

# freedom is a cupcake

100 things to digest, when you have the time

original word-combinations by Pat Tanzola, for everyone

instructions: **out loud**, **under your breath**, but not (alone) in your mind

# Freedom is a cupcake

## Unpoems

1. The entertainer	5
Who's afraid of the dark	6
about (bad) poetry	7
Not so easily classified	9
236 Lake Drive, Willow Beach	10
coffee cup rhymes	11
Afternoon drive	13
Calm and storm	14
Can I get to heaven before I go to hell?	16
Sass-und-frazzle	17
Dec07—subconscious	18
A deer caught in the headlines (National Post, Nov 11)	19
freedom o' press	20
cracked eggheads, indigestible omelette (too many cooks)	21
The techno-babel genesis	22
Meet the specialist	23
amateur night at charley's	24
backyard gretzkys	25
inspiration	26
Copenhagen	27
Passionate verbiaged curmudgeonism	28
The way we crumple	29
urbs aeterna	31
Agog on the sidewalk, 10 years later	32
desperately seeking S—	33
what you didn't say	34
Friday night sympathy—a failed reader poem	35
Ugliness of thought	36
Nonnonsense	37
beautiful jem-boorish gibberish	38
Forget chess	39
PU?n.c,t—u!a:t;i_o^n" (found)	40
Excursion, with footnotes	41
Freedom is a cupcake	42

Hold still	43
down by the lake	44
My mad mad love	45
La la la la la (repression)	46
Thousandword ramble (unedited)	47
I	49
Sad Bastard	50
pelican man	51
Eric the Lungfish	52
pain by numbers	53
Inside the whale	54
God damned you	55
international conscience	56
To heal a shattered back	57
test me and I pass	58
the cure for (suicide)	59
1978-2000	60
difficulty in walking	61
Mud puddle	62
Ms. Apocalypse	63
spicy jerk and guildwood park with the right beer	64
Wednesdays at the Mod	65
municipal	66
graffiti on the sidewalk	67
30 days till spring	68
not in my backyard	69
Thoughts as I eat my lo mein	70
Rat-tat-tat (hip beat to hop to)	71
MayDay	72
The Lady and The Snake	73
Loveless Rita	75
Susie and the Tomcat (vigilante justice)	76
murdered on a sideroad	77
Sour & Sweet	78
Floppy fish	79
My cat	80
You and Me	81

(checking the dictionary for the meaning of life) Nov 3 poem	82
Peanut butter on a celery phone	83
threeminute throwaway	84
Penny on the ground	85
Cover letter #99	86
Respectfully declining hospitality	87
riff#99	89
Isabella	90
Ecco il mio amore (song for De Andre)	91
Sandra	92
Today	93
man in mirror	94
please don't leave	95
Tony the Tiger	96
Stuck in the Friend Zone	98
money is love	99
What to do, if you're you	100
horsetorcher	101
90. Out like a lamb?	102

### Prose

91.form over. (just) content	103
Dramatic hangover	104
The Man Who Could Not Eat Himself	105
MISC. Piggy	106
Trials of a silly man	107
<i>The vino shot down his throat...</i>	110
Waltzing Matilda (for TW)	111
I wish I could quit my day job...	112
99. I am the phoenix	113

### Epilogue

100. 99 rejected subtitles	115
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## The entertainer (Da-da dah dum duh dum dee dumb)

What's the meaning, you will ask  
dares he prance without a mask  
smashing zeugma, spitting trash  
how dare he break the covenant  
and burst out in a rhyme

Get over it, you grey alcoholic toads  
you hang ups, mildew sonnets, you Grecian odes  
croaking in your poverty;  
I am here to entertain  
I do it with alacrity

Nuts to you, ascending judge  
student master, mental sludge  
your granite heart, too stoned to budge  
--check thesaurus: 'boring drudge'--  
I come here bearing dynamite.

Sad little thesis, overwrought  
bang advisor, if he's hot  
maybe he can put a word in  
(spent youth worrying inside words)  
that's not all he's putting in

I don't conjure mystic lines  
I don't read Joyce, I don't have the time;  
my message not subliminal  
those men are wanton criminals  
who destroyed the goddamned language

Words are to communicate  
food to think and celebrate  
why do you shrivel?  
why do you despise?  
get that pen out of my eye.

I spare no mercy for the poets  
dead beat fathers, and they know it  
washing dishes with their talent  
age of 80 in an instant  
I leave to them my epitaph:

I did my homework, did the math  
but laughter is the road less tracked;  
I set out with my map, my pap  
through elites I cut a swath  
entertaining all my wrath

## Who's afraid of the dark

I'm not afraid of the dark, I don't blubber when bulbs aren't lit. I swish, twirl in any murk, shout hosannas in every apocalypse, pish tosh to all pretentiousness. I look in your terrified, dusky grey eyes and offer surprises, not 'full-of-it' lies but midnight flights of fancy. Stretching my hairy ballerina thighs, I try this ink black leotard on for size:

Unlike Bruce S in all earnestness, I am immune to too-much sanguine awkwardness. Crooners only unnerve me, disturbing the common good with hypersensitive artistic suggestibility—ack, ability wasted on pedestrian emotions, inciting popular commotion, wannabe Horaces diluted to Hallmark.

I'm not one to boast of blood, it spurts inside us all; so what if drops sometime escape, it doesn't mean we die. Get a grip and grab my plate, and eat up what I fry: if I get cut, I bandage up—I don't go inside.

I'm no tall drink of water, I don't spill out over bar-rails, sopped up by cooing waitresses 'just doing their jobs', or teeny bopping pigeons fawning online at heart-throbs, raising ruckuses like roustabouts over big-top circus freaks with an entourage of thousands, monopolizing chambermaid attention in dime a dozen five star hotels

I am the five in the morning bell  
I am the hole that sinks the well  
the van outside the cheap motel  
I'm Gargamel and Azrael

When power's down and night crests, I ask, What had you possessed? Well I guess under duress a melting ice box and memories of a dumb flat screen could offer comfort, but if that's your final answer I am unimpressed. No, until you learn you get no rest; surcease your bleating, your entreating, and get dressed: Midnight doesn't dance with you unless you look your best.

Don't ask me who you are; I'll tell you who you are. If you must ask, then it's sure that, sir, you are no superstar. But the question is not 'who am I?'—that's a worm that digs up lies. The question, if you'll follow through, the question is 'what do you do?'

What do you do? What do you do?

What you do, it's up to you.

What do I do? Well, sir, let me tell you:

In lighter days I raise the curtain  
In colder days I light the boiler  
In yesterdays I talked about tomorrow  
In everyday ways to remind you of today

But at no time ever have I feared the dark.

## about (bad) poetry

This is a poem about  
poetry.  
It has a rather  
arbitrary layout scheme.

The title is transparent,  
annoyingly self-aware  
(you might, parenthetically, suspect me  
of being up to something. Don't waste  
your paranoia)

A modern poem rarely does rhyme,  
—the penman's prerogative, I'm told.  
Alliteration and assonance are all I owe, you know,  
at most, to all of you, you see,  
so there

This one wants a pulsating rhythm  
but it stacks up well  
in, ah, what's the word—  
'diction' or something?  
Wait, check that,  
'cheek' is more like it.

It's a dry, dusty well,  
unduly discovered;  
a scribbled mirage,  
this poem disappoints  
the readers  
who die thirsty in the desert  
for lack of 'well'-written verse.

And like a one-legged poet who runs out  
of ideas, my metaphors are lame,  
and my similes are  
the Satanic Spawn of The Guy With No Imagination Incarnate.  
Oops, gosh consarnit—  
no more of gross personification,  
flowery comparison or cryptic gravity.  
Bury it all in the cemetery, I say,  
with the graves and the crypts.  
Do it by night or by day,  
It rots!

A poem should have a voice  
but this one, boy, is it ever cloying,  
monotone at best.  
You ask me to 'shut up, moron'  
and I'd forgive you  
for telling me to smarten up or tone it down  
I give you bad mood, after all  
no feeling at all;  
I feel you up and down, I do.

And ultimately a convoluted poem  
is really rather bad;  
duly considered punctuation cannot save it;  
cannot fix it, period.  
It's a 'cata-pos-trophe'.  
Superficial and so insolent, it's  
exactly unlike  
all those really good and meaningful  
anthology poems.

