinction between
a bum and a destitute; the destitutes
have soul. The bums are all washed up.
Their souls have run south, for good.
Just like that ol' Mississippi runs downhill
and empties into the gulf, well, their tears
done dried up. Yeah, ain't no ocean
at the end of their tears, just rotten flesh
and dry ol' cheek bones. Empty ebony
sockets of evil – that's a bum for ya.
Turn their back on ya the second ya hand
'em a sandwich, or a fifty. Doesn't matter
though, ol' Easy Money had soul!

And he couldn't dance, or maybe he could,
and he couldn't rhyme, or maybe he could,
and he couldn't read... or, maybe he could,
but boy could he sing two lines better
than Muddy Waters on a good night.

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Yep, that's how he sang it alright, just like

that. And he was old and tired so he'd sit
on the stoop of that city, just owning the
wind, and the jackhammers, and the rich,
and the poor. And I talked to him once.
Couldn't understand a damn thing he was
sayin' except two lines, but sure, we talked.
And I was new to that city, but he took me in.
And I took him in. And you know how
they never tell ya how hard things are gonna
be, well, after one look at him you just knew
it was gonna be a long hard road ahead.
And that goes for me, for you, for everyone,
that is, if ya want soul.

So – Easy Money. This one's for you.
Except this time I'm gonna sing it to ya.

And if you're alive, and I know you are.
Whether up there or down here – you listen
real close now, because it ain't mimicry
no more. The pockets are dry and there ain't
no one 'round here but the sky. So I'm hopin'
when you hear this you'll cry a little, like none
of those bums ever could.

Now fill my cup baby...

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Ch-change! Ch-change! Ch-change!

Fact or Fiction

If you think I'm the writer of these poems you're partly mistaken.
The bulk of the work is written by myself, but the important parts,
The shifts in tone, the meaning, the content is not my own, merely.
Frequently I am shown another way how to interject the words.
Frequently I am writing when another's voice enters my mind.
I've been told it is my subconscious, but he is mistaken.
It is the thoughts of other's accompanying my own through my mind.
Different generations wiser than I am, provide me with clues as to
Which words to use in place of my own. Of course, it is up to myself
As to change the words in their places to the other's words. And
This is writing to myself. One remains open during the process to

The thoughts of others. And I am not alone when I write. It is my
Body sitting in this chair. My mind doing the work. The voices
Visit me now to say, I love you. That's why I'm letting you all in
On my little lies. My little secret. You decide!

Fall Time

In my blue and yellow flannel I step out into the sun on this fall day. There is one broad bolt of
sunbathing the passageway into day. And the light that stays on is on and on and on. The studio
is a kind place where I just love and love and love. I used to not love the coolness of fall except I
believe this weather is fine now. And it should sustain at least until winter enters the hallway of
grey purple red-orange memories.

Fast Food Paradise

One thing the
Midwest
has
going for it is
all of the fast-food
joints.
On the coasts
the
good food is in
the streets,
in
the restaurants,
in
the homeless
shelters,
all over the
place. So much
good food
you're numb to
it. But here, you
really appreciate
the value of a home cooked meal.

There's so much shit surrounding you,
so much ready-to-go eats,
that a person really
cherishes the
slow
value

of
sitting at the dinner table,
talking about your day,
and sharing

thoughts.

So I say bring on the cardboard-chicken,

the foam-fish,

bubblegum-beef,

Velveeta-veggies,

and plastic-pork.

I'll be eating at home
long after the rise and fall
of the fast-food paradise.

Faults of the Ages

I may not be that old, 35,
but the proof is in the pudding.
I've got more greys than most
70 year olds I know. More mental
breaks than a Ferrari going slow.
And I know, you might say, oh,
that poor thing, thinking he's
older than he is, or, I know, it's
just part of the biz to write the
way he does. But the truth be
told, that's just a fault of the
old. They think they've got it
figured out, especially when
we "youngsters" kick and shout.
They say, turn it down over there,
that noise. And perhaps sometimes
they're right, perhaps we still
get pleasure from meaningless
toys. But don't go thinking
you're the end all because you're
old, that's just some little parlor

trick from yonder years that's
not breaking the mold.

And the faults of the young, well
they've got them too. Plenty.
how about their disrespect for
authority, or their misunderstanding
of minority, thinking we are all
created equally. How they go
about with their smiles, thinking
we're all good. Well, let me tell
you, I'm just about middle-aged,
and it seems both sides are wrong
to me. You old-heads on the right,
conservatively, and you wet-behind-
the-ears on the left, liberally. And if
you want to fault me, you fault me
with the obstinance of my age, not
by my flattish belly or by my greys.

Fiction

I roll down to Liquor Locker on
Main to pick up a six pack of
domestics and a pack of smokes.
It's the only place in town you
don't feel guilty for smoking
while going through the drive-
thru and it's close to my digs.
I'm greeted by a haggard
old lady, sweet as cherry-pie,
and she asks what I want. I shout,
"My usuals!", and she looks at
me a little odd, but she knows
who I am so she smiles and grabs
my fixes.

On some days the clerk is a
young kid, barely old
enough to be working this kind
of joint. His face is tattered with
what looks like pubic hair
and I know he grew up a little
rough. But I'm not in the mood

for saving anybody but myself
tonight and by the taste of it it's
going to be a nectar of the gods
type of night – all night! So,
I get back to the studio and call
up a couple friends but can't get
them on the line. I'll keep trying
though, or else it's going to be yet
another night writing fiction.

And I fucking hate fiction. The
world has enough liars that it
doesn't need me doing it for them.

Flames, for Heather Browning

She had a perfect body! A perfect ass,
a crease at the bottom of each cheek
just so, and tits to die for, perky, and
upright. And two beautiful big round
hazel eyes wide open. Her background
was unknown to me, I was 19, and I didn't
much care about it, I was fixated on her
looks. She walked right up to me at a
house party on Third Street and said,
“I know who you are,” with utter confidence.
And walked off. Jesus Christ! I thought,
who in the hell was that? My God I had never
been so sexually assaulted by words in my life.
The respect was there, which, if you don't
know gals, is of utmost importance for a
man to feel before feeling liked, loved, etc.
Respect gets in his head, both heads, and

works on him more than fishnets and a thong,
more than big tits and a round ass. Anyhow, I
remember, she was wearing this red bandana,
had just been swimming, or to the Lake,
looking sprightly and young. I was had. She
walked right up to me and I was shaken.
Doomed for the craziest kind of love I'd known.
And like a bated fish, I walked right up to her
in the next room and swallowed the lure.
So, there we were, each of us getting what
we wanted, with no other way, the
connection was made. Now, the rest of
this story is history, but I tell you, this
girl had my heart after that for
a while, which was our fault and a
mistake probably. Sex. Sex. Sex.
That's what she spelled, and that's
what we wanted, and that's what we made,
along with a juvenile foolish soft hearted
attempt at a relationship.

Follow the Light, for Amanda Axelrod

Tonight the lighter is red, not white.
The air conditioning is turned off.
The skaters are on the street. Showed
up late for my coffee—they gave it to
me anyways. I gave them the quarters I
had left. So now I'm smoking my cigs,
writing, and thinking of a lady. Two

ladies. One from my past with indigo eyes and one from my yesterday with pale blue eyes and blonde hair when all up in curls. And I'm grey, with my hat off, sitting here, imagining what tomorrow might bring and remembering blue eyes and coffee shops.

And the weather is thick, you could stir the sky with a stick. Just the way it is when you lean in for that kiss. When your heart is connected to someone else's by something so small the momentum of a butterfly could knock you off course.

She has a way of her own you see, this girl. It's called loving another and setting them free. So, if you want to come in first you better let it be. God knows I learned this scarily. It doesn't help to call once you've had your wine or more. That's one quick way to get kicked out the door.

So, I'll give it all to the stars and fall in line tonight. Behind the cars I'll look at the moon tonight, on my way home. You have to be honest at this thing here. So, I'm listening to "Hold On," by Tom Waits, and thinking of them all. The women in my life!

And I may be elusive in my way, but one day I'd settle down if I could find the one. But that night hasn't come, yet. Not for eternity it hasn't. So, I'm still finding it hard to get by. And I'll leave you with this one last line tonight, follow the light, follow the light.

Fool for Love

In love, sometimes you fight.
Sometimes you fight and sometimes you
put your tail between your legs like a dog.
Sometimes you battle the wrong person
for the wrong reasons.
But, sometimes you fight and sometimes
you lose and sometimes you win.
Yes, sometimes you win . . .

He was a chubby boy, smartass, not too good with the girls. My recent ex, she must have had sympathy for this guy because they were hanging out and my ex-girlfriend's friend was there too.

My ex invited me back to her place at the end of a night out on the Lower East Side where we bumped into each other and I accepted her offer. I was out on the town with my buddy Dave from Texas and we had a grand evening until I departed from him and headed uptown.

When I arrived I went inside this little downstairs bar below my ex-girlfriend's apartment and she was there with her friend from back home and the chubby boy. He clearly, from the start, didn't care for me. This kid thought he was about to score with the girls, it was obvious to me but he was no threat really. And I respect an underdog, it's just that this guy was a REAL loser.

Well, we were hanging out for a brief time and he directed no talk or discussion my way the entire time, was just concentrated on the gals and consumed by himself and it was eating at me. But I arrived last so I sat and waited, quietly, for my opportunity to talk and did my best to cooperate in conversation when he did speak.

Well, one thing lead to the next and the girls were ready to go back to my ex's apartment upstairs. I agreed to go. About the time we got out front of the apartment building that shithead started in on me. Like, you shouldn't be here man, and, just go home dude, I'm telling you it really struck a nerve. I had a thing for that girl. And unfortunately, they were already inside the glass doors and on their way upstairs, so they heard none of it, none of the banter back and forth, so I had no witnesses, no defense, and sometimes a man gets the best of himself.

So, on my way inside I quickly changed directions and popped him a good one straight on the

nose, laid him flat. Shit! I thought, if I was thinking at all, so much for that! The girls are really going to love this and about then my ex's friend was all over me like, you dick! What's wrong with you! Just go home! It was déjà vu all over again, just after that little prick also told me to get bent.

But I wasn't finished. I kicked him a couple times on the ground and about then a pedestrian nearby whom must have witnessed and heard the entire incident ran over and said to me, "Man... you really need to get out of here in a decent tone."

So, I left.

I took the subway all the way home back to Brooklyn and told my roommate all about what happened, with dried blood down both pant legs. I explained how rude he was, what an inferior prick he was for acting like a Billy bad ass while I was quiet and polite to him the entire time. I gave her the whole story. And on top of that I was worried the guy would have to have his nose fixed, and if so, what in the hell was I going to do!

And she said to me then, "Damon, you have a real problem. These stains are going to be hard to get out."

Fortunate One

I need tires, and wood, and paint.
All four tires are in the red and
I wouldn't even consider replacing
them yet if I hadn't had a blowout
a few years back that scared the
daylights out of me. I once framed
an entire show of drawings with
insurance money I received to fix
hail damage on my car. That's
dedication, I thought, but not a damn
piece sold. So now I think that it was
just bad juju doing it that way.

Anyhow, I've got 2 grand in the bank

and it's not going to last long given
my needs. I think I'll buy the tires
first this time, then the wood and
the paint. It's an important connection
to the ground they say, tires. I'd like to
tell God that painting is an important
connection to my sanity, but I guess
that will have to wait. And then
there's all the other stuff I have to
buy, like books, and candy, and ice cream.
These things are important too, you know,
but I'm willing to pass on the perks.

And some of you will say, "That fortunate
son of a bitch, complaining about wood and paint
and ice cream! I've got kids to feed and
medical bills to pay. Where does he get off?"

And I'll say, "You're right. I live at home
where we're a little thankful, a little proud,
and a little rich, where the blood runs thick
not thin, where the young look after the old
and the old after their kin, where we don't
apologize for having earned things."

Friendly's

There's a bar in town that I don't
frequent, that's good enough for
the fastest, quickest, toughest
SOB on the block. And I'm not
talking about a fist-fight, or a
fight of the physical kind. I mean, a
battle of the minds. And if you've
got a hair-trigger, like me, you just
don't go too often, at least not
when it's got a crowd bellied up,
slurping down the domestics, hittin' the
whiskey, and playing the classics.

You go on a quiet night, like tonight,
when all is calm, and nothing in the
air is shaming you to do this or that.

You go without a cause. You go because you just can't get what they're selling with cash, they ain't offering it up for free like the other whore bars in this town. With friendliness you can buy yourself a drink, but not a true taste of life. You can buy yourself some conversation and maybe even get laid. No, you go there, because reality exists inside and outside the doors. It's no escape and it's no arrival, it just is.

Give Them Fame

It seems that in this world, today's world, if you go, you go straight to the top. And if you don't go you stay where you always were - at the bottom with the insects and the worms. It seems that the old hard ways are gone. The slow steady grueling path of moderate and occasional recognition leading to profundity is snowed over, blinded to us and to those money-making fame-grubbing fools on top. You see, we've lost the will. So what I say to those of you already on top is this: make them earn it. We don't need another hot shot bullshit writer pulling one-offs; clever little incoherent formal inventions. Make them live it for a time like the truest grittiest artists always did. And then, then, if they lose the will, the desire, the passion, the grit - then - send their asses packing and shut the vault! Otherwise, herald them and give them a crown and feed them grapes, those king's men and purveyors of culture. Give them fame.

Goodness Gracious, for Stuart Krimko

These days are stupid. What is it that I've swallowed that has me hallowed from tooth to limb. From thumbnail to toenail. I really don't know. Did I leave it out to dry somewhere, buried, where I forgot to check! Heck. The days seem withered in defeat, Stuart!

And Porter is our last names around here! Perhaps as Darkened as the beers. But something yearns. To my Dismay. And hey, what about the glands? Too many Hunter S. Thompsons chasing the adrenochrome these dayz. Well, perhaps!

I really don't know how I reached this destination of mind Lapsing. Except that I'm gasping my reach for newfound

Languages, for languish is the pall bearer at my word funeral.
The poems are coming faster than ever –
The landscaping chastising better than ever –
The poor me-ing it from here to the rivers where ugliness
Washed ashore years ago has me forgotten in this mess.

Stresssss. Sheesh. I never thought it would reach me from
Where I stand, backhanded by it, I am! Yet, the sky weeps
For us.

Gregory Edwards

As I sit here in the studio,
having awoken from a dream,
I remember an old friend.

I met this kid when I was also
a kid, at the School of Visual
Arts in New York City. I walked
into my first painting class there,
with Marilyn Minter as a teacher,
and as I recall, there he was, in the
right hand corner of the rectangular
wooden floored room with crisp
clean, but old white walls – the
smell of freshly painted latex and
oil paint lingering.

He was red haired, younger than
I by a couple of years, and handsome.
At least as handsome as I was. And
he made good work, work that I
remember. On the second day of
class we had the opportunity to bring
in some older work, things we had
been working on up to the point of
this new class. So, him being from
New York, brought in actual oil
paintings, abstractions. Right there
was the initial connection, because
I too had been painting abstractions.

Then, classes got on like they did
and it turned out we both wanted

to try out a figurative way of working for some time and we talked each day class came around. Not about the work really, you know, just about our backgrounds and about playful stuff. We were innocent and not yet competing. And those were the good days.

Then, the next year rolled around and we had different classes with different instructors yet maintained our friendship the same, mostly. Zack, my friend from back home moved to town and started attending classes at the school and was making some pretty good work. He entered the milieu without missing a beat. And there was my buddy Matt and Anna and Adam and Devon and Farmer and Sunya and many others. And we all hung out and we occasionally partied together, but we worked. And we worked. And we worked.

And the next year after that rolled around, our senior year, and we each got our own studio. At this time Greg and I looked at each other and teamed up. When I say that we each got our own studio I mean we kind of did, actually, the studio spaces were open and divided into two parts, one for you, and one for your studio partner. Well, Greg took to it well and competitively. I took to it well, and caringly. And in a time I could tell it was wearing on young Greggor, the amount of attention we were each getting for our work there. He got many kudos from the instructors, especially from Marilyn, and I from other instructors, but it was exciting to me and we, I would like to think, earned the attention. Well, Greg, I don't know what he started to think at this point but his jealousy really kicked into high gear. He started saying things like, "We should draw a line down the middle of the studio and on one side it will say your name and mine on the other. And we could have people tally

mark whichever person's work they like better throughout the semester!" You see, Greg had a real way of saying things that you couldn't tell were serious or not. But, to my mind, he got more and more serious about the attention I was getting and all I can venture to think is that he felt as though he wasn't "winning", so in the end, to avoid the drama of it all, I backed out of the studio and worked in my apartment the entire second semester of my senior year.

And all I can think now, is that Greg's ego really must have been on cloud nine at that point, thinking he had won and taken over the studio, etc. What he didn't know, is that in private I was working harder than I ever had before with a concept in mind and with every determination I could conjure. And I did it in my own space, without distraction, entirely by myself.

The end of our last semester finally arrived and I brought in my work for my instructors to see and for me to show it off, not just to Greg, but to all of my friends who I hadn't really seen in some time. So I hung the work, when no one was there, and I walked away. Essentially, what I had done, was that I had taken every idea that Greg had in the past semester and put it through my mind and heart and digested it the way I wanted it to look. And I didn't do it for myself alone, but for him, and for his jealousy. And the bottom line is it was better than anything he had made to that point, and it was on paper.