What of the theme, you say:  
avoidance of serious engagement,  
the making of a mockery instead,  
out of fear that earnest effort  
would come short;  
and so resorting  
to self-conscious self-ridicule—

why,  
it's so cliché;

almost as cliché as saying  
something withered and bankrupt  
as  
*that sword imagery, professor—I find it sooo Freudian.*

So, yah, poetry is great,  
just great.  
I mean, what's not to like?



## Not so easily classified

Clickety clack sound magic fingers and, ahoy, the heft I lift reveals scenic Siena landscapes, ruby emerald pastels, lush Chianti vineyards, a framed showcase of my gothic marble ambition. But lichen always grows on the side of a tree, signals ceasing immortality; arthritic shoulders can't bear the load, so I sit and hum my Springsteen—'The Ghost of Old Tom Joad':

*Wherever there's a cop feeding a tramp;  
wherever there's a president sobbing in his hands;  
wherever there's a spinster smiling at a babe  
—I'll be the vampire, sucking at the drain.*

## 236 Lake Drive, Willow Beach

the lake whispered while I dozed  
    above the outboard motor coughing at 2.5 hp  
below striped bass slipping through wood planks and the sun:  
    'clams hold their secrets in the clay cement' and

'the water you piss in is the air they breathe'  
Bono the dog shakes dry on the dock  
    annoyance too casual to embellish  
        funny, I tell his owner, don't let him shit on our grass.

Rhythm of a life, something worth living  
until the sharp September mornings  
    stenches of mink on death hunts  
        ripping crayfish to ribbons, casting skulls along the rocks

lost in the sunset and whitecaps  
are 25 years of returning,  
reconvening at the lake, I wash afresh  
and dig up worms, hoping for an interesting catch

I must repair the tree house this summer  
    —it blows down one night in a windstorm—  
because kids need a high place to launch water balloons  
                                and pelt each other with crab apples

## coffee cup rhymes

Floated on the road with cold drops dripping, exiting the cab after the customary tipping. Shambles of the storefronts, dirty glass panes, the clogged drains full of fallen leaves, uncleaned eaves. A funeral home bereaves, breathes, grieves, they line up in procession as the motorcycle leaves:

A child, infant, a suckling innocent, warm mother, extended family, the fourth homily in a stone church. Three brothers, no sisters, burning joy like a skin blister. New life but no new wife, it's no disaster (not like that movie, *Twister*).

Years pass, a ghetto blaster, teenage procrastination, fears of class tension, Hedges and Benson, fireworks reversed, the voice and tone terse, things were better once, but now they could be worse.

Rebellion in the body, brightness in the eyes, the smile the dimple, the mouth wide, the grin, so eager to begin, dive in, swim. Chance for an expression, relief depression, an obsession, no more clutter, a direction, all clearing bearing clean, an objective, some perspective. Resurrecting the spirit, a coolness, bold in sweeping surface; finally, a purpose.

Challenges, obstacles: the landlady, the rent, the hydro bill. Swill swallowed, indigestion, nasal congestion, reality, no insurance, just assurance, friends and concurrence, blurred observance, another acquiescence. Face up and look around, heads in sand, submission to that one particular gland. It's Friday night, so stay up, uncorked bottle, dress full throttle, sit back, relax, get excited: you're invited to meet the band.

Cycles: doubt, elation, penetration, the shock, the pleasure, relief, touching is a crutch, a drug, you're my charming little lady bug. A made bed, a swept rug, you plug away, wait for graduation day. You pay, buy, get paid, apply, pray, sail the bay on holiday; you get by, congregate, agree, laugh it off as heresy; the cheque is in the mail.

You're wrong: a storm, hail, wind, the house is not strong, it's frail. Don't fail, don't quit until you find a job, keep at it, shutter the pane, windows, doors, ignore refrains--it's just your brain. Holes in socks? Invest in stocks, triple-bolted locks, scotch on the rocks. Bet another chip, pass the dip, take a trip, the Titanic, a sweet ship, crew drunk but unsunk. Don't slump, don't slip, keep a grip on loose lips and we'll make the port alright.

Lust, a man lost in a woman, God's plan, propagation, cosmic props, girls and boys sneak in stores, buy sex toys. Write your vows kids, you're both virgins, say 'I do' and then begin. Unzip, expose hickeys scars and body blows, consume your mate and swear off hos; the end result, nobody knows, where it stops and

why it goes. Five star galas, seasonal shows, a nice steak knife, trophy wife, jealous prizes, eaten crows. Name your son, your future, hope, a scapegoat, leave your will for tots to tote—it's eighteen years til they can vote.

Work, salvation, humiliation, dignity, personal property of the soul, back bent, lowly tasks, shoes eaten to the sole. Today's a gift, the present, impress upon the future, import from the past. Sell them old ideas, profit panaceas, cooking up a reason to conquer North Korea. Damn the torpedoes, I do it for libido—do I look good in a Speedo? Shut the office in Toledo, boy we had a blast.

What the fuck? Bad luck, felled by a stroke, no joke, he's done but had fun, in college took a toke. Hospital visits the doctor prohibits, only kin, no friends, it's just cancer, happens often—take it like a man. Shut down the machine (in comas no one dreams), get real, it costs a thousand bucks just to buy his pills.

Step up to the plate, you know the drill: send them to heaven twenty-four-seven, stick the family with the bill. He grows cold, chills, old, over the hill, boo hoo, he's dead, tough luck, my how time flew, that's life, tell his wife I'm sorry, let's clean up for tomorrow, Fred. Sorrow is another day, and there's a waiting list for that bed.

## Afternoon drive

On a winding road,  
on a damp Friday when  
even your bones feel wet and  
wind whips the aerial like a  
cruel high pressure wash that  
removes no dirt,  
you drove up to those outlands where  
wooden signs creak  
sullen under  
what's left of winter.

You were surprised, at the persistence  
of life flashing its  
mangled brown  
choppers, and industry  
gasping in  
a cold charred patch of no man's land, left for  
illiterates and incest pigs scratching  
roots from the ground.

You made your way through  
main streets, off beaten paths down to  
pillows of snow atop frozen water, where  
a lone teenager  
lets himself be  
lifted by the gale, tied to a sail flying high  
screaming sing songs below in  
his windbreaker—  
a glorious afternoon  
skipping school.

## Calm and storm I

calm and storm

toast and porn

vials of chromium

a touch of strontium

poisons all the wells

it's probably just as well

better late than whenever

to face the magic lever

the yule season screams

and keepers light the streets

with Santa's bag of dreams

feeding ice cream to the kids

he calls himself our father

and we sing our hail Marys

and care to take the ferry

across the river Styx

boy we got our kicks

though the leg men in the water

don't ever touch the shore

(and the rest of the infernal story  
gets lost in the translation)

II

burned by acid rain  
sizzling patches on his jacket  
he decided to complain  
to Dupont chemical  
and the voice at the desk  
said 'it's probably just as well,'  
'we'll pay for a new coat,'  
'go, take the money,  
and forget about the holes  
in the rest of your life.'

Can I get to heaven before I go to hell?

Draw me to the water with the lure of your body  
I hear your singing, songs through the breaking of the waves  
Tumble overboard, jump ship with all your grief  
My men and I are desperate, months and years upon the deep.



## sass-und-frazzle

A banana peels my punch line, seltzer on the floor, wheel I reinvent with ink  
consistency, even though it bores

returning bottles without caps, the road map for our generation  
peddling fish wrap for tomorrow, on board a Chinese jetty  
I steal thunder, chop it up—it purrs just like a kitten  
I'm an honest wife who loves her man, and I've got a sparkling kitchen

I stole for kisses  
stole a glance  
I ask for John's head on a lance

ask the black bartender, "sing me jazz"  
ask four quarts of sassafras  
To get me going, through this poem  
To wipe my dirty ass

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This metre stick is plain indecent  
It's going to start a war  
I always whisper after midnight  
echoes through my pores

I have a robot dog, I call him Sparky  
His circuits tend to fry  
When he smells a bone he sparks right up  
don't bother asking why

I fantasize of giant peaches, bobbing in my face  
But it disappoints me greatly to relate  
that there are no peaches  
in outer space

Oh wait—                    here we are at the gate

get out your boarding pass  
memorize the Latin Mass  
take everything you never asked  
take ecstasy and blast off  
cuz the voyage is long and ghastly, and it will leave you frazzled

## Dec07-subconscious

We are here together in the opium fields. I surprise your father with the bicep flexed in the waning augusty moonlight and the last thing we decided was to eat fish in the blank moonlight and the only thing we ever decided was to encounter that evening while the descent of man over the bridge of sighs and ketchup never fixed itself in the winter of discontent and the failure of time to end the genocidal impulse, the wrecked hull of this ship where we lick chips. Saviour of the glue factory, empty throne of lies on which Satan Claus sits interred in the log jam of the yellow-fevered ghetto. Underwear frailty and the hegemony of the igloo ayatollah, infer from this I fear I'm ordinary compared to polyp and perforce I propel people populations per capita in painstaking pulpy colonies to sodomy. Lethal intubations of the weal of quail fighters yields no benefits until the June moon comes undone and we glorify the black vault until the sun shines and the cave of Xerxes destroyed reveals the mansion of coral and the violence zings and undulates unspeakably polluted for the rigor mortis of yesterday's news man. Kodiak bears flaunt the fright of the garish helmeted warriors walking marching off to suicide and the poison of the yellow bark of birch trees, and the janissary of Turkey was always and forever excluded from the reindeer games when the queen of the road offered pizza pockets to the protection rackets jailed in the prison of the Golan heights north of the tagus river. Look out, gargoyle. Harrowing oaf velvet banana and climax of Zen! Mildew centuries wither and the recording of the Inverness database explodes ponderous; heretofore it's a harpsichord. Magma harpies and the valkyries, the bakeries and fakeries inward seeking praise of the manna of Desdemona and Horatio: I dream of your philosophy it is true too true I love glue and I sniff poo. Jaded fealty and the benevolent mulling of the mullahs and the bacon version of chicken was a decided failure. Kellogg rocks with milk filters through the sandwich aisles of the supermarket without Somali curry and zoological pollutants wriggling without cease into the trout farms and the inharmonious desert. Bath night-times and the failure of tornado and the keeping in tone with the metronome ogles the fairy flipping wrists in midst of the typhoon, gangly and French under duress from the emissary locked in his hatchback pocketbook. Lethal regicide weathers the fried nutmeg motorways cacophony until everglade ibexes chirp intensely looking perversely out at Dolomite valleys. Dream of a falcon, hasten toward eagle flight popularity of the yard wench faulting the kook lathering the soap quiet and verbose much like Juno the troll of the last ship ever set sail from the coast off Cagliari. With stereotypical Sardinian sardonicism, the tacit trusting look forgotten, dismissed as crooked and lisping, Meinong wrenched four galaxies of scarlet over the toast yard into the police helicopter, expediting the last jacketed leather spelling into the raging ether sunset.

**A deer caught in the headlines** (National Post, Nov 11)

Coffee sips, the paper flips, a media blitz  
'EU backtracks after calling Scottish men skirt-wearers'  
A soldiers' letter: "I can still hear the wounded men crying"  
'Opposition to airport bridge delivers win'

Ok I give up; what's the use in trying?

## freedom o' press

readers of the world, unite!  
your writers do not right  
they cage you in their pens  
skinny pale women, sour little men  
daily opinion, pundits political, critical hippos, commentators  
compensate for friends  
with 'professional relationships'

clique of vipers, insider outsiders  
hissing secrets to each other  
revelling in their voices  
pretending privately for them  
what is public  
don't bother them with letters because  
they don't know how to read

how do you spell 'dutiful eye'?  
it's ego ego, doody-filled ego  
mercenary eagles, freelance beagles  
but how you spell 'hack'?  
the message, dear reader, is the medium:  
so put down that paper—now  
pick up your broadsword and ATTACK.

**cracked eggheads, indigestible omelette (too many cooks)**

Sorry ma'am but killing your son in the Afghanistan afternoon was an unavoidable eventuality I'm afraid. His destiny lay in that abstract manipulation magic, the mediocre fog of war board room dominance being the message, the only thing apprehended was the managerial depravity, apparently necessary ignorance of inconvenient reality. The relativity of the situation, the ethical conflagration inundation, mortifies a million zipped up lips massacring mouths making conscience-breaking remarks, vainly shaping circumstance to fit the perfect recipe...

## The techno-babel genesis\*

Catch what good Reverend Descartes says  
he be preach da magic gibbering  
Shrug at the prosecution's threats  
ask the def. counsel for a limerick  
And computer geeks speak in Boolean  
when not dreaming Pythonese  
Html? Um, what the hell?  
Ever find out what a chloroplast does?  
Hmm... I mean, what I reason what it is is  
a clear case of dissociative displacement transferral

*\* "Let us go down and mix up their language so that they will not understand each other." (Gen 11:8)*

## Meet the specialist

I'm good at this;  
I'm better than  
a plain old poet—  
I'm an  
omni*fauxet*  
I write these words  
and nothing but  
—top of the line  
head of the class  
I am a totalitarian  
state of the art  
ahead of my time  
—and I know it.

I'm good at this,  
so gimme  
gimme  
lots of  
money.

## amateur night at charley's

time to wriggle  
rip off our thong  
I giggle when  
I ride the pole;  
let me stuff all my  
sexy into  
these red  
tassles, this  
ridiculous role;  
get it up, gentlemen  
start your wallets  
I've never done this  
—but you do it so well,  
you're a natural;  
it's like you  
fantasize  
about this  
your whole life.



## backyard gretzkys

in my 20-ft arena I'm  
the great one, I'm  
rocket roger  
nolan ryan  
ryne sandberg  
rolled into one  
catlike reflexes  
I'm pat roy  
alias:  
patrick the king.  
just watch what I do with  
my fancy  
glove hand;  
trust me you've  
never seen  
moves like this—  
it's like I'm  
like you read about, I'm  
like you watch on tv.

(it sucks  
when the tennis ball  
bounces over the fence and you  
have to climb into  
mrs. heighley's yard.)

inspiration (what should I write about?)

Your chalk-line cubism, your cigarette ash soufflé, your dogshit consommé, your Miles Davis sneezes, classical car horn cacophony, that's what I listen for; like chewing gum wrappers plugging leaks in a dam, it rescues blind billions—it's that black sheep glam. *The opposite of wisdom is also wisdom; the rubbish tin glimmers if the lighting is right; the underground rails will take us from night.*

Admiring spires in **Copenhagen**, through the Christiana haze and the existential mania of Scandinavian brains: too many blondes, men wanting bigger schlongs; it's beautiful, prosperous, tourists throng, the picture-book city—nothing possibly wrong.

No?

Whaddya know—xenophobes, the socialist load, big tax burdens, no births, the country corrodes, thrown to the dogs—ie, EU in-roads—by great Danes, navel-gazing in ignorant bliss. (You reveal all of this with sophisticate pith, demographic analysis, and a delicate flip of your rose-scented wrist.)

## Passionate verbiaged curmudgeonism

It started at Edwards Gardens on a Good Friday afternoon, where I couldn't make it to the park for—and this is ironic—lack of empty space to park, so resigned and laughing quietly, “won't this make for interesting opening,” I head south, to meet my unexpected meaning. Now I've told you the beginning—I'm the fat boy in the skinny—maybe words can explain the rest:

Cherry Beach, with shimmering renovations, how bout that, circulating cars passing alongside wild-goose waterfront escape-chasers, a warm cloudless day for *I'exploratorio*, among masses of useless industrial residuals, bundled up apologetically behind predictably suicidal springtime pedestrians whose overblown exhilaration expressions have seen the shining sun. Broken glass collects in a roadside ditch, but roughly rides a tall blonde biker chick undaunted, all spandexed lower half with killer artificial calves, sipping a sport drink for two bucks, and her better half, sexy boy 'Rich Mitch' Goderich and his slick-trick 'twinkle-toes' cutting-edge calisthenics—they're all bang-bang, clang-clang, diggety-dang, superman goggles, water bottle in hand. But I'm laughing abstractly; how irresistibly her dimpled nine-to-five butt cheeks sag despite Goodlife subscriptions and protein-pill grab-bags, I'm thinking.

I'm just as helpless and stubborn though; I'm a caterpillar crawling across someone else's interstate; I won't make it to my butterfly days—my fate is squashing by rubber tires, I expire in a furry red-black coat of ire. But mellowing by afternoon moonlight, I groom thoughts for the later-on scripting session, my signed confession of a wasted day's activity, stenographic justification for my lifetime of pleasure, this verbal leisure unceasing on the horizon I hope. But I missed the last bus leaving the landfill spit, so in my Nissan it's an Andretti fit of amphetamine creativity; the bike path can't contain me, it's off to shoreline searching for bloated and bobbing puppies, hiding from prepsters, yuppies conspicuous in Prada leathers, bellweather gentry friers claiming the city's last pristine beach site for their god—it's a postmodern nonsense conquest for cold and cruel carbon-copy meritocracy leech logic. It's madness I tell you; it's going to the dogs, and they're frothing free from leashes.