What had happened was that we had lost our communication, our innocence, and that was that. So, in one last final balanced effort I did my thing the way I saw fit, and it astonished not only him, but everyone. And with that effort, I secured my roll in gaining honors and he did too. And that's the story of then, of two friends who behaved like boys for a time, and who had no choice but to grow up like men.

Handmade Frames – To Paul Baumann

Mr. Baumann – Find an office, in the blistering sun.

Employee – Square out a space when your time is done
then keep them locked up, your emotions for fun.

Lay it on the line, then watch them run.

Well, that's what happened to me back in '05.
When the choice was dead or alive. I'd get free three times
A day whether I liked it or not. Free in an unsanctioned kind
Of way. Those precious few minutes over morning break,
Lunch break, and delivery time. Smoke a square, come back,
Do it again, then, add to your time. But mostly I was honest,
You see, there wasn't much of a choice. You clocked out-and-in
With an automatic time-sheet. The only chance of getting more
Time was to fib about it, which felt like fibbing, under an owner
That was a staunch Republican during the Bush years. He
Thought his business would fail otherwise, with a democrat
In office. And I wonder why? More power to the employee.

Concrete everywhere, I'm telling you! Concrete steps with
A concrete mind. No matter how loud the trucks and sirens
got it didn't faze me. I'd sit there eating my cheap-as-packed
lunch meal with the best of the concrete heads. And now I'm pretty
pissed about it. Yeah, they took me in alright, with a fake
smile and a healthy appearance. But, you see, the mind has ways of
killing a person – from the outside in. My boss would sit locked
away in an offsite room somewhere, of which I feared even to
ask where. And it was down the hall but that's all I knew.
And the people we worked with would threaten to shiv you if
they were fibbing, and they had criminal records so you didn't dare.
And I put the brakes on that whole fucking operation once.
And I just stood there willing, wanting, waiting;
Then Shawn interfered and it went to shit. He was onto me.
But I made it explicit. So, nothing happened, except the cog
Was in motion. Then, back to the race. And nothing came of
It except a slower ethic about who did what and when. But
That was enough for the time being.

What they didn't know was what I was doing at home,

What I was building. A painting to end the killing. A painting
To start the protest. A painting to let others feel the darkness that was upon us.
A painting to run the ship. A painting to run "The man."
Built out of the hate. From the hard as nails fate. A painting
So soft that love would consecrate among them.
And I showed the paintings in the halls upon an open studio
Visit. And we all softened except for him, "The Man."
The lone man, sitting, still scared, in his office, "down the hall."

Henry, '07

Henry sits in the corner every morning to eat his breakfast. He occasionally throws his tray in a fit unintentionally - his nervous system is shot. So many twitches and ticks the entire ward gets their kicks. He reeks of spray-on Old Spice antiperspirant deodorant and puts enough on at 8 o'clock that I don't need an alarm, my nose knows. His bed is next to mine. By now I'm fine with his jaw against his skull, bone on bone grinding at night. I'm not talking Debussy. I feel sorry for Henry and that's why I like him. It's not right but neither is my brain. His body and my mind. I have the benefit of hiding beneath a crown of empathy for apes and he has little cover outside of the jungle. Henry is not an ape, that's just what he looks like jumping up and down grinding in the daytime.

I wonder where Henry is now? What he's doing? If he ever made it to Georgia? He was beyond hope I'm afraid, like a downhill fall. I remember the day he left the hospital, him and the social worker speaking something about having enough money to get there. I was released three days after. I miss him three years after. His outbursts were the most dependable warmth I had in that place. I've not been one to rely too heavily on the routines of others, but Henry's disturbances were so genuinely unplanned and untamed they turned detachment inside out. His behavior was so pure and so clean amongst overdoses and stitched up necks he made Walden light up like fireflies.

Hotel California

I had a dream that if I could navigate on
this jet ski successfully up jungle
stream, against rock and current, I could
escape this nightmare of an illness,
the evening pill-popping, and worry.

It started out at the bottom of the screen,
like on all those old videogames, and all
of the patients were there on their jet skis
too. At once, we were off and it was

difficult. I was by myself, while the others were in teams.

But it wasn't all that bad, some who were ahead of me would shout downstream, "Damon, over here! This way!" In distant resonating tones. And there were helicopters overhead to prevent any cheating, but my compatriots knew some shortcuts, so we took them to dodge the orderlies flying overhead.

It was like I was the chosen one. They all rallied around me and my swift skills. I was on a roll and had the feeling that light was but a Planck length away.

And just as I sensed the light the Dream Gods shifted it on me, stole my success and threw me back into the ward where my father was meeting with the lead Psychiatrist.

The dream took the form of a split-screen shot. Me on one side dead-heading it with all the other patients, and Dad and the Doc on the other side shootin' the shit, having laughs, and getting along famously!

The question on everyone's mind, including my Dad's, was one of, Would I get out soon? Well, Dad did everything in his power to pull some strings with his reputation, but right about the time it was all going so smoothly I noticed the Doc's expression!

And if you've ever heard these lyrics:

"On a dark desert highway."

You know what I mean.

Huck Finn

I was once likened to Huck Finn
by a well-read-half-Japanese-hipster
upstate. The setting was a Bob Dylan
concert, outside venue, intimate. My
friend who worked at a Chelsea gallery
had invited me and introduced us.

I had never read Huck Finn before.
Growing up in Missouri it's built
into you, in a way, there's no need.

And I liked the comparison. It
made me feel good, like I hadn't
lost my roots after having been
submerged for several years. Like I
had maintained a healthy reverence
for my home and some salty
irreverence toward city life.

It's important not to lose
that, that thing that keeps you
grounded. What I didn't know
then was that I was still carrying it
with me. I thought I had shed it
altogether and in a sort of rebellious
way it was my goal to shed it.

No one commented on my accent
anymore, or about how I dressed,
or on my mannerisms, nothing. No
matter what the goal I was
getting lost in a sea of so many
homogenized Americans, like I was
slowly dissolving into an ethnic pool
of insignificant beings.

It was soon after that I lost my mind
nearly entirely. I had a mental break,
as they say. Which is proof that the city
really had its claws in me, from my
perspective. No matter if the docs say
it's genetic it was at least a perfect storm.
The noise was the worst.
Yet, before it all went down, I had a
feeling my time was near, a premonition,

like, I had finally served my time abroad at war, to the end. Like, I was about to be life-flighted out of the rubble of so many identity crisis's, out of that hell of a place. But I held on strong to that city, and my home onto me, and something had to give. So I broke.

And when I hit the institution I carried that book with me, Huck Finn. I had purchased it not long after my introduction to the hipster. And I carry it with me now, not as a sentimental token of my personality or of our acquaintance, but out of fear of losing myself again. And I still haven't read it, and hope that I never have to.

Humanity

The ice-cream truck driver ran the red light and screeched through the intersection. I was on the corner with my girl's hand in mine. The motorcyclist was broadsided clean, and landed smack at her feet, motionless. That's when I heard him, the ice-cream truck driver. The ice-cream truck driver had pulled over like a good citizen. "Rocket pops, get your rocket pops, three for two-dollars!"

I Chased an Alien

I once chased an alien around the apartment. My girlfriend and I were in a heated argument. She ran into the other room for a few moments and I heard a sound, as if someone or something was standing up from a sitting position on the couch. I decided it was an alien right off. It must be, I thought, well, that or a ghost, but I didn't yet believe in ghosts so an alien it had to be. And I chased this little fucker all over the place. As soon as I was onto him, his sounds, he'd make another somewhere nearby until I was in the hall and outside. I've always been a speedy little booger, you know, like second fastest in my class. Anyhow, I ended up finding him in the trees. His presence was

undeniable, and his friends were there too, all taunting me with their clings and clacks and little chirps and claps. And yes, there were birds around too, but I'm telling you I'm positive about this. And there was a storm brewing and the wind was rustling the bushes. Then my brother called and it was a bad connection, thank God, because I'm sure I tried to explain to him I was arguing with Leigha and chasing an alien at the same time. So about when the connection dropped, everything went silent. The birds, the wind, the storm, Leigha, and most of all, the aliens. And I've been silent about this until now, but I read a poem earlier about an alien who liked cowboys, and I thought to myself, well, I've got an alien story too, so why not! Plus, that guy's poem was probably fiction.

I Stole A Snickers

There are thieves out there.
Yes, thieves. They will steal
your money, your words,
your poems, your paintings,
your ideas. They don't ask
permission and hide behind
rocks and stones, in corners
down dark alleyways. You
never know when one is lurking
and you sometimes won't know
when you've been had. They are
stylish and without a voice. They
go to the streets or to the markets
or to where the many people of
culture gather to get your goods.
They don't spend a dime, either.
They are takers.

You see, they decide which style
for which day, and really, it takes
little thought on their part. Whatever
shines the brightest is often what
catches their eye.

So, them, these wretched creatures of community, they, like chameleons get real close to you, who are the rocks or the stones, and they adopt your style for a week or a month or a year. I would not worry so much about these cold blooded reptiles because they have no voice. A voice takes time to develop, a voice is not something that can be stolen or pawned off for the next best thing. A voice is with you for life, but a style, no, a style comes and it goes like petty thieves in the night.

And I know this how?

Because, when you're young and impoverished of a soul, a true soul, you steal. You take, and you take, and you take, until the taking no longer, like a Snickers, satisfies.

You eventually realize that good fats and proteins don't add up to a king-sized candy bar. And that's what this culture is made of. Many sweet sucking sugar addicts the size of elephants and famished little saccharin shitheads.

Don't be one of these.

Be yourself – damn you.

If You're Like Me

If you're like me you don't watch the news. You read the paper-boy's expression – his headline-hair, entertainment-eyes, sports-page-legs, funny-page-ears.

If you're like me you don't count
the years or watch the clock either.
You notice the height of the sun just
above the Catholic church on 3rd,
or the glare of the moon on the broken
down window-panes on the old brothels
in the back allies on Main.

If you're like me, on some days,
you're so damn lazy you can barely
recall your own name.

Yes, it sure is a good life, if you're like me.

Inspiration, for John Ashbery

It's like that boulder that touches your shoulder
And forehead just as you've read the most
Complicated line from a book. You suddenly
Know you don't have what it takes, that you're
Not the cook, not for the job you set out to do.
You get blue. You hear a wind chime in the
Distance then suddenly you're okay, but under-
neath something yearns. The breeze returns.
Lines from the book haunt you like fence to
Cattle, pinning you in. You're nothing. Not even
Meat. The rain begins to beat. You think, if only
I were like him, Parmigianino, or the winged poet
That illustrated his self-portrait. Lightning strikes
And a billboard flashes – then all you see are dashes,
And letters. Everything's better. Your bravery
And courage return. The light that was your
Lamp is no longer necessary, it becomes you,
And beams generations, unities, segregations.
They are, each finger, of the same body and
Propelled by heavenly impatience, a burning
Desire for greatness. And you are great. Because
This is how it works – in fits and jerks,
Clicks and quirks,
Seventy thousand pound steel sculptures made
of triangles and curves. Paintings resting upon
Elephant turds, videos, installations, performances,
And earthworks.

Each deserving of its own tradition and unique
Labor; that of a man and woman's desire to serve,
To bring newborn thoughts to earth.

It's said that we are light and winged things flying,
by day and by night, moving with divinity and humanity,
Between poles of rationale and insanity. It's written
that there is no invention in him until he
has been inspired and is out of his senses, and
the mind is no longer in him. It's like that Wes
Anderson movie, 'Bottle Rocket,' where Owen
Wilson plays Dignan. How much joy and
Sadness, clear mindedness, and madness, was in
Him? Michelangelo believed the true work of art
was but a shadow of the Divine perfection. I think
it's more like that Robert Frost poem, "The Road
Not Taken."

It Ain't about Skill and it Ain't about Talent

I remember growing up with a boy who
could show you six ways to draw just about
anything better than you could, and about
six different ways to paint that you hadn't
even thought of. This boy was gifted, there's
no doubt about it, still is. But he didn't
continue down the path of the artist, he
just didn't have that something it took.
And he could draw women, and he could
draw men, and he could paint like the wind.
So it ain't about skill and it ain't about talent.
Then what's it about you ask? It's about
devotion. It's about not giving up no matter
the upsets. It's about learning to hit the
fast-ball, sinker, curve ball, and slow-pitch.
And trust me boys, I've been around long
enough to know. This kid, he had a knack
for it, you know, anything you put in front
of him would turn to beauty. Real, easy, beauty,
not some laborious thing. It didn't take him
time to learn, it came right out of him like
piss. Beautiful piss. Easy piss. And it smelled
like cherries and it glistened like gold every time.
But, I say, he just couldn't stick with it.

And yeah, he's happy still, doing it every
now and again, when the inspiration strikes,
but, I'm here to tell you if you want to do it,
and do it for real, you don't have a choice.
There is never a choice. And that's what I
mean, it finds you. So, I'm also here to say
I can give a big shit about your mad skills
and talent, talk to me in forty years after you've
had no fucking choice. Because, that's the
difference between the artists and the dilettantes.
It ain't about a look, a style, a pose, an appearance.
It's about you not having a choice, and my job is
to make sure you see that, as a teacher, and
as an artist. So think about how much
money it takes, think about the time, and
if it fucks you up a bit that's fine, but if you
stomach it and still press on then you're one
of mine. There will be sacrifice, you bet your ass.
And if you think a loving marriage and
children are in your future, you may be
right, but, you may be wrong. It can be
done, but the chances are you're gonna
lose a whole lot before you gain. You're
gonna pay, pay, pay. And doesn't nobody
give a shit about that except you, so get
used to being a glutton. But you bet your
ass you will provide this world and yourself
with more beauty than this world
or you could ever fucking imagine, or, on
their best day comprehend. And if that
sounds self-righteous it's because it is.
It's your job and devotion, so get used
to that too. No one except a very, very
select few will even come close to
understanding. So fuck your skills and fuck
your talent, talk to me in forty years.

Jack, the Man

Jack Shainman hopped on the L Train.
Shyed down in his seat on that train.
Headed to the heart of Brooklyn!
Where I was mugged and shot at by
Every hipster from mid-missouri to
There. And yes, that's where my destiny

Occurred. The vision that went on for miles.
The endurance that was grand. The compressor,
The stretcher, the staples by day and by night.
The might in just the right places. The graces
Of black and grey upon six-foot stretchers, handmade.
The pain. The geeks by the windows. King's bar
And a jar-head photographer. Conversations worth
It all. That still hang on better than outsold mutherfuckers
In Chelsea, the Lower East Side, and Uptown.

Then, Shainman's shoes hit the pavement and started walking.
To and from there. Upon entry, kindly treated, and talked to about painting.
He lasted 15 minutes, if that. Took one look at the paintings and wrapped
It up quickly. Said, we already have a Brice Marden. I chased him as he
Ran out that day. He stood in the sunshine when I asked kindly, which
Paintings did you like best. He said, The Black Ones! In a heated way.

Hah!

What a pussy.

I was working in color by that time. Six, six-foot squares were displayed
That day. 4 in black, grey, and white. Two in white. Enough to turn him
Away the right way. The clean knife of wisdom. Room to grow.

But it burns way down even still, his attitude. The behavior of a kid.
He must have been my age when he left. Full of piss and vinegar, at least
Enough to get him back safely.

Jon

I have this friend who's extremely
intelligent. There's little he doesn't
know about in this world. He's an
intellect and when he plays guitar
and sings his heart is splayed out
in front of you. You're privileged to
have been a witness if you've seen
him play and each time I say,

“Jesus Christ!” He says,
“Where? He owes me money!” And
every time I laugh. And it’s a guttural
laugh, because if there’s anyone I know
on God’s Green Earth who has suffered
more, hurt more, been depressed more,
been high more, been alone more, been
spit on more, it’s him. You see, God
doesn’t hear all of us like they say, some
just pray and pray and continue to be shit
on. I’m not one of those. So as it is, my
laugh goes all the way to heaven
and rattles God’s forgiving ears.
And he says to me, “What is it this time,
Damon?” And I shout, “God, my friend says
your son owes him money!” And God
responds every time. Then, Jon sings again,
and plays his guitar, and it sounds like money.

Just a Little Crazy

As the sun beats down
On this two-bit town
Let’s have one for the
Crazies who seek shade

As the laborers do their part
Sweating grinding out hours
Of stone and brick we make art
Of some things lesser and some
Things more bold

With them in the middle setting
Concrete molds
Or wrenching on cars to be sold
We do little until inspiration
Tells us to either create or shoot someone

Some crazies don't seek shade,
Can't seek shade,
Until their wreckage is made,
Until the cork pops
On a thousand boiling soda-pops
Left in the sun all day without firm regard

Until the cops
Come lay them to rest
Long over-due after they failed the test
Of sun and shade
And their final balancing act,
Unfortunately,
Is the grave

No,
I seek shade like you do,
Before the tipping point,
Before the answer of millions of spectators
Judges
Pseudo psychiatrists
Stay at home moms and
Machismo fathers put me to rest

I,
At my best,
After running for days
In the heat blistered seek shade
And then behave
And that's my kind of crazy,
The not so crazy,
I guess

But,
Even still,
Do I pass the test?
Truth be told I hate tests.
Yet, to be perfectly fair,
Every day there are multiple choices
And the tragedies and rejoices
Are so many that we,

Is it fair to say we,
That I can barely negotiate a C

So mothers
Fathers
Teachers
Go easy on your children
Your students
Because a C is still passing,
And a sure sign of prudence
In my book

God knows I graduated with honors only once
And look,
I'm no dunce,
Just a little crazy, you know, just a little

Just Jayson & I

Sittin on the patio enjoyin
a couple of smokes and some
cheap box wine. A crushing
swipe of God's white paint
animates the sky. He's a madman
with his brush! Better than ol'
Franz Kline with the cresting
waves of white. There's no need
for black, not yet, his strokes of
debaucheries splatter the sky
in oranges and pinks and yellows,
better than Jackson Pollock at his
drunkest. But we're talking.

And I look up and point to the
sublimation of cream colored
cotton and Jayson recognizes
the force. I tell him, "If I was
with a student right now
I'd hold back on my descriptions,
try to listen to the student a bit, and
then maybe mention its leftward
blow to the eye." I also say
something like, "It looks like
breaking waves in the shallows."
He adds, "Yes! I can see the

bluish color beneath the white!
Beautiful!” But now we’re
buzzed from the superb broke
boy box of wine that he and his
girlfriend bought, and I wonder if it’s
actually okay for me to be drinking
Rachel’s wine. But we continue,
and we’re talking.

We speak of music for a while.
He busts out some jargon in his
natural way and I’m impressed
and say, “Damn! See! I don’t
understand it like you do, I’m
a connoisseur, but I can’t
make the stuff!” He smiles.

Jayson’s great at what he does.
He’s got this band, Danger Cardigan!
It’s his passion and he cares for
it no less than I care for these letters,
or for that cloud he’s on. And he too is
a believer in love most of all, and
that’s what makes him great!

And he’s a little scared we over did
it, but then, he posts a message to my
Facebook wall that says, “Find what
you love and let it kill you. –Charles
Bukowski” And he knows I know
what it means...

It’s not the booze, the cigarettes, or the good
times that will sink us it’s all of it! It’s those
good things that we truly love that are a fine
blade to our throats! What’s more dangerous
than this are these words, and his songs, and
it will, God willing, take us to our graves.

Ladders Up

Ladder after ladder we climbed into
that dangerous city air. That cocaine filled
beauty of a night sought to kill us but couldn’t.

Invincible as winged unicorns to evil humans we
looked out over that ledge, each and every one
of us wondering what it would be like to fly.

Yet our hold fast to ego and immortality
and the distraction of drugs, talking, talking,
talking, so much talking bound us to the roof.

There was a radio in the distance playing some
really hip tunes and some of us danced. I was
a dancer in New York, never before and never since.

The twinkling and majesty of the city
lights below gave one the reign of a falcon and
wisdom of the owl but we were alone in that city.

And that's the thing about cities no one tells you
when you're young, you're more alone there than
when off in the woods playing in isolation.

Nature is inevitably nostalgic for a Midwest boy.
But you can't be any more alone than when you're
surrounded by the multitudes in the big city.

I cherished it for a time when I was young and
handsome and the envy of so many broken hearted
onyx haired vixens.

Look at this conservative Midwest boy they thought,
fresh from under someone's thumb. I was different.
And I played to it and the New York gals, they loved it.

But that night after the bar on the roof what I found out
was something else. That we were all equally lost and
damaged, city girl and country boy alike.

Or maybe it was the drugs with their fast hold on us,
I don't know. What I can say is that without them I wouldn't
have climbed so many ladders up, nor fallen so far.

Life, It Gets Harder

Life, it gets harder.

What was once warm
Breath venting from mouths
On a backyard football field
Becomes stale smoke in dim-
lit bars. You drive a car. You
Have to afford gas, and heat,
And light. But there's a base
Order to it all. Heat first, in the
Dead of winter, then light.
Make rent, you might. You feel
The blight of others and begin
To love your mother instead of
Arguing back. Sometimes there's
A crack, a large crack that fills
With light, where in this case it's
Internal, and the electric bill can
Wait. You've got to keep it straight,
Or else things go awry. You tell lies,
Stupid lies. The kind adults tell to
Keep an even keel. Though you no
Longer steal; some youthful tendencies
Pass, but you still have to fill the tank
With gas, so you borrow a little. No
One plays the fiddle for you and money
In all its glory plays the most important
Story, or so you think at times. That is,
Until you hear that daily train bell chime.
And it's back to work; your daily quirk
And freedom from the kids who are
Putting in bids already for Christmas
Season who have a reason, they say,
For bullying other kids on the playground.
They're taught the world is round, but
Sometimes, as you know, with age the
World gets flat. Just about then your
Father has a heart attack. It's damn
Hard to hack. But you don't turn back,
Because it's a good life, and you have
A wife who loves you dearly and those
Kids who need their presents yearly.

Life's Little Howl to a Murder Most Foul

I wonder what old man Emerson would say,

In a time like this what would he say!

Nature has come to warn us all!
And the President still wants to build his Wall!
God is plenty for us all!
Or perhaps, "Solitude is enough to free us all!"

Anyhow, I'm going down.
While little black faced Billy is not coming around.
Bob Dylan is singing his very last songs,
And Leonard Cohen, his friend, is in the ground.
But I am found here in this studio, now.
And little black faced Billy just came around.

There's enough racism to kill a Priest,
Enough cops to unleash the beast,
Two or three cups of ashes to meet,
In the streets of days while finding the beat.
And Bob Dylan says only dead men are free,
And it sounds pretty neat to me!

I'm finding the love enough for us all,
But one more thank you and I'll make a fuss of us all,
For all of us.
So, stick out your whistles and give us a blast,
Put away your cash and make it last!
Play us a song or two by the stereo,
Be a peasant or a little white cheerio.

Be a rich man with attitude and skinny feet painted black,
Sitting in his penthouse up the street from Zack.
Skateboard down a cul-de-sac after that,
Hit a half-pipe and then take a nap!
Feel what you have then go with that,
In this climate of ours we can't shout and all of that.
Nature warned us about all of that,
And God is coming to an end after the fact.

The Pandemic is on patrol,
The scientists are all taking our tolls and writing in gold,
The artists are fighting beneath of it all,
The laborers are having a ball,
The women are having children like always –
But who's taking care of them in this daze,
Well, they know who has a haze,
Some are marrying and others are going straight,

Some are divorcing what's offered on a plate.

And I'm sitting here going straight.
To the sound of Bob Dylan, going straight.
To the sound of an overhead fan curving it up,
To the silence of the studio carving it up,
And I might have to fill your all's cup!
With tea or coffee and with a sip and a sup!
Up now, UP!
There's poison entering your luck,
And decimation beyond your luck.

So, I wonder, I just wonder what Emerson would say,
Beyond his grave's final days.
Beyond his grave what would he say?

Perhaps this was his way?
Just perhaps he started this way!
In a frantic and furious defeated way!

But you know me, I like it this way,
With nothing on my mind or nothing specific to say.
Capturing the fleeting and indulging the specific,
All the while waves are rolling into the Pacific.
The boats are coming and are on their way,
From here to the Atlantic their underway.
And this pandemic has gone astray.

And that's all I really came here to say.
But Christ is well and so am I in our way –
So, send me some love and enter this rhyme –
Before the spirits of our world all go Blind!

And Pearl Jam says when the spirit comes to Stand Back,
But I'm sick of that song and its aftermath,
Just so I can sing along,
To dusty lyrics and modern chords,
When trying to cherish this first and our Lord.

But, you see, I can't see,
When being the world I can't see or look,
I'm blinded by love when writing this book,
And my phone just rang right on time!
A call from a lady friend of mine!
Just so I can end this rhyme, and right on time!

Listen

I know a girl who likes to talk.
Wants to be an actress, wants
to be a painter with pieces in
a museum, wants to be a model,
wants to be a scientist, wants
to join the navy.

When I met her, she seemed
not like the others, fascinating
enough. A different outfit for
each day, a different style for
each day, a different hat or hairdo.

So I listened and each time I would
respond with some talk of my
own her face would get scrunched
up and frustrated looking – eyebrows
turned in, creases atop her nose,
tight lipped, ears back, cheeks raised.

It bothered me, her expression.
It was the type that meant she
didn't care what I really had to
say. She just wanted to do the
talking, the talking, the talking.

So now I listen while she talks.
She says a lot, really. Tells me
about her day, about her problems,
about her joys, her sorrows, her
parents, her dog, her boyfriend or
girlfriend. So I listen. And listen.
And listen – and I say nothing.
And I'm better for it and so is she.

Look Here.

I look at the thing like this –

You can either get mad, sad, happy,

Sappy, in a twirl, with a boy or a girl,
Or at night with a toy, for some joy,
Or go it alone!

You can drink your beer, smoke a cig,
Chief on some twigs,
Or go without.

You can sip your tea in a mug,
Have a hug of coffee in the mornings,
Or enjoy your soda in the days,
Or go without!

But the haze of ashes clouding this land can't stand one more hierarchy of thought from me.
And I wonder, who is free? I just wonder, because, as it stands... these lands are not free.

And you may think I write you, and you may think hierarchies exist because they don't, but
That's just you not thinking. Kind of like if I called you a fag, you would get offended. But,
That's because dumbasses only think in two directions. In and out.

Oh, let's pout. Well, I've got something to tell you, the time has come that you fuckers
Should obey something other than that. Something more directionless. For a moment you might
Identify with yourselves, and find that this world we live in ain't as elegant as opposites.

There are the laws we make, there are the laws that are enforced, and then there is THEE LAW.
And if you fuck with those, in my world, you are no good, to me. And there are a whole gang of

You fucks out there who don't abide by them. And I just happen to have a list I drew up for myself:

It starts with, Passion. You better feel!

Motivation: after all that feeling you better get to doin' something.

Honesty: During it all, be honest.

And, Justice: Well, the glass ain't always half full, now is it.

And Truth: Sip that soup to the sound of it.

Discipline – Every fucking day. *Every* fucking day of the week.

Good Behavior: have a go of it. Speak of it, do it, and get on this way... with emotion and brains, not the kind that chops at the heart, either.

Faith – In the God upstairs. THEE GOD! Call it what you will, but you better find a way to

Believe in something!

Good Will – do unto others as they would do unto you, and flip it around every once in a little while, do unto you, as you would have done to others.

Now, this stated, what have we now?

A fucking disaster of wits and handshakes. Backstabbing and people going 'round shaking backhands for fun. Slapping asses, AND, grabbing pussies in this disaster. Well, that may get you something, but somewhere? I hardly fucking doubt it!

And you may say something like, well, look what it got Mr. President! “A job in the Oval Office, eh!”

And I say, well, yes it, did! But if all in all keeps going the directionless ways of the world

you're gonna see who lasts and who doesn't! Because, you see... my van Gogh stocks have been elevated for years, in this bullshit climate of one off's. Little pocket pussy gestures of men and their fucking toys have them elevated to the skies and back! Them not giving a fuck except about themselves and a little gal (or better yet) toy on their arm to hold when things get too rough for themselves. And around here we define that with a word. *Desperation*. Fucking helplessness better yet!

So, where are we now. Remember, I see it this way!

You can either get mad, sad, happy,
Sappy, in a twirl, with a boy or a girl,
Or at night with a toy, for some joy,
Or go it alone!

You can drink your beer, smoke a cig,
Chief on some twigs,
Or go without.

You can sip your tea in a mug,
Have a hug of coffee in the mornings,
Or enjoy your soda in the days,
Or, fucking go without!

Looper

What do I have to say, what do you have to say?
Hell, it's just day to day, a day to day loop we're caught in, I'm caught in,

Traveling back and forth from the studio. 4th Street to Park Street to Ohio Street
And back again. A loop, one big loop that opens up to young punks riding skateboards,
Longboards and back again, bicycles and chatter then from the young men and ladies
Building homes from 2x4's and pouring concrete to level floors. And the women cat called,
Eyeballed, and the men blue balled zapped and anti-romanced for being loud and obnoxious go
about their days without being sued, on most days. I mean, it's not the 90's for God's sake, it's
not the 00's for God's sake, it's 2019 and one to go before the 20's strike again! And the men,
well aren't men, and the women, well are men, because tip toe fancy footing blue balled vixens
with bravado get to saying things too sharply about her and then she turns all freakishly bad with
red eyeballs into black eyeballs with too long dresses making messes of machismo like spaghetti
sandwiches with meatballs in the days, eyes rolling off plates and arms dazzling about like pasta
to babe's mouths and about then someone's lights get punched out for being too brave. But I'm
on an exercise machine, a treadmill that rolls around and around upon the hardwood floors of my
house sweating it out in my mind's eye and I've quit smoking cigarettes and that's the truth
Ruth. Because 41 might hit like a brick to the mind's eyes otherwise! And even though life
happens in circles, like legends arousing the ancients through prose, the rose is still beautiful and
will always be beautiful to women that like such things unless they prefer receiving thorns, I
mean, I don't, but hey, some people do, so don't get blue babe like irises upon the graves of
heroes of past days. Because they are sure to return someday just like the horns you crave day
after day in the Springs of yesterdays and in the crescendo of sounds of days of today when the
sun hits on Ohio Street all the way to 4th Street upon sunbaked girls along the drives home from
work. And I don't sweat the heat and I don't sweat the boring businessmen and ladies walking in
the sun's daze because they have families and I don't, and they have sports and I don't, but I
have poems the size of Atlas's spheres of tomorrows and paintings the size of cathedral windows
aching, aging, daring me to start on them. So, what I am trying to say is, when it comes down to
it all, it's as level as grass in the land of Oz from here to Kansas's pure light in the evenings.
Sundowns over Ulysses and above Bazine and queens can't compare but get painted out the
same, and kings get painted and joints get made along railroad tracks that get talked about in
poems to the sounds of electronica and digital tunes cold as arrows through hearts in the
Springtime. And next fall I'll walk laps, I think, from beyond this room with my mind's eyes set
on the present, past, and futures to come. Because well, it seems to me the future is bright as
headlights on Cadillacs driving through cornfields and maze fields in the rains of yesteryear. And
that's pretty bright, to me. So, what do you have to say about it?

Love Letter

Love is so hard. So difficult to sustain. So unbelievably hard. I don't just mean between one
another, but also the love of one's self. We have to love ourselves if we are to get along in this
life. There are so many detractors, it's true. But with an inner heart that is cared for, that is
absolutely cherished for one and for many, we have a chance at something higher, something
purer. I wish I could explain to younger generations how difficult this journey is and will be, but
I know that's not needed and I'll save you the pity. So many of you already have it harder, it's
shitty, and so many of you have less. If I were to guess, you would say the same. I think the

entire world is tamed by it, love, and its credulous power of consolation. Credulous, because we want it above all things, need it more than all things, and are willing to go out on so many irrational, gullible, and bird brained limbs for it. I could speak more of its sharpened fangs, but I would rather not list its seemingly, at times, infinite pangs. Sometimes we just need to let beauty do its part. After all, we don't start anything without its miraculous motivation. So cut the crap and be above yourself, or at least above the next guy or gal dragging you down. Don't necessarily let them drown, but also don't let them take you with them on some perilous journey south. Be assertive with your mouth, or with silence, it makes not a difference. Just remember, love is the way. Say it to yourself. I love me. I love you. It feels pretty damned good every now and again. And yes, you'll likely do some sin, but hey, that's alright too, so long as moderation serves you well. I mean, what the hell, live your life. That's what my psychologist told me once. Risk the dunce every now and again. The man downstairs doesn't beg for us to visit any more than the man upstairs wants to collect your ticket; so love, love, love, and be well. That's my plan.

Maurice

I have this friend. He's black, blacker than most. When we were in high-school he was bullied. You see, he lived on the white side of town, which never really seemed to compute as being different to me at the time. When you're young you see the good side first, always. At least I did. And I never understood why all of the black boys would bother him until now. And I've never had a conversation with him about it to this day, but I understand now.

My friend socialized with those individuals who didn't discriminate, and most of them just happened to be white at the time. He was a handsome guy, good with the girls, smart, a great athlete. But all of this went under appreciated by the black guys North of the tracks because, well, like I said his friends were white and he was black and lived in the white part of town. Really, it's that simple.

But he was beaten day in and day out, my friend. Except he was a born fighter, you know, he stood up for himself and never

once did he make it a black or white thing. It's just that he knew on the inside that he better pound the punks for being stupid. It was a matter of survival. So, as it went, he rarely lost a fight. He had an inner fire of the rarest alchemy, the truest blue. That fire that burns in the greatest hearts, in the rarest parts of the soul.

And now, he has a family that he cares for like none of those lost idiots that tortured him ever could, or are able to now. Every damn one of them have either been shot and killed or are caught up in drugs. And on some days, like today, I can here ol' Mo's laughter above the rest as he goes on singing his song, singing it the best. And as I take my notes down I hope we will speak again soon. Because if there's one thing I know about him, it's that he rises again and again, black as the night and light as the moon.