But I'm not really 'woe is society' and 'curse the infidel'—that's not my style, I swear. On Front Street at least there's a sigh of relief, afternoon respite from the Hogtown diesel and dodge-me blight, and where in this dad-blast pink-car nation can I find a decent peameal bacon sandwich? The old market's closed and it's a meat-free Friday anyhow however, so upper lip stiffens on a donut shop compromise—it's not fast-breaking if it's decaf and fat-free cherry cheese danishes, I tell my guilty catholic conscience unconvincingly. I sit, read a bit about vacuums in our stillborn modern cities; I look curious amid downtown red lights for blue innuendos, expecting 'suck suck suck,' but it's all these tough-luck losers just rolling up rims to win, wiping sour milk moustaches with nasty-cuticle fingernails, scraping out livings and scratching at lotto tickets; it's sad sad so sad so I'm gonna please try again next time—I am definitely not a winner.

## The way we crumple

I could feel you twitching;  
how you were shivering  
as we held onto us  
after the police left us  
sirens dead

I felt you shatter in fifty places  
a lifetime unrestrained  
the crack and the howl  
for the first time  
screaming helpless again

You couldn't feel anything  
guilty for me  
for my whispered idea  
my empty threat  
my box of pills

You never meant to touch me  
when you touched me.  
and the resonance—it was me, pounding you  
I made you crumple—

Oh my dear

I saw you crumble.

And so naturally

you

never

touched anyone

again

## urbs aeterna

I never saw you so green  
as the first day on the train  
from Fiumicino to Termini  
after interminable journey  
by Canadian plane  
to the world's belly button,  
holy living coffin  
of  
prehistoric colour,  
six inch stilettos and  
telefonino  
fever.

I was afraid of you then;  
your sixteen degrees in  
January  
made me discard  
my jacket—me,  
the victim,  
sheepish in  
your fashion kingdom.

But  
after the first bite of  
carbonara,

the first lick of  
fragola

I forgave you  
your bambinos, your  
motorinos,  
even  
what your churchmen did  
to my marble Coliseum.

I was afraid of you, Roma,  
until I breathed your air;  
after  
the kisses  
you blew  
in my cappuccino

I never saw  
a better-looking woman.

## Agog on the sidewalk, 10 years later

They called me Mindy-Nanu-Nanu  
I was the ugliest girl in your class;  
You sat in front and to the left of me  
in Advanced Physics I think;  
I never said much, but I have to say  
the way you mussed your hair, was adorable.

I finally lost weight I guess  
Fun days? yeah, they were... I guess.  
I wish you'd have called,  
got in touch—something,  
—smiled even  
before I left for London.

What're you staring at?  
Oh right; haha, no those aren't  
papayas in my blouse—  
those are my new double-C's!

—sorry, but I'm married now  
and I'm better off without you.



desperately seeking S—

you made me tea on a saturday

I would never miss our hug goodnight

but I found myself wanting

to touch your waist

such incredible comfort zone

I was able to walk again tonight

a little taste, too much to take

your dad says we ought to get married

I am happy you would take me, but

I would never buy you a ring

what we didn't say

what you said

shocked me;

I admit.

but it's

what you didn't

makes me afraid

—not that I was losing you—

but

I never

knew you

because

you never said it.

and now

what we didn't say

is what

we are afraid

to find out

(please

tell me

I am right.)

## Friday night sympathy—a failed reader poem

A fellow feels not when he doesn't stop to think about the baby crying behind his ear. Does he hear the inhuman shrillness of the infant? Does it stir his basest instinct?

No call can wake and no salt can shake him. He doesn't smell the Sunday cooking; doesn't worry 'bout Lord in Heaven. It's make me want to shake him, blurt advice and break him, after the booze that made him curse and touch the nurse's dress and he spilled his ginger rye. Why, he broke his glass and scared his wife, and now he dares to lie? Sticks and names can only hurt him, yet he tries to hide his hurting, praying he is certain that his God is just a Bible and this world his only trial.

But I cry out in hurry that the night will end with rain, and the women carry water jugs, but their necks will feel the pain of a chore that's never-ending while the countryside is mending and the trains are full of shore men and the coast land got fished dry.

The wetness of the morning calls for jackets, cords and warming with the hot cup of the cider and the fairy-tale spider rhyming words that were inside her while the Wright brothers did fly.

But friends of all the Grease kids flavour speech with slang and beatnik; they dream of road trips down the coast and wish the hottest spice that words can buy. They smoke cigars, inhale and choke, but even phlegm can't hide the smiles when they're dressed up all in robes and books they never plied.

Their dreams all lay with books that lie: novels, poems, diner fry. Food unfit for eating, words wasted on the breathing, ideas for forgetting, ill-gotten flights of fancy.

That's not to say Jack was wrong, or the bohemian was lying when he sang seductive songs. It's just that life is more than leaving homes where toiling wears out idle minds—never minds that think to pray for work—which cuts the hands that never tried.

And it's just that every poem is a story of a loneliness that breaks itself when spoken, adding ink stains worth but tokens to the tomes of men who cry.

## Ugliness of thought

No ego  
No influence  
No acknowledgement  
No dedication  
No author bio  
No publicist  
No agent  
No head shot

No context, just words on a screen

No waste  
No residue  
No fodder for biographers  
No 'mail me here'  
No relationship wanted, and  
None given

Nature abhors a vacuum? Well  
she can  
blow it out her ass.

The repulsiveness of purity  
and  
the ugliness of thought  
are one and the same

What's that?  
on the tip of your tongue?

(The monstrous arrogance of your monolithic abstraction)

It's nothing, nothing at all.

## Nonnonsense

Cudgeled in a frinkered glunk, I sat upon my blog and thunk  
Freeming from the frothy mess, tassled wooms and xerxes met  
Poylish, drafty Aberbeen, velvet caw of quailish sheen  
"Concillify my beautophous clush" I shispered prawnly to the moon  
never stoated after nine, I boggled, poached, agog, agrind.

### beautiful jem-boorish gibberish

in a disastardy warnerly boggins, a nipple fran down from the sky  
as nardex kalmanity struck at my garden, the flit-fladdock maced out my eye  
skittling to town all a-yolping, my choice was raddished in twain  
"whirlpools will thrillsicle funk-wart," I zang  
but they shad never diminish the pain,"  
and "jally is fretch for the troasting, but the vintner requizzles some rain!"

the townsvark were drooning and clumsy, salviciously drunk to a man  
soon as a vinskin was hoopened, 'twas a-guggled and sluzzled again  
so francid and flooming fenductively, I rang up a quopple o' frassatorts  
euphonic agreeing deloreans, they smirkled and glabbed at my cash  
and as night festooned larchward and wastened the boardsnorts  
I zed "remember the mammarious moon-ages; dump your dustlets in their detorminories."  
but 'twas catastroxic from the chromancement, the frassatorts feebler than gust;  
alarums instaneous, vlaring, the feckleheads shapped without klass—  
the townsvark avoke in the moonlux, snurfling my snootfuls of dust!

fortuna destrooging my meticuloid prandle, I woggled to pressy pedge  
"my garden's a nardex kalmanity," I gloomed, "my loof's been razened in half."  
"to Dog Almighty in heaven: I woosh you would cuss me thumb slaff!"

## Forget Chess

Forget chess,

Forget football

Forget the drinks we ordered

And take me home

You call me a threat;

I don't like the tone in your voice

I don't like you in that dress

And i don't want to take a cab

You call me

Two years later

And say—

"I'm trying to forget the way you smell"

-----

why can't we just walk home

eat the snow before it

hits the ground,

and

fall asleep

and forget

to stop

wanting us?

question marks!  
LETTERS periods.  
CAPITAL commas,  
tuation dashes—  
punc- exclamation  
marks etc

all make  
a signif-  
icant  
contrib-  
ution  
to the  
mean-  
ing of

a poem?  
????

PU?n.c,t—u!a:t;i\_o^n"  
(found)



## Excursions, with footnotes

One Sunday I went to Mimico with a flamenco-dance flamingo called Maraca Natty Senko: lives in Camp Tawingo, plays acoustic classical and gnaws a purple mango. (we drove past Lakeshore, that's where it ended; at Royal York it's north, and you never see the lake again.)

At Yonge and Lawrence there's a busy coffee shop devoid of personality; that's where it all happens. I can see through the citizens fleeing to their afternoon respites and it is easy to write write write when white blankness (blank whiteness?) is all around--spherical silence like stereo surround.

But I'm like an instant teller; I can tell instantly that you need a hug. You you clutch that latté like a security blanket; you hanker for good tube time to set you free, to light the farthest fence post guiding on the walk back home, frothing like espresso machine mad dogs and flimsy polystyrene cutouts on the Dufferin St. telescope strip. Hey hey the walls of Jericho fell the other day, so rake up stray bricks into recycling piles, to further your ambition of neighbourhood regeneration. We're starting up a re-evolution, the kind of progress clearly necessary; we will drink away our yesterdays in the Purple Jesus tub, we will ask each other longingly for warm back rubs.

In the boardroom sits the beleaguered accountant, swearing into his palm pilot, head in palm, wondering what became of his friends, the physiatrist, the blinking slick-backed football player who might have made a boffo dentist. It's odious coagulation of pent-up past competing with inert adolescent regrets, so I pop my minty clorets, breathing freshness into this chlorine bleached parchment, inspiring chlorophyllic respiration and NO<sub>2</sub> fits of jest. "Have you seen my raccoon face? The trick is in the wrists; curl your fingers into binoculars; go giggling in the mist."

O dear, you never made it to my sofa—that's where I give my massive heart attack massages; I can pencil you in for February, though it's shorter than them all.

I entered Yorkdale from the sidewalk circus revolving door, beheld Babylon in her glory, and the giant indigo chain that will never sell my books--but I enjoy sniffing the candles so I walk in and have a look. On the display table there is Heather's Pick and Oprah's Picks and I wonder—am I the only *man* who reads? A glut of prissiness, 'In Style' nazinas ruling our marketplace for thought. What of tractors, testicles and skanky bi-otches? Now that's some manly literature. Baby get undressed--I'll read the sexy journals, I'll write like Hunter S.

But now and again you wreck me. You really do.

ps don't yell at me xoxo u no hoo

## Freedom is a cupcake

Freedom is a cupcake, liberty a bagel, I don't put up with adults except if they are able. I loathe butter, cringe at bitter herbs, televised blurbs and curds and whey, apple betty and John Getty, obscure reference, like to the screenwriter of *Deliverance*.

Myopic and despotic, let's get off this topic, as I waddle hobbled into middle age, subscribe to PermaLase, remove unwanted hair and shake my head free of dandruff. Sniffing at my armpits, popping adolescent zits, I want big fat tips and sticky tack and painted red toenails. Oh there we go, I don't slow, I don't show, you don't own me you know. I say hey you and hi and oh and we can go now. I rake leaves a little while, 'til it goes out of style; I fight roosters in the barnyard, cocking fists, baring wrists to force the fowl down onto a plateful of noodles: cock-a-doodle-don't! I won't, I can't, I mean I shouldn't at least, rest in peace, poor beast, man's feathered friend—please, Elise, go, leave this place and fetch the priest.

Let's talk shop, about five-beat hip-hop, the dropping of rocks off bridges, and how you slept through college; I'll blackmail you to mom—admit it son, you set off that bomb. We listen in on CBC, metro morning, Andy B, a clear voice, stern warning, never hoarse, inspiring us to make that choice. I relax, naked, in the tub, aching for a back rub; you shrug, I'm thinking you're unblinking (it goes without saying that recourse to praying is time we are wasting).

Mop the tiles, shovel the drive, thrive when you have life, a pregnant wife, blessed lack of marital strife. "I never needed anybody" I heard Julian croon; in mid June you clung to me like men on the moon, never knowing my dark side, the far side, the comical aspects shrouded with whisper, going crackers, cashing in his chips—'crispy lips' is what they quip. Don't flip out, I've figured it out: you go out, buy socks that match your shoes; remain thin and rake it in while I stay in and sing the blues.

My brother talks conspiracies, irrelevance and theory. I nod, smile; it takes just a while to humour madmen, but it takes all day to greet the postman. Finally arrives, packages cash on delivery, he's like Garibaldi in Sicily, red shirts and blue movies, chasing skirts, chewing certs to make his breath smell fresh. I realize when I claim my prize: he was wise to my recent trial, my love of boysenberry pies on the Royal Mile, my casual *heil*, the unicycle fair with rodeo stares and white hot flares, where I tossed half a dozen midgets into a well, wishing for heaven but deserving hell.

When I was in Florence by the Duomo, and Ethiopia where they found Homo sapiens in the lava, like Java man in Indonesia, under my boots were the roots of humanity, archaeological ambrosia. And Formosa is Taiwan, remember, Myanmar is Burma: we change names after a while, giddily hiding our guile; this nomenclature restyling really riles the cartographers, and kids who spend a lifetime learning maps, converting kilometres to miles, knowing Sweden versus Switzerland (home of the Von Trapps).

Typing by the Thames, in London dairy air, licking the milk shake too thick to suck, I gawked at the overtime puck drop, quick and pathetic like a mercy fuck, a dead buck tied up on a pickup truck, knowing big-breasted blondes have most of the luck.

I don't stay long, meander home, getting to bed before the light goes dead, asking God to bless my friends: Fred and Ted Jennings, Ernie Laurel—the three Irish lemmings I call them. Sunset ends everything every night, so why put up a fight? I sigh, put on my pjs, sew a knee patch needing mending--I am Zorro with a thimble—ending one more day of thought upon this Pale Blue Planet.

**Hold still**

While I brush away

your eyelash

While I

hold still

let me be

beside you still

Don't turn

Don't paint your face—

I like it that way

please

We don't have all day;

One of us has to

blink, but

please

wait, hold

still—

I want to kiss you on

your eyelash

down by the lake

down by the lake

I make my mistake

—opening my mouth

she stares at her shoes and

love flies south.

## My mad mad love

My love is mad crimson love,  
it spills into margins, it  
nibbles your fingers and tickles your wrist; you  
drop your can of cream soda  
and fall on your knees  
howling.

My love is an ocean of confetti  
tossed back and forth like a frisbee  
on a grey concrete highway;  
it breaks down granite  
and melts into warm  
raspberry pudding.

My love is a secret rainbow of  
ultraviolet regeneration;  
it takes seven years  
to blossom from the tiniest  
mustard seed, but it feeds every  
hollow capillary.

My love is an open book of  
prayers, spells; a blue curse  
when you are deaf, a  
stone statue paralyzed,  
in terror of being  
in love.

And my love is a clutch of darkness—  
blackening my insides, maggots  
rotting in midsummer stench—  
when I fear  
my love is wrong and  
I hate my own soul.

My love is killing me,  
killing me every hour; so  
I pierced my heart with a silver switchblade—  
all that's left now is  
sixty seconds of  
mad, crimson gurgling.

La la la la la (repression)

The reason she is raging is her conscience

Rebelling at what she did

Smothered an infant in the secret room

In her home

*Hushabye baby, don't you cry*

*don't say a word,*

*it's time to die*

(no, it isn't—it's time

it's time, it's time

she learned

to fly.)

## Thousandword ramble (unedited)

I am going to explain by the thousandth word:

'Never'

Unless

Perhaps

'It's been a while'

'He is home, and there is no Christmas in February.' Moto moto motot motot

Leave me alone and everywhere it is such as that we receive and the only thing I ever tied to the back of the bus was the ribbon that said I was alive. So che guairei. Non dire no non dire no. Non dire no. nonoreee  
I have the best of me locked up inside your rapid glance. Don't do that to me with your smile. Don't take me apart when walking through the room. Mi basta il tempo di morire. I need to get the backdoor open, to expunge the last thing I ever wanted

why do we get so, *y'know?* Where does it go? Why not stop and ring the bell. And why not discover what is there inside you. Fearful and twitching inside the only thing ever thrown to the bone the dogs unknowing. It is a heartless city. A city that has nothing of permanence, Come in, make your money, get out, drive to Oakville with your SUV. You don't even know how to throw a party. WE are desperate to get out. WE are desperate to leave the last the only the withered bankrupt condominium. The truth in advertising was the last thing ever expected to throw the knockout cops below. I will be cynical and you will trash the hotel room. cYNICAL overused and oversued developed and renovated and into thrown rugs it is the last of the overran citizens denizens of the complete utter unfinished symphony of the mind the regal cutlass in the open field strip mine, strip tease the collar for the fleas, in ceasing the pleases from ecclesiastical heritage. I need to accept the room I need to expect nothing more than less than zero. I need the last open rung on the ladder of living livery the liver that purifies the blood or maybe that is kidneys. I need the bile it is the while over miles and miles of thoughtless trials and the beacon outer inner the threat of Acadian simianism. Devised and rethought impossible to excise, I renege the violin in the thighs open to closure the last big whining cloak was cut to ribbons with an elementary school pair of plastic scissors. Hey little woman I can't see you in the rain, I can't eat through the cord, my how the ropes are thick and you try to escape, well you will have to use your own teeth to bite through the rope. I am the last and loneliest oven dweller, the cave Osama hides in to gives the lessons to mainstream Islam. She is so young