Moonwalk

I gaze at one key, End, as if to begin again. Yet my course and memory dictates to myself that I must reverse the night's steps to see. So, there I am, rousing that man, talking of points where there are some, but for fun, I pretended there weren't. As he was far too dangerous and old to be dealt with in some serious fashion of endings. He was indeed an ominous and wild character of behavior. Thinking, smiling, all the while I was, and him, oily hair and regrets parched to enter the room through his pointing fingers, and breath of a man who lingers for far too long looking at paintings that are of my own. Yet for display purposes and hanging. Angrily, I wagered my war of words upon his words that night after listening to him say to me, "What are all of these points? And that crusty paint!" In some far reaching and fetching tone, snootily. And this ominous man, who is he? I cannot tell. A rich man? A saint. A patron of his? Yes! By golly, yes he is! A troublemaker, nevertheless!

And what of Barnett Newman and mathematicians. And what of artistes versus true artists? They were there, both of them. And what of rage and backstreets? I drove too long to be castrated and emasculated by women both strong and weak! The lookers – too young, the thinkers – too old, the minds of men not bold enough to hold onto fact and fiction long enough to speak truths – Suspend judgments. Let them go upon the winds. As you leave the place. Or, speak them coherently enough to be judged by the artist, myself! Because, that is what you are risking by being there! So, I say look, and hold your tongues! Walk away if you have nothing to say, but for god's sake, don't say anything at all be it bad!

Because like this – one thing leads to another and the harshest words are saved for last! So, go now, into the wind, you asses. Because, that is surely what I did, at last! At last! At last! Freedom rings on the backstreets of nowhere, to me. Freedom rings, at last! And down Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, I passed! For miles I laid on that gas! And to Vernon Drive I landed, my directions are candid! So, then, I took a right and was headed on a path. One that was my own. And, alone I was. Destiny called, and faith took hold. Doubting is not for the Bold!

Morning Light

Finding it hard to get by, I follow the light.
From my house to the studio, I follow the light.
And it's beautiful. The way it shines
through the crevasses between buildings,
casts gorgeous shadows on the streets,
wells up in the eyes and permeates the darkest
unknown places inside of you.

And isn't it curious how after a night of drinking
it punishes you and you must look away? Yes,
on some mornings, you don't deserve the light.
You get to sit in shadows until late afternoon
embarking on blame and pride and guilt.

Did I pay my tab?

Did I call my girl?

Did I get into a fight?

Yes, that's right, you journey on guilt all morning long from
the moment the sun falls on your flesh until it enters your eyes.

And on those mornings, you want to hide from the others,
from the world. Because you don't need others
beating your ass into dank submission, the way the sun
already has.

So, you curl up on your couch and imagine the young
girl's ass from the night before, or you imagine the
small talk of other artists sharing some techniques,
or the talk of justice in the streets to a police officer
whom you don't know.

And you're worthy of all these things, you say, because

you earned it you feel. But you also earned the barbed wire in your throat, the bedside water glass run dry as a bone, the taste of your pain and glory that so often goes hand in hand.

But, what you didn't earn was the Sun – the morning light. The feeling of elation, as high as a kite. And this, no matter how trite, is what I live for.

My Country, In Love

When you grow up a little and get
Past the idea that your path is the
Only path to take in this world
You then may realize, like I have,
The great sacrifices so many have
Made to protect your innocence.

I'm an artist, it was a long and
Arduous path for me to see this
Clearly, and still is on some days.
My job is so far removed from
Taking life that I could never see
How it could be done. I couldn't
See the threat of life on my soil,
The justification of fighting wasn't
There. I can see now why. Because I
Was insulated, well protected,
And free. And though I still don't
See how it's possible to kill on some
Days, I realize it's a blessing, the
Freedom we have. More than a
Blessing really, because it is defined
By so much will of so many men and
Women who fight to protect our
Homes. I've intentionally removed
Myself on many occasions from danger.
From the imminent threat of fighting.
And though I still believe passivity
Could be practiced to a greater degree
By the many, I do see clearly now the
Need for others to fight.

In this world, on some days, some
Weeks, some months, hell, some

Years, it's difficult to find breathing
Room; the space one needs to be them-
selves, to think and to feel like a
Compassionate human being away
From the aggression of others, away
From negative thought. It's a great
Liberty offered us by so many young
Men and ladies. And I'm grateful to
Them. Grateful that I'm not the one
Who must fight.

We need a leader who cares. One who
Understands that fighting is not the
Only way, who is smarter than that.
Who can express to congress and to the
People that there is nearly always, always,
Another way. We are getting there, I feel.
But, it is a subtle path, one that gains
Strength one step, one leader at a time.
It's so complicated, the engagements of
Others. What we should realize, I believe,
Is that it is okay to take a loss monetarily,
If the choices of making cash equals losses
Of lives. We can learn this here at home and
Afar as well. That money is good, but not
The end all. We are weak. We are not as
Smart as some countries are. We are large.
We must get stronger mentally if we are to
Defeat evil.

There is a better way, and it is near.
I see it in the flowers, in the flags, in the
People, and in the grass and it is near. I see
It in the wind that whips those stars and
Stripes to and fro just outside my studio
Window. I can see it now, delicate and
White, humble and innocent, strong
And bold, red and blue. It is our future
People, and it is beautiful.

Neighbors

They've been away.
The couple with the beautiful young

daughter who watch her play in the street while they sit atop a metal flight of stairs yelling and screaming at her and each other, but mostly at each other. The man does the yelling, most of it directed at the mother. The rest of it at the in-and-outers, the other tweakers. He's rail thin, the skinny piece of shit, methed out of his tiny brain day in and day out. But I don't give the mother much credit either, except that she was probably a lovely looking dame before the dope took hold. Now she looks as if 10 years older than I, but really, she's 10 years younger, leathery skin, wrinkled with red splotches on her face, and bones sticking out from her shoulders where the skin hangs down over the joints and triceps. If only I would catch them doing something wrong, I mean really wrong, it would give me the opportunity to set that motherfucker straight, I mean, give him a real good beat-down. But junkies are good at hiding, it's the one thing they do best, well, that, and lie, and steal, and cheat. Anyhow, the time will come that they are busted, beat up, or dead; overdosed on the tweak, crank, or crack. But their daughter, that precious darling girl, all she wants is love, all she needs is love, except that I hear her playing with the youngsters on some good days and it's "You bitch!" "You asshole!" And she hasn't the vaguest clue what the detriment will be in the long run. Bless her little heart, that dear, dear girl. If only once she learns to ride that bike she could just keep riding, and riding, and riding, and riding, but they've been away. And I don't know if they're coming back.

No Bombs

Sun, sweat, and wasps like a thousand little cops monitoring my behavior as I sit outside the studio door. Then a breeze, like a pleasurable sneeze that soothes my senses into enduring the sun some more. And the stupid little ants beneath my feet collect the garbage scraps of what I had to eat. Better them than me. No one likes being stepped on. Like a pawn in a game, I bet they haven't any shame. Or like a Ranger in the field, I bet they don't yield before

they wield their little ant bodies at the
enemy, or do they slow at the smell of infancy?
What beasts know of innocence? Surely all
know of reconnaissance. Especially when
going after their young who once blessed their
mother's hands but who were stolen by distant
lands to defend the rest of us from damaged morals.
Protect your little girls. Build a wall around their
floral dresses at night and bid the strangers a muscular
sight because one must protect their young.
We don't do it for fun. And very few have the
right to a gun it seems, but I've been given some rights
and dreams of my own here, you see. This pen recognizes
fear. So watch the news at night my dears and nestle down
into your own kind of fear as the powers come to be,
there will be little left for you to see, you see? Unless
we bring the noise for others to love and to keep and to
be able to speak their minds. My God,
our world will be blind if we don't stop pining
over theoretical little findings and beliefs. I just thought
I'd wander near the studio door and inside again to sharpen
my little mental pen but the world is back at it again with
stupid little crawling ants. The little fuckers sneak
up on you and before you know it they've traveled
under you and one climbs inside your sock and then
your bitten. And if he bites defend yourself but don't
go asking for votes if you're just going to turn the lot of
them into a cesspool again. My friends, sharpen your lens.

"No suffering is unnecessary. All of it is only enlightening. This is life"

--Agnes Martin, from Writings

No Suffering

Momentum goes like this . . .

It begins. It ends. It goes like this!

Starts slow and easy. Then, it gets harder.

Fast. It goes like this. It goes like this.

A little stutter every now and again.

Too self-conscious?

That's when you know to slow down.

and move slooow sloooooower

and

STOP.

Then speed up!!!! UP! UP! UP!

down down down , it goes like this

V
V
V
V

rock bottom. ugh. flop flop flop on someone else's couch. ugh.

Then back UP! UP! UP!

Slowly. slooowly. sloooowly.

Move fast again. A cup cup cup of coffee!

To BLAST off! Then tea. Let it be.

See. That's how you move. To the grove.
Momentum ain't no thing. And stagnation,
But a word. Find it. Tease it into you. Mom-
entum. Fix it up. Curl the ends?
Like that. Send the straight parts off sailing –
Like that.

It's easy.

And smooooth

Like that.

On a Grand Mountaintop

Just my brother and I rolling down I-70.
The sunset is not an ordinary one, it comes
in layers – one cresting the other, after another,
after another. And it's just he and I and the

music and some laughy taffy on a meager budget. And I gave my artist talk where about six people showed. But it was a group show of sorts, so I'm not too ashamed. And I drive in the dark under bridges and over bridges and beside towns with the lights on. And I nearly got a ticket for expired tags but the cop let us pass, so it's a good day. Because sometimes the world lends a hand. Allows us to stand on top of it for a moment, like on some grand mountaintop where the weather is perfect and there's not a chill in the air. And it was just he and I. Like it should be – two brothers doing no harm. And the Midwest sky just keeps on going and reminds me of my father's paintings, like no one else in this world can paint them. He's earned the sublime attitude of the greatest masters. He's seventy years old and still painting it out. And one day, if you're lucky as I have been you'll walk into one of his shows and it will let you in, and the light will take you all the way to heaven, like that old I-70 road view did. Like that old road view did.

Plastic Town

Everyone goes downtown these days. At night they pretend to have had a hard day's work and sit, retired, at the bar. The old industry also sits, once beautifully decayed – now – refurbished – like it's spanking new. Old crumbling facades repainted, reworked, like the olden days.

And I remember some of those days. No neighbors; the grit, the grime, falling down fences, no restraint, the old candy store, butcher shop, dollar store. Boom boxes blaring upstairs and on the streets. The run down brothels. The alleyways at night.

But now, you can't play your music so loud. The gentries don't like it that way.

Their souls are tired, as if tired, and have lost sight of the hard-road. The tough bloods are all but gone. And the blondes are artificial like the windexed panes of glass on the store fronts. And all the cats still roam the streets, but are fat and well-fed.

And that courthouse flame still flames, but no one has the balls these days to light a joint off it. They just smoke their cigarettes by it and talk about justice, as if it exists. And like it or leave it I'm here to watch the overflow, and to criticize the fat-assed lawyers who haven't needed a drink to get through the day in 30 years. The tears don't get cried, the cheers don't get sighed, and the crickets and cockroaches have all but died.

But tonight I'll be pretending like it always was and used to be and playing my radio loud as white lightning. Maybe something like Jungleland at three quarter's volume will suit the mood, if I'm lucky, before the brooding sets in even worse. Then, I'm bound to join in with all those fake showboats at the bar – sitting there, pretending like life never mattered or existed in this godforsaken town.

Poem in the Aftermath

Remnants of a good night litter the concrete. Cigarette butts and bottle caps rest hungover and pleased from being flicked and flipped upon the hard-dry ground waiting to be disposed of their attentiveness to aiding in the joy and occasional sorrow of escape. But it would all die without a name, and the name is, The Studio.

Praising

My first book, "Where the Sidewalk Ends,"
Was where it all started for me. My mom
Turned me onto that one. She was the literary

Master of the household. But I didn't read
Another book, article, paper, magazine, until
College. The excitement of that one book
Held on through the years. It was an adventure,
A timely one.

When I got to college, and finally learned how
To make the grade by studying, it was all over
For me. It was better than any drug I had tried,
It was a human affirmation of orderly success,
not euphoric disorder.

So, I decided to be a scholar. I looked around
To all of the other students, and they didn't
Seem all that tough. So I took to it like a baby
Takes to milk. And slowly, bit by bit, I devoured
The best of them. From Hesse to Hemmingway,
From Plato, to Emerson, to Kant; Lao Tzu to
Chuang Tzu, from Shakespeare, to Poe, to Hughes.

And now I sit here, writing with many years ahead
Of me, God willing. With a few good poets at my
Side. And I'm just hitting my stride. I've not yet
Found the 'proper' balance between life and work,
But I have been given the gift to know that it will
Likely never come. Because that's my way, most things
A little off kilter, and some, the very best of them,
Come perfectly out of my nest of a brain, and rise to the surface
Like a buoyant dolphin, trained by my many years of praising.

Rainbow Drive

I remember the old Rainbow Drive house just
off Southwest Blvd. My brother rented the house
with one roommate, this guy Andy, who was
cocky and could be an asshole. Up late nights
and into the mornings tweaked out of your mind
tends to put a person on edge. You know, the
emotions can't keep up, there's no downtime
to replenish the natural dopamine levels of the brain,
and so on. Well, my brother was as guilty. And
Amy, and the whole bunch including myself
except I stuck to the weed, didn't fuck with the
harder stuff back then. And I was maybe 17 yrs.
of age and my friends Russell, Maurice, Bobby,

and others would frequent the house. We mostly played video games after school and in the summers all day into the mornings. And the comers and goers would slither in and out of the doors, front and back, snakes all of them, at all times of night and day getting their fixes. I never wondered why there was so much activity going on in there, mostly I was naïve to the harder stuff. But the spazzes would shake and twitch and scratch and claw and argue and talk, and whatever all day. Most of all I remember we smoked our weed out of bongs. And there was a 6-foot glass one that we added a 3-foot extension onto with PVC piping and you had to stand on top of a chair to smoke that thing. And you had to use one of those big wooden bowls to load the thing up and if it was a really good pull you crushed the whole bowl in one shot and you were then stone stuck for hours on a couch, which mostly is what we wanted. Something to nullify the pain, the loss, the angst, and to induce laughter, stupidity, and joy, even if it was a short term artificial kind of happiness. And it took two people, one to light the bong with a torch and one to smoke it, so you were never alone at it. And we were never at a loss because my friend and I one summer found out where his uncle was growing the stuff and we knabbed 4 plastic Walmart bags full of the junk weed. I remember walking about a half a mile out into the middle of nowhere in the country to a secluded small barn where there were clothes lines full of buds, all drying and labeled individually by strand type. And I just smoked the stuff, but Scott was his name, well, he would sell it when he was low on cash and that always made me feel a bit paranoid because shit man I was young and I knew I could go to jail, or worse for a deal gone sour. And if you knew Scott, he wasn't exactly a stand-up citizen, sketchier than I ever was.

That's about it.

But the last time I heard – ol' Scott was in jail for child molestation or some heinous fucking crime but I never did confirm or deny that with a factual account. Pretty much nothing surprises me anymore by way of god-forsaken crimes in this town.

Anyhow, we stopped speaking years ago, shortly after our summers at the Rainbow Drive house.

But I guess I'm still searching for that pot of gold.

Real Human Beings and Real Heroes

What makes a real human being a real hero?

Stepping up when the chips are down.

Making the kick with seconds on the line down by two points.

The game winner.

The clutch master.

Faster.

Our savior of the disaster.

Calm in the midst of storms.

The ditching of pride to pay for necessities with nickels, pennies, and dimes left in the pockets.

The eight ball in the corner socket.

The halogen light that forgoes suicide.

The difference a rhyme makes.

When nothing rhymes.

And the ability to about face in the face of adversity.

Diversity.

University instructors that curse when life throws them a curve ball.

Who can admit when they don't know something.

Humping.

To get through the darkest night.

And calling to reassure her it was right.

The man in the dark alley begging for change is out of sight.

Because he knows what he must do.

He knows that work pays off.

A cop.

A two-bit penny pincher in a three-bit town.

The sound of quarters hitting the washing machine.

The cleanliness of mothers.

The fulfillment of others.

Brothers, who fight in the face of monsters.

For their younger brothers.

And sisters.

Who fight in the face of boredom for their younger brothers.

Fathers.

Heroes.

Who aren't zeroes.

Who are there for their sons and daughters when no one else is around.
These are real human beings and real heroes.

Romancing the Fall and the thought of You

I think if I could just write a love song worth hearing, a poem of romance endearing, and worth reading; a painting of love redeeming then everything would be okay in this world. You know, something really good, something beautiful and articulate, and soft! Not a saga, not a drama, simply love and its undertakings in this world. But, I can't. I haven't felt it in so long. Personal love! Yet, I do recall the autumn and its smells, the rain welling up in the corners of the oceans, romantic potions of colognes and perfumes on sweatshirts, jackets, jeans, and hoodies with oatmeal cookies crumbling down our fronts with spicy pumpkin breads and baking pumpkin seeds! Also, warm coffees toasting in the fall airs, the breath between yours and mine, the taste of your lips on mine. Dining in and going out! Letting out courageous shouts of glee nightly in the autumns. And misty evenings of flames on firewood entering the damp airs like creations in autumns past. The beady eyes of opossums on both our faces because our night visions graced us then like tomorrows can! And will. And sweetness must exist, it must, as it exists between you and I, but elsewhere too!

Scotten's Video Store

I recall going to Scotten's Video Store when I was younger. I would go in to rent video games for all-nighters with friends. Maybe 5 dollars would do it, probably less, and we had three video games to hold our attention for the night. Two sports games and a fantasy game. But, the back room with freezer doors on it that swung out and in split in half during the night like lumberjacks splitting wood in the daytime and that's where the real fantasies were at. I was younger and could not go back there but one time I did with T.J. Up to no good in the nighttime we were, and we perused the women on the covers with a speed accustomed to most youngsters, and also to embarrassed old men with erections the size of Jupiter, but likely Saturn. The doors were there to remind us kids with boners to behave ourselves and to possibly remind older men who were there to be safe. But I doubt it. It was chilly in that store with the freezer doors and old men and my friend. And cold is not my thing, not then and not now, you know, I prefer love to lust. But, on some nights lust is the best a man, or a boy, can do. So, I'm forgiven, to say the least.

Shallow Waters

I'm running out of things to write about.
I'm reaching deeper into my bag and it just
turns out everything is shallower and shallower.
And I don't mind shallow things, they shine and

glisten and reflect the sun so well, and when I was young I learned to lie in shallow waters, not to swim or dive. So here I am resting in the shallows and boy does the water feel good on my skin. I mean, really, there's no other way now, except to swim and swim until I don't see land. But, that method is not for summers I've found, or maybe it is, I could be wrong. It's just that, winter is so helpful with the deeper stuff. Like, the sun dips her head earlier, the colors of nature all turn grey and brown and tan and silvery and white. It's beautiful in its own right, but it's full of tragedy. All the death surrounds and you can't help but to be penetrated by its crude hand, it's clawed branchy expression leafless with life. And the body gets cloistered by sub zero temps and is languished and atrophied and tired. See, this was to be a light poem, but the very thought of Autumn and Winter aid in depth. Anyhow, I'm not swimming that far today or tonight, I'm going to lie and lie in shallow waters and collect shells, something of petty beauty, something to sooth my free and easy wandering soul. So join me if you'd like, but I'm not going to help with your problems, or rescue you from some dramatic situation that's bringing you down. So sit back with me, we're leaving this world now for better easier mischievous longings. And watch yourself, I won't throw rocks, but splashing is allowed!

So, What's the Difference?

It's not that I don't want to teach it's that I have so much to learn. And as I read a friend's poems I realize how many different ways there are to lay down the words. I must teach tomorrow, but in these last remaining hours I will fight for my education. My sole education. My richest soil embedded with seeds of growth. I must learn new adjectives. The action is dry. The adjectives are wet with wanderlust and healthy vegetation upon which God sits as a mantis meditating in the light and sun of day, as an orange octopus next to vibrant coral that moves with slight descriptive camouflaged language and is bright as the sun shafts in the shallows once spotted like the proverbial sore thumb.

I'm learning. Here in this richest soil, I'm learning. And the paint is rich also, but the heart sometimes can't depend on the building of stretchers, the preparation it takes to lay down the color upon the creamy cotton twill. And I lament no longer the two, one possibly

being higher or more achieved than the other, both are languages.
And both are love. Love in Love. Love in Others. Love in Self.
Teaching is different. It is exhausting. It is love. It is also learning,
but, I shouldn't say but, it is part of the process, not THE process.
Here, in these words I have it all. THE process. THE togetherness.
THE longing. THE tragedy and empathy. THE joy and the pleasure.

I will teach tomorrow and I will love it, I tell myself. I will. I will
meet new faces and people and students. Students who will school me
in ways of thought, of feeling, of focus, and awareness. Students that
will be schooled in thought, in feeling, in focus, and awareness. Some
will listen and love me, others will not. Some will want and need the
lessons that I offer, some will not. Those who want will benefit from
their own willingness to prepare themselves not only for knowledge,
but for openness in years to come. For all the knowledge and openness
their minds can handle in years and years down the road. Once they
too are writing and painting and teaching and educating the others who
are in need.

And I will then be old. Old and more tired than that mantis, or that
octopus. Old in ways God is beginning to understand. Because like me,
he is also learning, and like me, he is also humble. And like him,
I will listen always to the sound of crickets dancing. To cockroaches
scurrying. To cows munching on hay. To myself, and to him I will listen.
Because so long as he is all knowing, he too, is all learning. And you
may want to throw things and you may want to build walls upon my
mentioning of God. But he sees me here and you there and we are as one.
And after all, my friend says that it doesn't matter if we believe or not,
your thrown objects will land where they land, and my words might fall
upon deaf ears, so, what's the difference?

Socialites

Clean shaven
Shiny short hair
Hard parts
Sparkling clean teeth
White teeth
Hair up in curls
Or down in swirls
Cologne
Perfume
Xanax
Vicodin

Beer
Booze
Marijuana
Button ups
Blouses
Scarves
Nice jackets
Or coats
Staring down long hallways lit with dark pupils
Down long alleyways lit with dark eyes
Social clubs and bars throbbing with empty hearts
Soft dicks
And hard pussies

But I'm telling you, I've spent time in dive bars with real men and women who needed it
Who actually needed it
Needed time away
Spent on another planet
Who had real deformities inside and out
Who had cocks like steel
And pussies like velvet
Who drank whiskey all night to the sound of thunder
And who sniffed cocaine to talk
Introverted numbed thinking dumb
Who could talk all night because the drugs allowed it so
Who did not philosophize but spoke from experience about this thing or that thing
Real people
With real lives

And you ask, who am I?

Oh, just an old nobody, that's who.

Something to Hide

They say people in the Midwest
are nicer – I have my doubts. It
just comes out in a different way.
It's not as obvious, the disgruntlement
of the people.

You see, we burry it deep, hide it way
down, let it seep out little by little like
sap to an old oak in the summer. In the

cities, on the coasts, it's the opposite,
they're cold and detached to your face!

They hide the heart. We hide the mind!
They lead with the icy intellect, we lead
with warm emotion. But it's really the same.
Both of us have something to hide.

Something Unforgettable

At MO Psych Center there were windows
with steel grates on the outside so no one could
jump or get a clean view. About five stories up
would do the trick but I had no notion of it there,
it was all too interesting.

I mean on the backstreets of Brooklyn you see all
destitute types, and in art school it's really the same.
You're surrounded by human beings all having
profound insecurities and egos the size of Jupiter.

But the ward is where it all already happened.
That's where the broken soldiers really went to rest.
Mental slips and suicide attempts gone awry showed
up there in obvious fashion.

A middle aged lady scarred by her own hand from
head to toe, leathery skin, and 80's rocker hair
all up in loose hardened hair sprayed curls was my
friend. She was so happy she almost managed it!

She said, "Boy, this time I almost pulled it off. They
had to bring me back, but boy, I know I was a goner
for at least 10 minutes, that's what the doc said."

I could tell it took her years to build up the strength
to get that far, or I suppose, the lack of strength to fall
that low. But I tell you, she seemed happy about it,
genuinely happy. I think some people are just like that,
death makes them grin. Me, well, I'm like most of us,
somewhere caught in the middle.

And it's no bullshit her name was Joy, and I never
knew a girl by that name before. And as it was, she

elicited true happiness in me when she told her story. Of course, I was fearful, but, the purity of her laughter in the face of death said something unforgettable about strength. I recall her neck all stitched up from ear to ear. I think I loved her.

Spotlight's on You!

I can't remember all the details of the argument. What I know is I was a youngster, a teenage boy, and obsessed with winning. Being right all of the time, you know, that's what being young and in a relationship is all about when you're still full to the brim with piss and vinegar! Well, no matter how special the girl, we were at each other's throats and I had a good audience. All my friends were gathered around for this one. It was in my buddy TJ's living room, well, Tom, his dad's living room. And if memory serves me descent enough, I'm pretty sure he was there too sitting on the corner of his couch smoking a Doral. Which, by the way were the first cigs I smoked, no matter how much shit I give my friend Bobby for getting me hooked at 16, it was TJ riding around on a bike smoking cigs he stole from his dad at about 13, hehe. But anyways, back to the story...

Heather was her name and she was a bright one. Certainly brighter than I was in this moment! We got to bickering and so forth front and center like with a lamp/fan overhead. And to make a long story short, the argument came to a finale and I had spit all I had to spit and said to her, "Okay, now Heather, the SPOTLIGHT'S on you and reached up for the cord,

tugged on it, and that fucking bulb
was burned out just like the headlights
on an old lie I had been driving around
for way too long. Yep, she got the best
of me that night, and every night since.
Don't cheat, kids!

Star-Crossed & Found, on the Holy Ground

I star-crossed a sign on Tuesday morning,
Said the Rapture is beginning. Man, yawl
Got dinosaurs turning over in their graves
And waves of relief across sages' mouths
From here to holy vows and cows in pastures
On the graves of raptures. It isn't 360 B.C.E.
Up in this place to be and nor is it Chinese
Or monks that lift the diseases of edible skunks
From here to there. But the end of days is
Coming if you worship a cigarette smoke haze
From here to there. And while I may have the
Rites of passage from Jesus AND the masses
To smoke what it is I want in here, the NEWS
Strikes fiercer than any warranted piercer of
Megalodon Sharks from then and now. With
A divided country you'd think the south won
Again and that churchgoers would repent but
Damn the luck if such apocalyptic preying
On the weak isn't my luck on this day gone
Bad from smoking in here. Cigarette lungs
And bat viruses go hand in hand in here,
But masks, yes masks, like always do the trick
To wart off bad juju, and that's a fact. From
Here to New York and back that's a fact. We
All have at least two identities anyways, you
Have heard it said before, so don't close the
Door on Science and the Arts just yet. My cure.
I think the Scientists deserve a break from
Working around the clock as well as the artists
Who have socked away what moneys they could.
The Scientist should visit a museum and the
Artists sciences every once in a while, for relief.
And then its back to work, for good grief in this
Life gone bad from it all. And the cure might
Happen then. Either through love of the craft

Or through divine inspiration then. But I'm
Banking on both to get us there. So cut the checks
Worth cashing, the masks worth coughing into,
The sanitizer worth soaps, and pray or better yet
Hope right into the faces of losers. Because snoozing
On the NEWS, well is as false as it gets from
Bloomberg to Hollywood fits. To Fox, to MSNBC
In this tree of knowledge. Get upset from it all,
And do your best to bawl right into the faces of
Them all for not doing their jobs right, those
Fascist pigs! I've got cigs to smoke.

Summer

This winter has stolen the prose from
my fingertips. But today I got the best
of the bitch. I opened the door on my
sun baked Ford and headed down the
back-streets into coming spring. You see,
I've lived in this town long enough to know
which roads lead to the best weather. Some
are just dead ends for the tourists, but others
lead you right past the little girl standing with
arms up, grasping the sky, in a red dress, bold
with her back against the base of an old grey
maple. Winter's hold just melts away from the
eyes like a flame to wax.

A little further down the road I dodged
a blue-jay and swerved into what looked like
miles of sun-shafts and bolts a blaze on Main.
The old industry of this town came alive for a
moment and one remembered Hickok, and the Kid,
and Scott Joplin, and every other gunslinger and/or
artist who likely came through on horseback or by rail.
And the ladies with their dresses and beautiful hair
up in fancy hats were there too. But most of all there's
the memory of you, summer. How good to me you've
been throughout the years in this fading cow town.

Sunday Poem

I begin by correcting the spacing of lines, then by correcting the capitalization of lines, then I let the verbs and adjectives swiftly roll from the tongued mind. It's a fragile design, these words and paragraphs of sort, and who knows if they will be long or short, wide or skinny, made of shining half dollars for eyes or pennies.

Her eyes are pennies, yes, pennies today as I have not really much to say of the round things aside from their color in the noonday. They are small and hazel like pennies. But she sees me here in my Sunday's best and considers my hand upon her heaving breast. The words do this to her, get her all hot and wet with tears salty upon her sweater in this low to moderate weather.

Her sweater is the divide between our flesh, her softness, and I. She puts it on she takes it off depending upon my descriptions and whether they complement or scoff. I tell her I don't need her today that I've lost my bark, so she bundles herself in her wool and scarf.

And that's good because I have things I need to get out, like this one thing that forces a shout! How can a man fill gaps with grout and lay a brick where there should be an open space? I'm hardened by men who'd rather not speak soft from the lips, who'd rather yell when there should be a kiss, who'd rather fight for peace than withdraw in bliss. Who are made of stone and brick, and not of this.

So once I'm through here I will attend to her like I do always. For I will have expressed what I needed to in a bliss.

That's All She Wrote

When I was younger I did some
things to make her feel special.
When I got older I did some things
to make her feel like a woman.
Now I'll do a thing to make
her feel loved wholeheartedly...

And she'll know the respect
I have for her as all the while my
heart is like a balloon high in the sky,
because of her!

I'll pay it back with a sigh!

Her smile,
the one she wears ear to ear,
between those two worlds of mine,
it's there!
I bend those worlds from time to time,
here and there, with some caustic words.
Cancerous words! Loving, beautiful words
that are known to crush casual doubts.

And they need be shared.

For on the wind they will find her floating upon
a fiery breeze and shall soothe her bones in the summer
months!

And when their incendiary incantations happen upon her
silence of solace on some fine winter day they will warm her
handsome heart!

For I'm thankful for her loving return.

No score to settle...

Not even one damaging word ever made to hurt a fly from
her sweetest lips.

The Abstract Expressionists I

These were men, real ball-busters.
Men that stood up for their ideas,
not some nonchalant pansies
caught up in pleasantries and niceties
and social faux-pas. Even the critics
during their time said what was on their
minds. You had dogma on the left and
dogma on the right, but it was homemade
and original. Even the ones in the middle
stood up for something, they stood
up for neither side, for themselves and
that was that. Take Guston. This guy
started on the left, said fuck it, and swam
diligently to his own island in the middle
of vast tsunamis, furious rip-tides, and
oceanic shifts. It was a shit storm alright,
the squiggly-line guys on one side and the
hard-edge guys on another. Most women
didn't dare enter the order, not then, they
were smart enough to let the boys take it
out on each other.

But they weren't boys, really. Take
Newman's old ass, the Captain. Or Rothko,
the ruthless Spiritual Guide. Both of whom
were men that fought tooth and nail, bunker
to bunker, for their own side. And what they
managed was miraculous, one of the cleanest
breaks in history. And it wasn't done with
surgical steel, they took a course-iron-blade to
the neck of the past, to the finesse of European
ideals of prettiness and beauty. They uttered
in nonobjective tongues the tragedy of the
present. And that was the sublimity of
Kline, and Motherwell, and Gotlieb, and Still,
and de Kooning, and Hoffman, and Pollock,
and Gorky before them. And they arrived as
individuals, and America arrived as a super-
power.

The Archive

There was this little coffee shop and video rental
place called, 'The Archive,' near where I used to

live in Brooklyn. My friend Matt and I walked in to grab a coffee and a bagel. I had my usual, an everything with veggie cream cheese and coffee with milk and sugar. I was sweet then, and the girl behind the counter was sweet on me. Boy was she a tall thin drink of water, an absolute vixen. I swear she was on the verge of asking me out each time I walked into that place. Well, Matt said to me as we were leaving, "Does your girl know about that?" I laughed and thought to myself, "Fuck, at least I'm not delusional to think she likes me." I always had a knack for knowing. You know, some guys just have no clue, poor SOB's. And then I thought to myself, "My God brother, what kind of leash does your girl have you on!"

The Fire, It Still Burns

It's good to get out, see the world, even if it's just a trip to the smoke shop, or the gas station. Maybe you'll have some contact. Something to remind you that the world exists out there. Someone might say something like, "How are you," or, "What's up man," or if you're lucky on a sunny day a woman might just complement you on how you look, or on what you do.

Today's a little bit like that. Actually, it's just like that. Sometimes I feel like I live here, in these lines, in these letters. And the world is shit on those days because you don't want to live in here bumming around the same old tropes and words, banging your head up against boredom and the monotony of art. No, you want to live out there where the sun shines like a beautiful diamond, or where it's golden like the hair of some casual blonde out for a stroll laughing and toying with her friends. Yes, you want to live life like no tomorrow, to its fullest, without the debauchery of booze and cigs.

A clean, clean, clean life sober as a man
with a mission to live life on the wings of
trumpeting geese or bald eagles that could,
with their clawed grip, pluck words, fresh
words, like animals from atop the soil
and do some good. This studio, this place,
it gets old after a while and then you know
it's bad, really bad, when you start writing
about yourself in a way that the ego won't
even fit onto the page. You sit down to
write after returning from the store, or the
gas station, or the smoke shop, and you fling
your coat down in anger and it's back to
work. But then, something new comes.
And it's like that sunset right outside
your door, fresh with life, not shielded
by the scum of cigarette tar on the
windshield but like a one on one
encounter with God or a Lion, and then
you know it, the fire, it still burns.

The Frame Shop

He worked with bells on his hip attached to his tool belt.
There wasn't a damn waking soul that couldn't hear him
at 8am.

It got to me bad,
and I can't tell you how many times I wanted to take him out.
What an annoying little prick.

And in the frame shop we had a cd player,
and he dominated that thing like he did his job. He was quick,
skinny, and handsome (which made him more of an asshole).

The others and I barely ever had a chance to play what we wanted
on that thing because he'd finish his work at a pace the others couldn't
find. And he'd never ask what we wanted to hear, you know the type.

He'd get all hopped up on energy drinks and shitty little danishes
from the nearby gas station in the mornings and rattle off
like 10 frames to my 5, or 6 on a lucky day.