she is so old, and we look around the house with the alarm ringing to wake you up before dawn to get to catch the subway and the flu on the way to work. I enjoy the soy bean sandwiches, the healthy snacks proffered by the overweight receptionist in a bid to save face, how disingenuous and the word it is new and unlooked up in the dictionary. The diction fairy visits to offer advice on a quatrain and the .. you you the man of fire in a room of chalk and the men of Saturdays ponder the latest example of utter Lysol-like insincerity. Don't don't don't we walk away we want to stay but we don't. WE hold on to this we want to kiss and we will always fear the bliss we could have had. Yodel the open fodder to roadkill the latest desired women to walk on the catwalk eager for the media embrace the chase of the latest the lace translucent and beckoning to the hairy snatch between you and her face. The flu derived from the toxic bug that hides swept under the epidemiological rug the sluggish start to the winter disimbuces the red wagon the walter cronkite news network, that show that starts you at seven and continues past ten. Legal illegal beagles excrete theological blather the baiter in the cage defies description the transcription ellipsis the theological nexus of thought the unblocked un thought stomach rotting polyglottic truth can't be bought, not even in a pawn shop. Jasper woods is good with his hands, the only supple sweet hands to touch the flute and finger the holes through which wind blown breath pipes and shows musical metronomic sensitivity. More words to go to finish the thousandth word the indicator of an accomplishment the four pages per diem necessary to meet the quota you set on yourself the decision to stick to a regimented attitude toward art. And after all this time we continue to sing to John and Paul and George et alii. Is it the classics that conspire to keep us infants to keep from growing to stop to hinder to hand the world to our parents and their totalitarian nostalgia? The Beowulf pushers in their first year lectures, don't worry if you don't get it, just copy notes off a mate and then copulate years hence in a bid to make good the friendship that just didn't suffice the thin ice we walk on the chance never taken because of the law of statistical averages that dictates that all relationships end in either breakup or marriage. Ack the pessimism of life the half glass empty the truth about mortality so we write write write miles before we die. We maek a make mark we need to piss on the trees around us to keep away the dogs, Cerberus I see your red eyes, stay away from my house and home. I'll throw you a bone if you let me pop these pills to stay awake for a few more years, to stave off Acheron the crossing with Charon at my side laughing and reassuring and adding another notch to his grim ledger. Five more words to go.



I

I am inside a crisis

others pass it by

(much time spent reading;

ignorance helps you accept)

I don't know what's round

the corner

but I'm fascinated

it will be something.

I'm falling down

what is called

'slippery slope'

further and further from all I had left

## The Sad Bastard

I am the sad bastard  
I'm the loneliest person in the world  
No one has ever thought my tragic thoughts  
I am the epitome of jade sensitivity, my  
every tender eyelash is a redwood of suffering,  
casting deepest roots, thirsting in an ocean of salty tears  
You chop me down with your callous vulgarity  
And I'm scorched in a desert of parched, harrowing doom;  
I pose my head down in this decayed leper's palm  
whimpering echo sounds into a blank white sheet  
I am the ghost that haunts my own soul in the dead of winter;  
If Sorrow were a televised reality show, I would be its mournful host,  
rejecting the make-up artist, offering my pocked-marked neck up  
to a coast-to-coast audience of unblinking executioners.

## pelican man

Looking for the pelican man  
always flies where he can't stand  
swallow worlds of fish and clam  
he lives in never never land

never known him, to deny  
he tends toward philosophy  
his dialectic iron clad  
he'll argue you to Hyderabad

Pelican bird, wing of steel  
beak to snap a turtle shell  
eyes finer than a china comb  
inner sensor leads him home

legs so supple, liver good  
his kidneys do as kidneys should  
gizzard is a masterpiece  
feathers light like heaven's yeast

I can't explain, such peli-charm!  
ornithic song of sweet disarm;  
he has a way  
of opening up  
and then you open up  
and then you never shut up  
about him  
Like a celebrity that way.

He's a king, this pelican  
sceptre golden in his craw  
lineage that rules man  
son of god or superman  
(I've heard the pope is quite a fan)

O you turkeys with your tryptophan  
know the joys of pelican!  
you can't believe it, but I can  
he's my pal, the pelican man

## Eric the Lungfish

Eric the Lungfish  
Pokes his eyeballs out  
He gets no support  
His spine like jelly  
It gives no support  
an amorphous moral  
In a classroom full  
Of six year olds  
They call him the freak;  
the board of education  
Should have seen this coming  
To treat him like a pet  
but he doesn't like  
To be touched.

Eric the Lungfish  
just a bit misunderstood  
Ah Miss Kimberly  
The only one who understands  
When he pokes his eyes out  
the kids scream and shout  
And Eric finally feels  
Like a human being.

Eric the Lungfish  
wasn't wanted by his mother  
They've got a pine box full at home  
of his funeral preparations  
But the doctors say  
he'll outlive them all  
That's right Eric—  
you show them.

Blind, deaf, mute  
like a lungfish  
He's Eric the Lungfish  
Heck for all we know  
He could be a  
Messenger from God.

## pain by numbers

addicted to the figuring  
eaten by arithmetic  
this is your brain, and  
we are getting sick of it  
always twisting on a calculator to  
quantify the strain  
hitched to the rhythm  
of a binary train

from now on I sing  
wear velvet, leather gloves  
hair slicked so well  
but I'm always out of love, like  
Elvis was king spell, a  
diplomatic dove  
until he started messing  
with that evil jezebel

your heart is bigger  
than a gigantic fuzzy banana  
your legs are stronger  
than the cement sidewalk in front of  
Keith's Fine Foods  
that's why I fall to pieces  
when you jump up and down

## Inside the whale

It's warm enough, but there's a decided lack of dryness;  
I wish I could get a television signal

I spend hours playing chess with a moray eel  
—eel mates me in 12 moves;  
I haven't been this upset since  
the glop of rotting plankton  
called my momma a whore

...tonight I'm thinking  
I'll make a pass at the blowhole

## God damned you

You goddamned faggot loving imperialist anti semite:  
You aren't Jewish; how could you understand?  
You weren't raised Catholic, so you can't know any better  
Ha—that's just what a Westerner *would* say about Islam

If you do, if you don't  
believe me  
—it doesn't matter: We got you. Damned.

## international conscience

holocaust drawn on a paper napkin  
missiles tossed like rice at a wedding  
numbers arbitrary, spoils divided  
sick and fast diplomatical joke

send the envoy home in a limo  
i'll tip the driver for him  
he steps out drunk and condescended  
r.o.w.'s outside for a smoke

presidents jabber the night away  
a genocide or not, tough call, sure  
weigh the cost, damn the torpedoes  
a few more dead, a few votes less

so Kyoto's not a top priority  
our mandate's clear—growth'll lead us  
(hey animals, go pray in the savanna  
ostrich squawking, head in sand, busy with worms)



### **to heal a shattered back**

take five years of agony  
add five years of therapy  
swim every day, mind you  
practise deep breathing  
and long stretching  
distract your soul with  
light reading while  
your body wages a  
grinding war of attrition  
on itself;  
whatever's left intact  
is a bonus.

### **to heal a shattered back II**

whatever you do,  
don't sit down  
or  
fall asleep

test me and I pass

my days are long windows into failure

a hot bath would fix everything

tell me again why you love me

I coughed on my pen,

dried up my anger

with a mop wringer

flowing across oceans, underneath

is the sand bed—

clams are the only trustworthy citizens.

too much connotation

a French sauce, prose disguised as verse

truth has flavours that don't need dressing

fresh produce of the mind

genetically modified opinions;

where does your love go

when you give it away

for free?