There was no keeping up. And on top of the bells he'd talk to you

the whole time you were working, like, “You’re not doing that right, Damon”, or, “I see streaks, Damon”, or, “Another chipped corner, Damon”

The only respite in the whole damn place was my boss and by God she was a saving grace. Listen when I tell you she was smart with knockout tits and an ass that could roll your socks down from across the room.

And there were no windows to occasionally refresh one’s sinful mind with some natural outdoor view. So, instead, fantasy reigned. I must have done her in a thousand different ways.

And I imagined innocent things too, maybe brunch, or a pleasant walk, or just a subway ride talking about our day. But then she had a boyfriend, so the idea of it all would eventually recede into the background.

Day in and day out, the same routine for what seemed like years until one day I took numb-nuts into the brake room and really laid into him. And I was the quiet and kind type, so he never saw it coming.

Well, on that day, after he just about shit his pants, it was months until I heard those bells, or his talking, or his speedy work ethic, or his good looks, or his taunting, or anything. He had just changed. His entire identity there had been crushed by one simple threat to kick his ass. And I would have done it, I promise you, I was to the brink of hell with that kid. But it never came to that.

“The Genius in All of Us”

I’m reading a book on Genius. It interests me, this book, the idea of the book. What I’m realizing is that to write about the subject and to make something of genius are two very different things. That would be something, wouldn’t it, to make a thing about genius that is genius. In this book that I’m reading there are all these scientific diagrams and explanations for things to back up the author’s argument. I’m sure there are many facts to be revealed in reading this book, but it lacks depth. You see, a genius is fallible, like the author of this book, I suppose – but, is there not something of the soul to genius? Something of the heart? Cold science won’t explain what we know so well already, that genius is a mystery and will always remain so. Is not the very nature of genius,

why we consider something genius, that it defies what is known? I mean, it must. How else are works of genius so intriguing? Like, I could easily glean the recipe of my grandmother's cheesecake crust, but by my hands, I promise you, it would be no work of genius, nothing on which to stand. Yes, you could break it down into genes and aspects of the environment's influence on genes, and how the operation or process works, but defining intelligence is only half the battle. To know genius just might be to know the man, the woman, the person who brings light into this world by way of the making, the 'process.' A collection of first-hand accounts of how that individual is a genius, stories told by friends might reveal more. See, it is no mystery what tools were used in the making of the many brilliant sketches of the Renaissance, it is the 'how' that we don't understand. Then again, there aren't many accounts of those men that exist from so long ago. What I'm trying to say is, character, the warmth and passion of a man or woman's character must help to create it so, otherwise, we will merely be left with dry old bones and icy tinny tones of science's explanations drawn in facts upon metallic racks of brains being dissected generation after generation!

The Good Old Days

The radio is on in the studio playing some old songs and I'm reminded of old young days in the wood shop by myself laboring to old tunes on the old radio upstairs where I built intricate wooden stretchers for my dad's paintings just the wood, myself a carpenter, and the glue and the nails. And this was before compressors, automatic tools. Manual claw hammers and ball peen hammers and strength and sweat in the summers did the work with an occasional breeze from the propped up windows. Before air conditioning there was fans and every corner had to be measured to a perfect 90 degrees and there were lots of corners and every horizontal had to be braced every 16 inches at least and down to a millimeter my mind and father's later attention would greet. Then, after routing the blonde wood beautiful as blondes in the summer in their curvy routed dresses with hips to knock you up to size I would carry them all downstairs, the stretchers, the blondes, like new life for me and my father to then rest and I made a little cash and would then maybe go get drunk with the boys at night where we greeted more blondes – the kind that took labor of a different charming kind to hammer and to glue into beautiful picturesque beings of light that would hold you until morning and then take flight.

The Kids Are Still Having Fun

It's 4:30am and I'm up, couldn't sleep.
I finished my coffee at 11:00pm last
night. That is the reason.

And I'm at the gas station this morning
picking up some cigarettes and a bottle
of water and in front of the store I run
into a former student. "Hey, weren't
you my art teacher, (chuckles)." "Yes",
I respond, hesitantly, before I get a good
look at him. Then, it registers – good kid.
So, I go inside and so does he and his
little girlfriend, or sister, couldn't tell.

I go to the back of the store and grab
my water, thinking, God bless it it's early,
and what the hell is this kid doing up!

So then he's in front of me in line and
turns and says, "Hey, you wanna go first!?"
Good kid. I say, "Sure." So I purchase
my water and smokes and then he goes
next as we continue with the small talk.

"Still in school," I ask. "Yes", he responds,
(happily and with a smile). And the girl
is smiling too. "What are you majoring in",
I ask. "Chemical Engineering at MU", he
tells me as he proceeds to buy rolling papers.

The Last Saturday Night on Earth

It's the waning hours of the last Saturday Night
on Earth, as a matter of fact, every Saturday
is my last Saturday Night on earth, and I'm listening
to Jack Kerouac and those jazzy riffs played
by Steve Allen to "October in the Railroad Earth."
All my friends are either at home with their
girls or out on the town taking in the drinks
and night lights and I'm working. They're
probably all dolled up in sweaters or scarves or
else running into the bars from parked cars
before they get too cold while the men stand

outside smoking. The women are chatting at tables and the men are not as able getting drunk but it's all for fun and who doesn't need a social life after being inside all day taking care of little Sunny Sam, or little Jacob, or Sally Sue. You know, they deserve some drinks for bringing in the newest generation of slap dash suckers who's hearts will eventually be broken by the hard fast world and whom will be smoking on Saturday nights in the not so distant future.

But for now I'm writing, and to tell you the truth, the men could be in their studios doing their equivalent and making it last, on this last Saturday Night on Earth. And the gals might be preparing meals, or, in their way they might be doing their equivalent by reading to Sally Sue or to little Sam I am with two eggs and ham. Or, maybe someone died in the family and they're all out of town visiting or making arrangements and everything. But I'm writing.

So, how about I share with you what I saw today and tell you about the dog barking at me from across the street, or say, the marigold blooms in the backyard, or say, the hardy soup I ate for lunch – broccoli and cheddar with a hunk of bread and an apple. Or say, I thank my buddy for handing me down this poem after one bright afternoon at a coffee house just sitting there like we do talking shop with the best of them. Because the guy can keep up in any number of ways: with the gossip, with poetry, with philosophizing on life, the beats, the streets, and so on.

But I'm writing and there is enough beauty in the air outside to make a man need winter all year around.

The crisp, you know, you have to say crisp anytime you write about the winter; the crisp apple I ate that was plucked

from the coffee house display right in front of my eyes and it was enough to make my eyes water, that honey crisp.

And the pastries were there also, but I had to pass because I'm watching my weight these days. My belly is surpassing my ass.

But I'm writing and I think it's time to give my buddy a call on the phone. After all, he just moved to the big city again, and hell it's got to be great and a little rough at times. But he's soft on the inside and has got a few dimes and hard on the outside so he'll be fine tonight, I guess.

So, I'm writing for now and what do you know I watched a show earlier about a screaming lady. Yes, a screaming lady. She was buried underground, this lady was. The young girl that found her, well, no one believed her so she went to digging her up and sure enough, a screaming lady was there. You see, the dying like to be saved as well as the living. So, I wrote this poem to save myself and you. Hell, perhaps it's not the Last Saturday Night on Earth after all.

At least I hope not. I'd like to read this poem again sometime. And the alleyways of night's streets always get my goat. A host of dim lit darkness on the way to nowhere is what they remind me of. And night turns to day on some alleyways, bums and poor folk hanging out on 10th street and pennies. But, who knows how to mutter like those bums in the wintertime bluesy face of stone. Home is but a two-nickel face in a one-nickel world then. And the jazz from the night clubs echoes sweetly but they only hear beauty because beauty is the only universal thing around and the sound comes in waves like Coltrane

told Jack Whitten, the man's man,
who told D'Amato, who told me who told
my students one day after watching a video
of Josef Albers' students. And prudence
comes and it goes like the shifting tones
of a Homage to the Square at night when
staring at the bricks that come in threes
and fours. Like the jazzy riffs of Kerouac
when listening to his work online. And
I'll tell you he liked describing his places
in the world's epic isles of alleyways at night.
Just like I do.

And I talked to Jack Kerouac tonight.
He said, "That's how it goes when moving
slow on 10th street and dimes. Because
nickels turn in to two or three or four at
four in the morning on 12th street and 5
o'clock. When tipping the happy hour
bartender for good looks and a nice ass.
And that's just how it goes some evenings
after a hard day's work on 10th and pennies,
on 10th and pennies. When she's wearing
her skinny jeans and long hair down to her
waist just above the place to be when she leaves.
Oh, how do you know when a gal wants to go home?
You don't, that's how, one thing happens and
another and bang boom pow you're in bed
with her at 3am.

When one afternoon I tried to tie my shoes
I leaned down and tripped over my own shoes
and later that day while having a drink outside
smoking I looked down and caught the gleam
of a penny faces up like a king of diamonds.
Ohio Street rolls downhill like water that's actually
coffee going up the mountain in a cup beside
you in the afternoons on vacation from the
family watching cartoons early morning like
Yo Simmity Sam and Foghorn Langhorn going up
and down talking in a deep voice going down
the mountain. And I met you there on that
hill going up the mountain fast like snowflakes
falling in twos and threes through the trees
on a sunny afternoon. Like steely Mountain Dew
drops of water falling fast down the mountainside.

Like Lilly Jawbone moves fast, or like Taco Sue
moves fast, or like the Roadrunner running
down the mountain chased by old Wily Coyote
down the mountainside on a Sunday afternoon
doing nothing in front of the TV's of dreamtown.

And on this Last Saturday Night on Earth
microbes come and go like TV's running
in houses and static moving to and from left
to right and down and up, and microbial
infections come and go up and down the back
causing infections on children's backs like
tea boiling on ovens at home watching Yo
Simmity Sam on stove glass reflections from
the other rooms in the houses of reflections
of other houses in the glass on windows down
the block from other houses with microbes
and TV's on and coffee in their cups going
up and down mountaintops and cafés with
nightlife or downlife uplife in potatoes with
ham and swiss cheese oozing out from the
sides with chives. At BBQ joints with hamburgers
eating sides of chives and fries with sour cream.

And once I read poetry about butchered cows, too
many non-grass-fed butchered cows, and it about
made me puke. Because I love to eat meat, and I love
docile cows in fields and to paint them alongside
haystacks and fields paved with yellow and green
fields and I once told my friend Ryan to serve
tempe bacon in dirty ashtrays to patrons with
patience in the afternoon. And I told him not to worry,
the poor sons-of-bitches would eat it anyways.
And paved hills of blue flow uphill sometimes and
so do Hawaiian steak outs with knives and objects
used to stab tires and hog roasts with pineapples on top,
or slop on bottoms from too many wasted days
working in the muddy streets of dreamtown. And
about then, I had a thought about red confidence with
too much purple to create red-violet astro niece stools
with mud butts and assholes going downstairs not up
them to protect them at night. Because riots are supposed
to stop at some point when one bartender says to the
next stop the fight. So stop the fight! It's night and the
sky is right in its way with yellow and pink and light
blue streaks of Carmel Apple joy in the wintertime.

And on this Last Saturday Night on Earth I think I might be on time. Right on time with the rhyming and musical delights. So, enjoy yourselves with buttered rum, hot totties, or beers and dance all night long to Jayson Williams on bass or whatever he has in store for you all tonight. Because tonight is the night that all might end. And you can stare into the abyss or you can cook hamburgers and watch the apocalypse come down in twos and threes while turncoats on alleyways await sleep in the night's salty air, so flip a dime on 10th Street and nickels in their direction if you are willing or better yet join in the laughter as Ol' Graigor and I paint tonight later on to the sounds of Al Buckles in the hot night and Keiffer Buckles in the day.

And jazz plays sweetly at nighttime. The end is coming but not yet because there's too much left to do, too many pages left to write, too many young punks left to fight and to care for when writing in the afternoon on Sunday night beneath the nightlight of bars in dreamtown in chairs going not nowhere, but somewhere in the daytime. So feel good about it and care for one another in the day. And say, I know a place where it's got beer that flows from taps and the place is right here. To be, to get, to tip, to flow, to go when the time is right on this Last Saturday Night on Earth! So, spend it with the ones you love and say, nighttime has its way of living its own way with the ones you love so make it a glorious evening with friends and behave in your own ways like friends do in ways love has in store for them and if the moment strikes eleven o'clock talk to a young lady about everything you did today and more. And whatever you do don't bore her to tears with fears in the nighttime of you in the daytime as sensitive as it might be to do so, try to close the door on a love you might attend to in the future with her loving you the right way. Be an ass if you have to but love her nevertheless and if you are proper in doing as much you will live a good life! Strive to be proper as much as you can with her in love with yourself because daffodils don't grow in the wintertime unless cared for year around. And closely listen to her cares, those daffodils, and her, because life is sweet as candy from the

dime store! And trust me I'm a candy connoisseurship
master at night even when the lights are down
and no one is around. You know, art doesn't make
itself without a love interruption from the ladies
you live for so make it for yourself and her bright
impregnated with love and flowers and sensitivity
like you want to provide for her in the daytime.
And if she were to say on a dime that she loves you
sometime then say it back no matter how you feel.
Ain't that the deal when moods defer, for her.

And withhold the love at times if she's taking you for
granted and that old girl will come around again.
Don't break it and she will. Shake it up at times,
make some rhymes, be on time, don't take bribes from
girls who make good on bets with hexes and exes from
the past.

But that's enough of the past already for I imagine
was I to go on writing of it, it would taint this rhyme
like old fashioned wine with cherries. Ain't that scary
enough to think of virginity lost. Love lost. Love gained
is the way to go even in the snow of fields of romance
in the nighttime on this Last Saturday Night on Earth.
So make it last. Make it all last. Smoke some grass and
pass the time like so many whom have written these lines
to bass drums over bass lines. My friend Jon Burkey says
make it swift or else the times pass in furious ways at times.
People. I mean people at times. You know, why couldn't he
just write back? And yet I'm the one who suffers from it as
well as him in the day. So for God's sake have something
good to say to him if you want his feedback on this thing
or that thing. And in the future now I know how to bless
the kings of summersaulting at night with
trombones that glow and trumpets that know
the sounds of good things in the daytime. And
this rhyme has gone sour if you don't like a
conscious yet swift shower of words that takes
time in the day to say, I love you all.

And I could be peaking in this rhyme that's
right on time tonight, but I'll hang on for the
whole ride tonight, the whole enchilada's cheesy
stuffing with ham and grits and cheesy potatoes
with stuffing and grits with butter, like butter.
Like, I need some butter, some butter, some butter.

At least that's what I had to say to the help when
it came years ago with Barney Knight in the daytime.
And I remember all those guys that have lent a
hand down to me for keeping at this thing here,
Vicki, Alan, Kim, and Paul. For paintings hung
one after one on the wall at nighttime. And night,
well, it comes and it goes, well, it comes and it
goes, well, it comes and goes like twilight leaving
us in daytime and the stars then find light twinkling
surrounding them in the days and two eyes at times
offer us light in the days and nights just like diamonds
do in the day in their way. Two bulbs side by side
in the Christmas Time. On this Last Saturday Night on
Earth.

So God bless the Christmas Tree this Christmas and
all will be okay on this Last Saturday Night on Earth.

For don't the Christknots say that all else has ended
on Christmas when Jesus and the Lord came to tell
us about the ways of the world and that one day
He will rise again to tell us again that somethings are
right and that other things are right and that somethings
are right in this greyish world where what was wrong
becomes right and Jewish lords praise him for being
strong and Nazis praise him for being wrong and
Icelandic strongholds of Vikings come in threes to greet
thee on boats ancient on water or ice in the winter time.

And Christmas trees become ugly in red and green after
years of mothers hanging trees with ornaments from
dreamtown upon them, so spice it up this year with
orange and blues and God forbid the news makes its
way into years of past regrets upon the tree
in green and red stars of plastic in the summertimes
of winter in this God forgiven planet of hot
summers and hotter winters where splinters
are bound to happen when ripping plywood boards
instead of true straight pine trees and cedar trees
up and down hills muddy with train cars in the
wintertime and muddy with buddy's butts from
outer space planes that at times ride through
buildings on fire with orange and blue skies in
fields of orange and blue poppies in the summertime.
And Indian sagebrush and paintbrush grows seldom in
this year gone bad, ice age gone bad, and leaves

not falling from ice burls in trees because the seasons are confused and rapid in twos and threes and fours snoring loudly to praise of Jesus's day and night in dreamtown. And hot book and grape juice joy in the evenings with Skittles and dreaming and Red-Hots dancing in stews of ciders with spiders clinging to everything I do in the daytimes until with lighter and torch I burn from them all that I need and get bitten by one or two or three only to become a spider also on the beaches of towns surrounding spider's webs and dirty sheets bloodied on beds from virginity lost on beds of dreamtown.

From beds on dreamtown. Clouds above dreamtown that occasionally drown this house of writing, and I'm writing with the best of them here in this town, and I'm writing with the best of them here in this town, and I'm writing with two or three clutches and cigarette smoke lungs and ashtrays to do some work of good people in this here cowtown of astro physical stools brown with burnt sienna and cadmium yellow light bleaching my sight in the daytime. So, feel good about it in the daytime and do some good. Paint a red and blue physical astro niece stool sometime. And make it rhyme with fool in the daytime when nieces and nephew sit silently so in the daytime watching the news with their dad's so the ugly world, the beautiful worlds of dreaming and seething to and fro beneath the beauty of some gal can go on and on or some pal go on and on with some gal go on and on with some pals to the store at nighttime to get cigarettes and smoke them on back porches to music and crickets going back and forth and wolves marching in minds upon cliffs in Anchorage where the earth quakes while cars go boom and zoom around potholes in the streets of dreamtown. And Yellow Stone National Park was fun when I was a kid seeing and climbing and integrating with natives in lands that are ancient as can be. Arches of golden reefs at Christmas time imbue nature's way here in this town because old buildings crumble at night when the heat is left on and doors get entered when locks aren't turned and car doors get broken into when turned into astro niece cars on blocks with other cars zooming by them so be careful when exiting onto crazy streets and beats with engines zooming by in the daytime. Because fools with lazy attitudes, bums with attitudes get

confused while writing and one rhyming scheme gets hijacked by speed in the daytime while writing of weed at nighttime smoked from soda cans and paranoia still exists in the daytime and the nighttime when marijuana is illegal and all is legal when morals are at stake and that's why Potterson called us Outlaws once upon a time and even though he doesn't take credit I wrote about it sometime one summer to take back the credit from outdated fools on coffee in the Summers.

And the artist is a strange creature who has no place to fall says Bob Dylan but I know of two or three couches in this place that could just as well be called love seats in the daytime and nighttime. And Tony Mitchell once had sex in my bathroom while I did it on a cot in the studio because you had to make your way the best you could in those days. And without a place of your own to call home you did the best you could and thank god I didn't have a place of my own then because like other impregnated girls at night I might have burned them all or impregnated girls with spice of life in the nighttime only to remain a young man in the day. So I've done it my way at nighttime's calling of balling young women and dropped them like bad habits in the day and picked them up carefully with two arms in the nighttimes past, in the daytimes past. So, on this Last Saturday Night on Earth I'd like to shout out to two or three because when free I get greedy at nighttime and attempt to pull love and drugs in my direction then and I've been capitalized on before and dropped like a bad habit upon the entry from the door to the studio's grey floor and couch in the nighttime. And yes, I do have a favorite tonight but it changes sometimes when behavior is a blight or theology is a blight or whatever decides morals in this world of ours. Perhaps it's a blend of the two and I'd like to add a third to that mix, art is the highest on the shelf for me and you might try acknowledging that and clap or snap upon hearing it in the nighttime!

And I still haven't called my buddy on the phone because it's days later and I haven't yet ended this rhyming poem or eaten enough food to yet get into too much of a meaty brood with food

and dudes yelling at me to say this thing or that thing and trust me you may think we have power but we don't. At least not when sitting behind a studio of power getting shit on by birds in the evening after cursing birds in the evening and this ain't no lying story of truth. And meaning gets slurred and soup becomes piss, and this is but a joke on them all for making us feel small in the daytime. And you might feel as though you are winning but it's one step at a time and winning is but a desire and success is but a dire winning in the dreams of dreamtown. And was I to hold this dream up high like fireworks in this sky Dylan may just spend some time on 5th Street and dimes with us singing and playing harmonica but he did his dirt already and spent his time already chiming and diming and dining in restaurants on 10th Street and pennies, so as he enters this chimney song or not tonight, may he leave the gift of song on the hearts of strong men and women in the night's air. And I will tell you this one last truth tonight, your song is only highjacked if you let it be by the ancient past. So, won't you rather let it last and wrap those presents in your own way with your own two hands and stand up with ease or with a sneeze and broken back after hanging those bulbs side by side with your two eyes that glow in the snow and elevate your lady's dress with imaginations in the daytime!

And every day I'm on trial. For shit like this here. And every day I stand trial, no matter how queer I am at the sight of jealous men with ladies who deserve better. And better is not just a word you toss around like pancakes on a stove-top, it's something I earned long ago by being myself in the day and the nighttime. And hey, hey, Todd Kreisel goes at nighttime when ladies roll up on him in the day without something to say to him. And I say hi, because who knows what the weather is truly like on the inside of them, like assholes and elbows bumping side by side in the nighttime or like

assholes bumping into her in the daytime and nighttime all day like no one had a care to say that day. So, if I encounter that kind of torment, then the rain perhaps steps outside with myself and beautifies the skies of dreamtown at night.

Because I've been saved at least two times I know of by managers at a bar in this town. At least twice she has rescued me from the storms. And I sought shelter then in her clutches and from their clutches. And I turned to the water glass outside and said a prayer for night before the rain turned to ice between us in my glass. And maybe there's a secret between us, a secret place that I go to in the daytimes between her and I that one night I might go to for something better in the day.

Because I loved her, and I loved her ways. And beauty is that way sometimes, I'm guilty with the rhymes, condescending rhymes about her at nighttime. I write about her and her and it ebbs into the work, like sometimes I'm a jerk and at other times she twerks for me. And she is a jerk for looking at me in ways that I cannot resist at nighttime. Or I could be wrong about her in the days and nights made of stone between sheets alone on empty islands of stone grey sheets in beds at nighttime. But one night it will pan out for me in this dreamtown and perhaps it will be on this Last Saturday Night on Earth. Yes, with her on this Last Saturday Night on Earth. But Earth is just a part of it all, and Heaven sounds like just as much of a ball at nighttime when I visit the muses in this here studio at night. Either way, she'll be alright from me and I wish I could explain myself better but on this Last Saturday Night on Earth it will have to wait.

On This Last Saturday Night on Earth I will love with the best of them all. I will need with the best of them all. I will consume with you and her and I going to the bathrooms in dreamtown all over the place. Amen.

And the homes will be in shelters of crumbling helter-skelter no longer. The icing on cakes will grace our

faces for longer, for there will be the needs of young boys,
and girls then, with toys by them, and I will eat my cakes
and have them also. But I won't have kids without you around!

Because when you return a buck or two
in the snows of times you must run out on them to
see who's the best at the games of winning in
dreamtowns across this great and fascinating street
game of love, for the best of them is the best of them,
and that ain't no lie, McFly. Because hours persist as
they pop zits to the sound of glorious tunes on stereos of
this here place in the graces of all seasons. Given the
times. And who wouldn't, given the freedoms they should have!

Well, maybe some petite assholes gone bad from too
much sun on windy days, here in our dreamtowns, where
I live in streets paved of bricks and houses full of pricks.

And thank you for giving me the gift of this song
and I will repay you in time. But not with money
this time, or any times, or not with righteous scheming,
but with love. And to answer the question of several,
indeed, it comes down from above! So, watch from below
when it snows as we show. Draw a path around their hearts
to the stars with grace and back, to gaze and to stare off into
the nights with love, and then, into the mazes of graces and
distant gazes we Shall Go!

The Moon and I

Just the moon and I on a Monday night, me wearing blue and her wearing white. She sits silently across the place, stylish with her skirt trimmed in lace. For a moment she stands and I catch an embrace, her two eyes forming crescent shapes. And it's dark in here so they shimmer with fear, her not knowing exactly what to make of my face. Yet I swiftly smile, and she coyly dials up a subtle motion with grace. It's my lips that are soft but it's her that I taste. And the bar is packed yet it was she who attacked with her doily dress, high-heel caress, and two legs that obfuscate. So I think to myself to close the gate that's an eternity between us, so I race. And instantly a cloud appears before her eyes and the music that wed us dies. And I'm fully aware the handsome man that appeared was not her date but was more than that. So I escaped into the night with nothing but a brief bragger's rite of passage. And the stars are lit but it's Mars that hit with his reddened devilish fist. I drank too much, but it's her that I touched, so all I can hope is that I made her list.

The New York Sound

Uptight and smug
Dodging twerps and thugs
Subways screeching
Teeth clinching

Headphones on the streets
Disconnected beats
Not enough money to heed
The notions in my head
Better off dead

But not on rooftops made of glass
With a fine, fine ass to boot
With some fine, fine grass to root and smoke
With some blokes in arm's reach

Necks to grab and snag
Heads to roll
In the neighborhood's strolling of young girls and boys
With no toys
Just art
To get them there!

But, oh my Gawd, that sound,
Make a grown man's head swivel around!
To the look of young women
Dilettantes
Blondes and brunettes bleached in fishnets
Black headed youngsters
Gunslingers to the sounds of trains in the distances

Instances of men gone awry
Foolish men and women gone awry
Too much pain to cry
The well's all dried up

But there's still a fifth in my cup
A gulp and a what's up!
To the sound of, What's Up Gentlemen and Women
To the sound of heavens and hells
To the sounds of bells on churches in downtowns

Wallstreet crutches

Made to bolster the Duchesses of men

The Hudson at night
River Paintings at the MET
The psilocybin and street cred'
MDMA on the upper Deck
Fireworks and Frank Stella
Black in the Nighttime!

Friday nights and dining
Dreaming and finding
To the Sounds of it ALL!

And we had a BALL!

The Painless Skies, for my friend Angel Gomez

A song comes on the radio with enough strength to turn the pale blue summer skies to a cold and stark white. Bb guns and gunpowder, enough to kill a snake living in the soil, a large snake of mischievous nature! Perhaps that same snake that has bound so many to its pages of knowledge. But my thinking ran dry last night, upon the cans running dry of gunpowder and smoking. Thought foregoing the mechanisms by night. Burning orange starbursts. Crack, crack, crack goes the 22 rifle against the painless skies!

The Pickaninny Blues

I imagined being tiny
A very small fellow
Picking cotton to soften the white man
But that old story is not for naught

I mean, you've got all the hicks and the rednecks,
Our presidents cashing the checks of their labors,
You've got the mother's giving labor,
And the men shining shoes at the tailor's.
And then you've got me.

Sitting here in this studio to write.
Fucking the keyboard majestically day and night.
White with a history of Moroccan blood.
Me, on the counter with some automatic thunder moving into the blues.
So, you sing me the blues, which is which, the whip or the switch at this thing here.

And yes, I've done some damage on my own,
Slapped and been slapped by a woman.
Cracked in the nose by a lady... one night
After discussing life with a brown man in the shady night.
But I've loved most women with a gun for fun,
And been hit on the nose for fun.

I stood there like a fucking idiot in the dead of night,
Like a fucking wall in the dead of night.
Bleeding like a sieve in the dead of night!

So, fuck them all for their vices getting the best of them,
Enticing us men into them, and for what, to fuck some sluts.

Cum dumpsters are what they are to me unless I'm going to marry,
Ohhh, but ain't that so scary for some to say. Ain't them words so gay.

And why the need to bite when high as a kite on love?

Unless you want to draw the heat from a black man.

Because then, up from below the money flows like aces from pockets.

Negativity like aces from pockets. From out of snakeskin wallets.

Only to bite the chick that has you in debt from magenta thighs
Flowing like magenta runs down noses in the dead of nights.

But I won't pretend to know why I got punched, or why the
pickaninny is called such.

Because that's just a crutch.

And when remembering this poem and times to come
you just sit there and do something for fun. Because little
black boys and women are very afraid of white men with pens
and presidents unless otherwise talked about from prison with
complements.

So, let me out is what I say, let me free without a victory!

Let me bleed alone in this studio without the need to bleed.

Yes, set me free!

The Potential, after Justin Horn

How'd I meet you, Justin? If you're out there?

You know that time those two girls sat me
Down on someone's bed in your house you
Shared with Perkins? Yeah, totally botched
It when they both asked me to have sex with
Them. Threesome time! The embarrassment
Was overwhelming, plus, they were meth-heads!
I don't even remember their names! One was
A sweet blonde, and the other a demure onyx.

Anyhow, I remember you at the height of your
Game, all clean and shit, calling me from Sedalia.
We talked like never before on that day. It was always
Difficult walking into the pain thick bedroom of
Marijuana smoke bellowing out in front of posters,
Like Metallica and Pantera.

They say, you know, that you killed yourself with
The bottle, intentionally. Ah, I don't know about
It, but I will say you had the potential of centuries.

The wherewithal to go to school and pass classes.
The need to, at one point. You spoke highly of
Your stepmom! The one in which I don't know
Much about. I think she was the one who was our
City mayor at one point! Well, that she was.

So, here we are. Loving on one another straight to hell,
And heaven. Me smoking, your drinking. They say it
Catches up to a man. I say I have permission from Jesus.
What about you? Did they give you the rites of passage
Down here from up there?

See you in the afterlife. My brother, if you ever get there?

The SFCC Dayz

Fuck man, I didn't know what to do other than make art. And with that, at the time, it didn't take much but a little doing. I mean, you could smoke weed all day, but as long as you showed up, and on time to classes it went alright. And I wish I wouldn't have been so rebellious back then, but I was. And this little gal from Columbia that worked in the bookstore caught my eyes and was shy, and it ended up she was just looking for a good time like most of us. And it was the visual art students and the theater students who all would get together for a good time at nighttime. Myself and others made the visual art students, and the theater students were her friends mostly. But they had a little spot over on 5th Street near my house and it was close and we played foosball and drank beer until the end of most nights. And I was just starting at it, so they nicknamed me, "The Contender." And Zack, and Todd, and myself had a studio on Ohio we split three ways and payed eighty dollars each for it per month. Sometimes that girl would come by and we had a couch. Her and I would talk and then she'd leave all pretty in the night. Maybe I'd be burning some incense and studying while drinking water. Around then things started to turn up for myself.

The Studio Chair Next to My Father's Desk

The studio chair next to my father's desk is where I lay my jacket most of the time. But recently I have used it to sit in. And others have too. It has been kind of late. During the day, my father takes up the helm at the computer, checks his emails mostly, then, gets to work on a painting. In the late afternoon, around 3:00pm-3:30pm, I sit down in his chair, at his desk, and I work. I also check my emails. I also check my Facebook. I look up artist stuff too: videos, interviews, books, and images mostly. I do my research. Around 5:30pm I go home to eat. I return to the studio and lay my jacket down quietly around 6:30pm most of the time, in the chair next to my father's desk. I start to text. I put my feelers out into the world and see who might drop in on me. Lately, it's been busy. Mostly men. Friends, of whom I visit with and gossip. We might have a beer or two then I'm back to it. Except, lately, the visits have been extended. The cold brings them in. It's warm here, in the studio. So, I host and I visit. We laugh mostly. Some serious stuff gets talked about, occasionally. But, it hasn't been artist friends lately so not too much serious talk happens on my end, mostly listening from me. So, I listen. And I drink my beer or two. But, the other night a lady friend visited. A spontaneous visit from a lady friend. She sat in the studio chair next to my father's desk. The chair has been kind of late.

The Studio I

The studio is a good place,
good for just about anything.
A pretty face, an absolute
disgrace, a neutral place.
A good dig for a fight,
for love, for discussion.
For an argument. For a polite

night when the moon's just right
sitting there in the cool air of fall.
For thoughts of my old bud Paul.
For paintings hung one after one
on the wall. For a cry, a ball.
For a movie or a good reading,
for some friends or a gal to drop
by to stop the bleeding. For sweet
receiving and angry, angry broods.
Dudes in flannels wearing beards
in November, gals in skirts of whom
I can barely remember. Yeah, the studio
is a good place alright. It's just, just
right. 2,000 or so square feet, glossy
floors, and a neat, neat façade. Redone
like all those Ohio Street broads
walking down the sidewalks all dolled
up pleat after dress pleat of which
I can only dream about in the summer.
But I'm watching. Midday clocking
over lunch break. Skipped my leftover
steak for more of the fine scenery
where there's much, much more
greenery to suit the mood. Vines
on fences, flowers to lift my senses
into believing the dirty lawyers and
trashy public servants won't be
getting drunk tonight. You see,
justice lives here, behind the studio
where the balancing act traces a
black and white cat skinny from
absent garbage in the dumpster. But
just now a lady passed by with a
sweet, sweet front and rear bumper.
So, this time I'll say hi! And by God
one look from her eyes and I nearly
collapsed. And at the studio, that's
how the days pass.

The Warmest Glove

I was out walking and wound up talking to the boy on the silver throne. What he said to me was this – You sir, are quite accomplished in your way, won't you join hands with us? So, for a time I did. And what I learned was this. That there were many boys beneath him and that for a time it

was okay. But that he was searching for a better throne. A taller, grander, more mature, golden throne. And, in my world we earn this. And in his world you earn this. But, in the world of men you do not. They are traitors to your face and spit on and polish your name as they see fit. So, me, on my pale horse went riding among them and saw many wounded soldiers. And these youthful soldiers were riding together and apart separately. They needed coherence, a leader. But in my time, we did away with leaders. So, love is the only emotion they were lacking. But, among them, who is willing to do the work? Who, with shovel made of mind, with double made of heart, is valiantly going to dig out the pity from their art? And who, with golden lining will line their hearts with chests of gold? It takes time. But sure as time the boy is learning what it is to have a golden throne and golden heart. And all men recognize it, that he, this boy, does the heaviest work. And he, this boy, is not without love. For he, this child, is the glove inside which other children's hearts are warmed. And, it is not my job to see to it that this child is protected, but I do it anyway. And so the world goes safely into the love of his conviction at night. And I into my own. And we are as one.

The Wiz Kid and Ain't this the Biz, Kids?