...and why doesn't the crossing guard

look back to see if

I need help on the sidewalk too



1978-2000

I remember, the call from

Toronto

was morning, beginning of month

in Kingston, October

Amanda told me what

*horror*

No that's not funny ... no no no it's not

(fall leaves, gorgeous rustle)

*his throat slashed*

no no no, I refuse this

*knife in hand.*

I remember, I

went back to school the

following week

I was numb

for a day or two

Every Thanksgiving I

think of him;

the wake was one thing, but

I'm sorry— *I couldn't bring myself to*

*face your funeral.*

I will pray to him

every Thanksgiving

until he

forgives me.

## difficulty in walking

conscious and not  
tired and awake  
straggling with sore knees  
bent, back like a beggar

quick, there's a sale at Yorkdale  
diamonds on Bay Street, go become a lawyer  
drain your brain of Sammy Twain  
Huck Finn and his Nigger Jim, and sly Tom Sawyer

I prefer the uptown traffic  
the easy pace of the Avenue  
condo folk talk Tommy Hilfiger  
I dry out over the Globe, inside a Second Cup

I am disappearing in a thousand ways today  
from all my loved ones  
spiders shirk the windy corridors  
stillness feeds insects and poetry

I lit the candle in the attic, set it on fire  
but then I smelled the café bagels  
blueberry maple and cream cheese  
and was reminded of my stomach

I drive down the street and park my Buick  
pop the trunk and grab the notebook  
buy a coffee and sit  
and talk to my pen  
I peek at pretty visions—  
but they don't look at scary men

## Mud puddle

I always burst;

I'm a storm cloud  
on the playground, and  
I collapse  
into a mud puddle.

they drill you from behind,  
snap your neck in two, and

bursting into tears—  
I'm alone in my silver car, I'm  
you never would have guessed it.

you grind up cigarette ash,  
crush your knuckles into dust  
chew your face off—

*be beautiful; baby, be beautiful*

I've got the warmest handshake in the room

*you're gonna grow tall and strong*

but whatever touched me, shook me silly

*two sides, same coin*

so I just bust out howling.

Ms. Apocalypse

the world died on a Monday evening

you were drying laundry on the line

AM radio going berserk

why would you notice, smoothing out creases

the power went out at 4:20 p.m.

porch birds picked at toast crumbs

while nuclear submarines set the coast on fire

you found matches, lit the stove, boiled a pot of tea

flesh-eating zombies knocked at your front door

"sorry," you said, "I don't have any cash"

they banged their feet, insisted on brains

how very crude—"how bout muffins instead?"

tanks rolled through your living room

you took the car out for a spin

guerrillas had blown up all of the bridges

so you pulled to the shoulder, popped in some jazz

"I'll be there soon," Ms. Apocalypse told me

whisper from a payphone, turn the Mustang around

the world had ended; I was hysterical

"Tonight," she said, "I'm coming for dinner."

## spicy jerk and guildwood park with the right beer

The giving constricting empowering urban grid we walk on, taking your cut at the door, the five bucks apiece for entry into bars. Detention cells federal fester with soulless criminals and the nearest unlocked door to hell, the late-night lampshade hooligans, the dampened enthusiasms of ornery minorities; how *triste* and bellicose you sound this morning my love, my grand, weird wet-walk brother-in-law! The things you do for family, the things you do every dawn in the bathroom, the teeth you brush with assiduous circular flicks of workaday wrists, the eternal nonagenarian who bakes a rhubarb pie, who asks you where you're going, but—thank heaven—she doesn't ask you why; today is the testing day, today is the only day. Have you seen the lights in Paris? Have those brigand raccoons caved in at your door, apologizing profusely, adding to the folklore? Evermore, how many hours—three or four? Spare an afternoon then ope the door, let's explore, a Sunday drive, let's go for it, into the city we've never seen before.

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Amid forbidding masses of fractured Greco-Romans, the laughably discordant statues in the Guildwood lakefront groves, the 100-foot cascade to the dimpled water down below, April shrieks sizzingly, a demonic blast from February, with a rusty chain fence separating us from the abandoned roadside inn. They are shut up til spring, those wooden huts where sculptors hide and scratch graffiti on Canadian granite, the heavily subsidized decay of the space they spend their days; oh delay delay delay—can there be another way? We've seen it now, we've seen enough, so let's be on our way.

\*\*\*\*

Kingston Road, a widening sprawl, the turnip farmers turned bingo-parlourers, the halting speech, wasted wisdom and the watered French onion melody and daffodil blooms, the wicked denial of the inquiry scapegoat, the ancient ginkgo tree, the meandering repeatedly duplicated sidewalk jostling, and the squawk-box Fokker pilots shooting Messerschmitts; the weather-vane robber barons and the Scarborough Pantera freaks, MotorHead rascals smashing beer bottles on sacred cemetery gravestones amid sugary Passover bitterness. (The roadway may be linear, orderly, but she blinds her driver in savage chaos.)

\*\*\*\*

Surprisingly strong, the ginger beer, the nip it gives, and I, the wimp, I fear. Can a red and yellow Caribbean restaurant make you homesick? In the case of my friend, yes; it's *plantins* not *plantains* she tells me, but is ecstatic all the same. Jamaica, mon, IRIE, it's that starchy sleepy afternoon roti, although the waitress was from Trini. But me? Me, I was contemplating the strip club over kitty corner, my salivating glands, wander in to Jilly's, check out our fillies, hobnob with 905 hillbillies and crackhead hellcats in the Queen-Broadview village. Oh how very very silly I am; now hose me off and take me home, to Avenue Road—I got a load still in the dryer, and Monday morning will be chilly.



## Wednesdays at the Mod

Shazbat shazoom, we enter the room, the last pit stop on the path toward doom; heaven sends visions to coerce the crowd, the saxophones sounding for the weak and the proud; it's another Wednesday in your charcoal city, I'm combing alleyways for pity's sake, fantasy, ecstasy, some ice cream cake, anything. Tonight's make or break: we take a piece of ass action, lap dance dissatisfaction, we can wiggle on after to Mississippi Jackson's—but nothing makes sense.

"Forget me not," whispers one-eyed Betty, until I tell her I'm related to Ed Lorenzetti—shrieks, "you Mafia goons ain't welcome here; keep that drink and finish your beer"—cackles curses til I'm blue in the face, the Sad Sack Sisters just smack me with the mace. Cellephones clanging in the midst of a skull, come out Alexander to the conqueror's ball: back up to wall, rohypnoled bottles, but we don't fall, pressure's intense against balcony rails; ha ha Betty, it's Murphy's law: the chicks in red, tall heels, getting hit up for feels in strapless sequin dresses, pink Medusa tresses, I'm guessing she's a call girl, y'all.

Bass is pumping, girls and boys in back stalls humping—little does she know he's got the clap; little does she care; it's laser lights, it's dry ice nights in bleary-eyed dazes, it's all about scraps, the visceral commotion in the sex club trap.

## Munici Pal

lost in the suburbs, my city's a mess  
litter on the sidewalk, Cinderella gets undressed  
hard to move, traffic like a knot  
may be time to take a toll  
but the mayor might get shot

my city has a fever;  
big guns, four-wheelers  
who needs a car that size—  
oil barons in Arabia?  
the great Canadian beaver?

clean up city hall, weed out the Gardiner, sweep traffic underground  
build a car bridge over boats to help planes  
bust unions, chop em up like onions  
don't kowtow to big business  
more cops on the street, get em on the beat  
a little girl gets kidnapped—ain't that sweet

stuck in the left-turn lane  
oncoming trucks don't stop  
run a red, hop a yellow, go for the green  
pedestrians—look at em scatter, it's  
like shooting immigrants on a ferry  
or Peking duck in a barrel  
or Vietnamese gangsters at Queen and Ossington

Lorraine's a hooker on Wellesley  
Jeanie's magic with her fingers  
Betty's got a great bust

my Toronto's crumbling;  
can we blame the upper crust?