I'm middle-aged and worried how
I'll be received. Did he do his best?
Ain't that the test? That's how I'd like
to be received, "Old Damon, he may not
be the best at what he does, but he tries
as hard as anyone I know and does HIS
best." That's what I hope they say anyhow.
Yes, something like, "God damn, Damon Freed
works harder than anyone I know at his craft."
And yes, I'd be satisfied with that.

Because, that's all that I can do and I'm doing
it. My god damned best, that's what I give it.
And hell, this thing here gets easier and harder
by the day. And ain't that how it gets? Easier
and harder.

Well, that's how it gets young bucks and does.
So, don't say I didn't tell you so. Don't say, well
they never told me it'd be this difficult. And though
you'll likely forget I said anything about it, particularly
when some bolt of lightning from above reminds you
of God's special work here, and your deafened in the ears
by the thunder and wondering what it'll be like in 40 years,
and I'm there. So recall the night you heard this and the air,
because I'm about to breathe and bleed into it with care.

Do your fucking best. That's all you can do people. Do
your best. Because ain't that the test, yes, that's the test
people. And who cares if you worship yourself, or the

people, or the god damned steeple, you're going to find detractors no matter what.

And half my nights are good and half of them are terrible. But it's changing. Something has lifted and it worries me. The weight that was concern for my parent's wellbeing doesn't bother me any longer. It's like some massive weight has been lifted from my shoulders. And I can't explain it, but it's gone. And now there's a hole where the pain used to be. A disconnection, a misplaced understanding of love is what it may be, call it caring from a distance, I don't know, but it was necessary, the lift was.

So, I get on like this, numbed by years to a degree. I can't name it, it's apathy I suppose for the repetitions of being told what to do, over and over, again and again and I just cannot care anymore, not like I used to.

And friends, well, they're fewer and greater than ever. Yes, life eats at them too, but so too does that holy dove give life to them as well. To us all. So above all, it's joy that saves us. It's love that takes us. It's light that wakes us. And into the beautiful night I go again as I write.

But there are enough stars overhead to save us tonight and to keep the blue outside of my head. And upon its external return, the sky might bend, and I might cry and cry, but that's the way it is. And ain't this the biz.

Yes. It's the biz. And I, if you so decide, when whispering words about me in years down the road, wouldn't mind if you all shed some light on my intelligence by referring to me as the wiz kid. Because, ain't that also the biz, kids?

“The Wolf”

I just finish watching, “Wolf of Wall Street,”
a truly masterful performance by
Leonardo DiCaprio,
And am reminded of the world outside!
Not about money, not about drugs, not about
yachts, not about women, not about anything,
but morally bankrupt sons-of-bitches that make
this God-forsaken world go ‘round. I
loved the movie, make no mistake! It's
raw in a polished patented Martin Scorsese
kind of way with just enough glamour and just
enough grit!

But I am reminded of all the ‘good’
in me and I wonder where it is going to?
You know, I’m not in sales, but I am in
the money-making business, as we all are.
I have the potential to make ass-loads. I’m
an inventor, a creator of paintings and poems.
And to be honest, I don’t make either, not in
the sense of what you might think to be either.
They’re like nothing else that has gone before,
and I know that’s dangerous and delusional
to say and to think, but,
it’s the truth.

You are who you are when you write and paint. Just like
“The Wolf” was who he was.

Except, there is one difference between
Leonardo DiCaprio’s character acting,
and myself painting... my stories aren’t fictions.
They’re of me, of the sweat of my life,
the fortunes and the failures. My
own handcrafted presentations and they’re
honest. And if that’s not proof enough of what’s
better in this life, then I don’t know what is?
You might as well go ahead and worship another
saint who is also worshipping saints because you
and I don’t belong in the same room together.
And yes, god is good. But he knows
what it takes, like you know what it takes!

Effort. And, confidence!

Thieves

It’s like I’m robbing the bank with
all these poems I’ve written lately.
But a bank only has so much cash
on hand at any one time so now I rob
friends, family, bars, convenient
stores and petty businesses for cash,
jewelry, credit cards and whatever
spends.

I turn my bounty into words that spend.
And through this process I gain more
friends, all who love to steal. So here
I am, giving all my time to thieves,
and the worst kind. Intellectual scum
who prey on the weak, on disappointment,
on casualty, on failed relationships, the
homeless and the heartache.

I'd have it no other way.

This Poem

It's been said that a poem is a city,
but this poem is this city.

This poem is this city with its railroad roots
and redneck boots hitting the hot dirt in the day.

This poem is this city with its factory industry
and community college education.

This poem is this city.

This poem is this city with its big ideas and
lofty action.

This poem is this city on the move.

This poem is this city on the stop.

On the stunted growth of its downtown commerce,
uptown ideology, and side-town suburbia.

Yes, it's been said that a poem is a city,
but this poem is this city.

This poem is an ant.

This poem is this city that is an ant that is attempting
to carry 10,000 times its weight on its back and is succeeding.

This poem is a child bleeding, an innocent child with a scrape
on its arm that is frantic and not knowing what to do.

But I will save this poem like I will save that child.

This poem is one in thousands.

This poem is very much like other poems that claim to be poems.

This poem is not about a city, or a child, or a mother, or a father.

This poem is this poem.

This poem is this poem that is a small city on the move.

It is a poem, it is a city, it is a cup of soup.

A cup of soup that warms the children at night, the child with the wound on its arm.

A cup of chicken noodle to excite the wounded child's electrolytes into something beyond.

A cup of French onion to calm his belly into something like a yawn.

A medium broth made to remind us that this city's children, that every city's children, are going places superb.

To remind them that we all have the will to do things, positive things, that require mental fortitude and positive action.

This poem is every city that is a pill of good omen to all that create within its in-skirts and outskirts and beyond to do some good.

Travis

I used to know a kid, Travis was his name. He lived in an apartment on the second story, dark day and night with stairs that could collapse across the street from a funeral home. You had to lean into the stairs on the left side when you stumbled up them or else you feared it might be their time to go, your time to fall. And they've since torn the place down but we had our days and nights with it. When you went to the place it was all shenanigans all time of day and night and we were usually drunk or getting close to it together. You know, looking back, I loved the kid. Travis could play guitar like the wind on an old-time dime store acoustic and he wrote all his own stuff which was rare for that young in that town. But the kid was humble, he didn't lead on, if you know what I mean, not like so many of us could.

I remember one day in the record shop where we worked together. He told me about this guy named Tom Waits and this song called Waltzing Matilda. It kind of described Travis in a way, drunk and passed out after a cold, cold lonely night, desperate for love. But all his friends were always around and by God he could write a song except it wasn't enough for the man. At the end of most nights he'd be piss drunk in a corner of the apartment somewhere or else barely awake with head down and a beer in his hand nursing, sucking the last few minutes of life out of the

party, like we all did. And who knows what possessed us or what enabled us but I remember Justin, myself, and Travis at least, it's a little foggy at best, and we were so happy on at least mushrooms summersaulting from one bush to the next out front one night. Or he stayed on the porch rooftop, but whatever. One tree to the next. And our plan was to at least make it to the studio down on Main Street that night, about six city blocks from there, but we never even made it out of the front yard. It felt like the entire year was that night. A summary of every good time all wrapped up in us and the bushes and trees and rooftops, the summersaulting on a warm evening in July.

Hell, that night I believe may have been the end. The pinpoint end to what seemed like years of burning fierce hot nights like neons in a factory that never goes off no matter the breaks, the months, the years. Only to be replaced by a parking lot of nothingness, a small field of grass, where memories are but ghosts rising into the spirit of warm summer nights spent on a rooftop drinking beer or whatever vice got you there.

Upon Listening to Charles Bukowski

My next-door neighbor mows his lawn at the dire
Edge. Right before the complaints come rolling in.
Waits till I damn near am ready to explode and
I come home and its mowed. Two days afterwards
All the dead grass that has gone unraked from his
Old lawnmower is sitting on top of the grass, dead!

And when he mows, he mows. Sweating, takes him
5 minutes at best. He's mowed the shrubs, the plant life,
The god damn flowers for God's sake! He's mowed it
All down. And what's worse is he's frantic about it.
In a frensy, he doesn't care about property lines. And
A man, I like a man who understands property lines.

And his wife, all pinned in goes to bed at night with
Him and his four children! With the kids running
Wild for him. But he never draws a line in the sand.
Never tells them when enough is enough. My God,
She probably hasn't been laid right in 4 years.

But these little brats run around on him for months
On end. And what's worse, is my smoking. In through
The windows of his in the mornings when I wake to
Drink my coffee on the porch. And his cat comes around
Interrupting my peace as well. Fucking thing!

Well, anyhow, I was here first. And until he fucking
Stops mowing my lawn the smoke will bellow. Hell,

If it gets any worse his wife will go to hell with her
On my pillow. Judgement is harsh in these times gone
Rotten from gin. And young mommas need love, too.

On the other side of me, it's Joe and Linda! Good
Neighbors. One stopped drinking years ago. Bless him
For it! The other, is wise. And I'm thankful, thankful
For the yardwork. Thankful for the blessing. And thankful
For him and them.

They sit on their porches, like me, and sip their coffee,
Even into the evenings, at times. He works a job nearby,
She is a hairdresser! Beautiful. With younger eyes than
His. Grey beautiful natural greys. Silver, even. We talk
Football, he and I. Actually just yesterday, football.
You know, you can talk things like that with him.
His brother lives down the block. Rides a motorcycle
To the bookstores. To the libraries. He's on my route
To this studio nearly every morning and evening
Coming home at nights. A good man as well.

But football. I'd kick all their asses if they tried to
Write something like this about me! And yeah,
The Chiefs won the Superbowl last year, but it's
All out when I do this thing here. So, with a hallelujah
and a how you doing I say hi to them all every now
and again. Because what's their business is mine
every once in a while, in this neighborhood gone sour
from good music while the Mexicans pump it through
their garages at night.

And you know, I'm about fed up with them too.
A man needs a good lay every now and again to get
The juices flowing. To add a little pep in his step.
And by God it isn't me who needs it. But this young
Man does need his rest in the nighttimes of calling
Young women who need him. So, pardon me if I'm
Asking for a little fucking respect around this town.
And every other town from around here. This shit
Of hittin the gyms in order to get laid is overrated.

Especially when you have a brain the size of an elephant's.
And yes, I might be scared of you but I ain't running
To tell you about it, am I?

We Do it for Beauty

You see, we all do it for beauty

We all do

Every second of every day, for beauty

Every second of every shit, for beauty

For every walk, for beauty

For every plane-ride, for beauty

For every accident, yes, for beauty

For every single day, it's all for beauty

And you do it, don't you?

And you too, don't you?

And I do it, yes, I do

And we all do it, we do

Even with the shock of a petty word in a poem like shit, or cunt, or ass

Even with the daffodils and marigolds and dandelions you may pass

Especially with the dandelions

And especially with the marigolds

And especially, especially, with the daffodils

You'll do it and you'll love it

Because it's all, all of it, every day, all of it is for love

At least most of it is

And most everyone does it

Most everyone does it

And some do it with soul

And some with something else

And some do it with might

And some do it with weakness

But they do it

And they do it well

Don't you.

Don't you?

I do

You see, we do it well and we love it

We love to see others do it, too!

When driving

While dying

When diving

While crying.

And though it's dangerous, we do it

And though you might fall to your death while skydiving

They do it

you do it, don't you?

And I do it, don't I?

We all do it.

Hell, some do it for good

Some do it for bad

Some for fun

Some while getting sad

And some for a dollar

And others do it for ten

And I do it for free

But, I do it

And you do it

Don't you?

Winning

Rounding the corner, I witness a fight!
I'm in my car and it's getting broken up.
Two women on the street are going at it, one
older and one younger. The younger one is calmer.
Two men are breaking it up and I wonder
what it's about? Shouting from a stoop as the
younger of the two drives away. Not today!

On such a beautiful day as this one no one
should be fighting! So, I steer clear and am on
my way. I don't get involved, no police are called.
Yet it is in my neighborhood no one should
pay the price on such a beautiful day. After all,
there was no blood.

You see, I've sold six paintings this month and
I'm not going to let this get me down. I'm on a
high and it doesn't come too often like this so
I'm not crying over someone else's spilled milk. As
a matter of fact I must drive to Saint Louis
today to give a gallery talk.

The last thing I need is a bum lip and a black eye
before leaving. I plan to turn the music up, listen
to some choice tunes, and drive there and back into

the sunset smiling the entire way! It would be nice if I had a friend to visit with on the way there, but I'm unsure if that will work out. I hope it does but I'm prepared, if not! I've made the trip many times by myself. It's a long haul, but you don't get rich overnight and you don't win by starting a fight! So, I'm going, and it will be a blast!

Write it Down

Sometimes I grow tired of writing everything down. But this one thing is important. I once high-fived a chalked outline in the streets of New York high on mushrooms and booze. If there was one thing that was real that night it was that.

Who knows what happened to the poor SOB, probably a hit-and-run. He was near the curb, I remember that. One hand raised, the other down at his side, head turned, you know the classic chalked outline pose.

Another time I saw a man stabbed in the nighttime over some raw deal. I assume it was over that, or over a woman. There he lie, in the middle of Times Square in a pool of his own blood.

And then there's the big one, 9/11. It wasn't the watching it from the opposite shore that got to me. It was the smell of it for months – that fucking stench. What a nightmare. But hey, who saw that coming?

You see, some people get off easy in life.

Others have to write it down.

You Gotta Hold On

Around here the clock strikes noon and it's
Coffee and a macaroon! Yellow, pink, and
Aqua, full of all that macaroon stuffing in
The coloration of her Chakra. And okra
In the summers next to ham is a pleasant
Meal for us. With some applesauce on the side.

And I hide then. Onto the studio to do
Some work! Yes, I take that trip to that
Part of town! And the blacks all contribute to
My mindset in here, and my friends are in fear of
Them, but really I don't sweat them! Because all
Of them, and I, is running for the stuffing.
And let it be for my little pink and yellow baby,
This morning. And God help us, aqua is still draining
From the spickets, and that the God upstairs is punching
Our tickets to the ride. But it's actually Midnight
And time to go with a heavy glow from the coffee I'm
Sipping on. And the light is beaming. So, I've got to
Let you down the hard way and not amidst my dreaming!

There ain't no macaroon! There never was. There ain't even
Any goons to say goodbye or to quarrel with in this studio
Made of glass. But I ain't weeping inside of it, or maybe
I am? I mean, you all just take your sideways glances
Inside from outside, and keep on riding past us anyways. And
If you didn't keep on trucking, I would probably murder you
Anyways. Justice is cruel at times.

You know, it gets that way sometimes beneath the heat in
Here, with the lamplight leaking and the sunshine
Bleeding all day and all night long! With my hands tired
From typing and my eyes squinting from painting all
Day long praying to the currency of love,
To the currency of love.

So yeah, I'll wake up half-refreshed, like always to the
Dark of 3am, somehow, still holding onto it all. To the
Under-glow of leafiness-light, to the shrub-light of back porches,
and coffee. And perhaps I'll get lucky and catch a white
bloom of strength where the glimmer of hope hides by
day, but is reflected by porchlight back to me and by
crepuscular chance-rays, serendipitous and ridiculous,

all in the same striking, aching, pissed off motion!

And it's a mental-mind-breaking potion of love and
Care in here, and out there, that gets us going again from
Here to there. So enjoy it at least, this time. And
It's time to go. To go. Anywhere. But here. Now.

Ain't it all so queer!

You Must be Out of Your Mind, after the Magnetic Fields Song

Amazing! The drive from my house.
Like a teenager gone wild from a single hit song,
Like a deviant kid working late so he can afford to hit his bong,
I will work and work until late tonight and then go home.

The vibes are good and the soda is biting harder than a gin and tonic.
And the painting is as mathematical as my mind is on the chronic.
And that's real shit right there. I took my time with it like parting my hair
When I was a teenager on my way to Taco Bell to meet Heather.

Oh, the weather! Perfection.

Damon Freed – Bio

I am an artist who cherishes balance, reason, and ambiguity; and I express it through a variety of working methods, from abstracted realities to nonobjective paintings of grids, I believe reality exists on the edge of perception. And while my Dad has been my best and greatest influence Agnes Martin and Brice Marden's work are among them.

I received my B.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in New York City where I graduated with honors. Freed taught at two places for 10 years at the college level. His first year was in '09. His M.F.A. is from Hunter College, City University of New York. Freed has studied with such luminaries as Jack Whitten, Marilyn Minter, David Chow, Juan Sanchez, Sanford Wurmfeld, Tobi Kahn, Lucio Pozzi, Tim Rollins, Alice Aycock, Susan Crile, Anton van Dalen, Suzanne Anker, Donald Kuspit, and Katy Siegel among others. He has been exhibited in galleries in New York City, Saint Louis, Kansas City and Columbia, Missouri.

In writing, my influences are my mom and dad, sister and brothers, and friends, mostly. My inspirations are my family and dearest friends, and the people I meet in every direction! Freed has not been formally trained in poetry but is an avid writer of works and spoken word. He has nine books of poetry published by himself.

He has been published by The Writer's Place online and by The Rye Whiskey Review. You may find his collections of poetry in the Sedalia Public Library as well.

Freed may be reached at damonfreed@gmail.com or by going to his website online.