## graffiti on the sidewalk

You weren't born here, that's why you don't care  
You've come to make your money  
Laugh to relatives back in Nepean,  
Antigonish, Victoria, about dirty old Hogtown  
Suck us dry, you south-of-Bloor daytrippers  
Short-lived big smokers  
your tax-farming parents enjoy their \$20-billion Xmas present?  
Please, ride our subway day and night—we built it just for you  
So you shouldn't bring a car  
No you're afraid of the traffic,  
*Drive on the 401?— barbaric*  
Study, play, dream on the College St. scene, it's ok  
You post-grad potheads don't pay taxes anyway  
Go, end up somewhere in Brampton, or Pickering, nowhere  
Feed the bedroom ant colonies with  
your upper-middle downtown jobs  
Like those 905 leeches  
You'll drive an SUV by then, you  
won't mind clogging the DVP and Gardiner  
on your way to Bay St. then  
But you'll flip at the prospect of road tolls  
And won't vote in our elections  
Don't go to town hall, hell  
you don't go north of Dupont (*Jane and Wilson? No way, I'll get shot!*)  
You bastard Canadians, fair-weather urbanites, it's YOU with the identity crisis, you  
hypocritical shits, your naked envy makes me blue in the face  
Condescending visits to our 'ethnic' neighbourhoods  
Giddy and nervous in a city so off-white  
*Oh it's so exotic on Queen Street*  
*Oh, Toronto is home to all kinds*  
But the pierced pale-skin young folk, getting tattooed on West Queen West? that's YOU  
from Sudbury, St. John's and the Soo—  
escaping those empty shitholes  
'cause this is the only place would tolerate freaks like that  
But I am sick of it; sick of you hick transplants and your bigoted provincial parents  
You're why we got 5,000 homeless—so your uncle's pig farm doesn't go under;  
why we can't extend the goddamned subway tunnels,  
Why we got crumbling sidewalks; while your cousins drink subsidized Molsons on the back forty  
So go head back to Sarnia and Red Deer and Moncton and Kelowna for the holidays  
And hear mom and dad bitch, how big fat and ugly Toronto is  
And crap on the Maple Leafs, and piss in our Lake poisoned with acid rain  
...But don't forget to make phone reservations  
for Mirvish's 'Mama Mia'—the Mother's Day, matinee showing—  
and you'll wander on after to Eaton Centre food court for  
maybe some spring rolls and a raspberry smoothie, and  
*maybe we'll take the rickshaws dad, you'll say, but only*  
*if the smog's not too bad, and so*  
the hobos won't assault  
you with their cap-rattling guilt trips.

### 30 days till spring

Garish in the morning rush hour, the daisy buds in the amazing clay pot of destiny. The warmth of the breeze, the huckleberry bosom of my beauty by the bay, the ruby pearl smile of my lover, the honey I slather over Sunday morning waffles, the peck of the baby chick cozy in my palm: these are good things and I will protect them, save them from your tyranny.

A twinkle of a far off star, which had so much hope, to see us miles and miles from the quasar, to see us as we really are: riddles rhyming un-metric time, the 60 beats per minute of your hopeful heart, the hop and skipping limits; the undulating omniscience of the great blue whale, telling tales at such frequencies that humans can't perceive; the winter birds returning to give hope to a frozen people, who see the worst is over—the cycle, the wheel of Fortuna finally reversing her favour, the profit realizing on those hard years of thankless labour; the reward of a job well done, the scotched Christmas wrapping—will it hold, or does it come undone?

Geriatric Hades and Persephone, beneath the surface of this planet, bickering thickly over a pomegranate; the rhetorical flourish of a Roman orator, atop the rostrum eating ear niblets bought from a Thracian vendor of animal parts; the crowd parts at beck and call, they are marvelling at the totality of his knowledge, the transparent displays of intelligence; don't they gasp and sway at his furrowed brow, curled in dismay, exhorting them to tax delay, to withhold from the Senate their hard earned crops, the tears and sweat mopped from buttery Etruscan foreheads?

Elvis Presley charisma and the twang of a banjo gets your pelvis dripping with readiness to kiss the man and go go go down to the record shop to snag his latest disc, product of his voice and the machinations slick of a record company exec who's got a wife and kids to feed so why not, what the heck—ride that Alabama boy good and hard, cash another paycheque. Why not indeed—turn your best friend in to police if he is a communist; if you're not with us you're with them, or least, you're with someone else. But no, you protect the good inside your friend; the yellow, the grey, the banana boat fantasies we're dreaming every day.

And if reading this you conclude that worms are inside of me, that the parasite has taken hold, then step back, look at yourself, check your head for colds, and sure you'll see a different shape unfold: the fortune five hundred destiny of my piddling ink motorway, the black umbrella opened in the back of the barn, the iodine pills keeping your blood good and thin, the bigot paradise where Klanners plan community retreats, ridiculing a dwarfish talk show host who has a weekly segment titled 'tall tales of the outrageous kind'—the irony being short men can't be tall, irony being the description of that which is iron, the irony being being an extraterrestrial made of iron hence described as irony, the irony being being the state that that being is alive, which is better, to be alive rather than not you will concur, and you will endure my thousand words of pap just to retrieve one nugget of clarity—at least I offer joviality—and the saleable output of this fevered typing, um, maybe not so good for business, but good for a good laugh. Ah, yes, time for a nap.

## not in my backyard

the sign says  
"no trucks"  
mommy, daddy get  
that mack daddy  
off my street  
he's spilling coal  
into my drive  
such chunky bulk  
I'll call police  
I'll your tow dirty truck  
and teach you to be neat

sure I drive a Navigator  
but that's a nicer kind of truck  
plus  
I work so hard each every day  
to make an honest buck

there's a difference see  
between my truck and yours:

my model's built to be elite, but  
your nasty beast just roars and roars and roars...

## Thoughts as I eat my lo mein

Desperate China men sold as slaves  
break into an immigration office, or class room  
in Canada, where  
Chings and Changs become Barrys and Daves  
they dance hidden, in metal coffins, writhing by the score  
reborn upon arrival, cross the callous ocean floor

To learn to speak is not so easy  
suckers for a fake to help them out  
they sacrifice a thousand times  
perhaps, for once, it work out

I walked into those rooms one month  
saw twelve dozen pair of slanty eyes  
full and eager, the desire to please  
to live the cool land, to mock the Japanese

To earn bread daily, and not worry about the roof  
caving in, or the red men from the prefecture  
who rob the cradles  
and burn the books

And maybe one day some ancestors return  
to keep them company  
so far from grandmothers and the home  
they left in order to love it  
finally

they came here to live new  
already forgetting old ways  
thousands dying to forget  
they've made it here, begin at last.

But who will help them now?

**Rat-tat-tat (hip beat to hop to)**

*Rat-tat-tat (shoot up his window)*  
*Rat-tat-tat (oh your poor husband)*  
*Rat-tat-tat (now you're a widow)*

Up near Finch Ave. and McCowan  
where the cops don't know  
who wants to rat  
no one talks  
gangbangers walk  
where CityPulse won't even go  
it's *rat-tat-tat*, and  
Chief Fantino has a coronary.

And in Rexdale where  
there's a hundred languages  
spoken  
but all the street kids hear  
is *rat-tat-tat*;  
they all get  
what's going down  
and everything is broken.

But in Bluffer's Park,  
not far from Malvern  
when the sun reflects  
you find a quiet bay  
far from shattered glass  
away from *rat-tat-tat*;  
where seagulls, swans, ducks and geese  
coexist in peace,  
and all you hear  
is  
the wind and the waves.

## MayDay

What's a May Friday, without visiting the zoo? It was a day without you... It was a lonely drive in the afternoon, it was over and through to Scarborough, Old Finch Rd; it was a narrow roadway underpass in thawed and gaping dumping grounds, where rubbish sits, gathers and makes chaos of our birthright. And despite the hollering army of trees—annual over-the-top charges into budding green defiance—it was a sermon half-listened-to. And despite obscene moments of occasional piety, they'll gasp still, come June, trees in full flower, startling regenerative gasping power, gasping in their final hour. But they're gassed too in the rushing zoom, around and through, by Oxy-3 and SO<sub>2</sub>, gassed by me and gassed by you—passing gas, we pass the zoo. Ok, we say, boo hoo, but what's a car to do? It does—we say it does—it does what it will do...



## The Lady and The Snake

My Lady begged unto The Mayor:

"I am choking, Doctor Miller,  
your 401's grown into some  
black asphalt Anaconda;  
this highway beast is swallowing me,  
my arteries sluggish and hardening; please, won't you  
prescribe your laws, and let me breathe?"

The Mayor said unto The Lady:

"You're seething with the reptile's virus, it's  
called 'MercedesHondaBuicks'; luckily  
there are vaccines up my sleeve  
—a dose of TTC will do it—  
but if I can't kill this bloated snake  
to Doctor Ottawa we'll plead."

But The Driver cursed unto The Mayor

"You're nothing but a quack;  
you're better off to feed the snake, and  
hitch your wagon to its back;  
I may someday ride the Rocket Red unto  
the rescue, to bring your Lady back, but until  
that fancy day should come, you'll cut the motorist some slack!"

Hark I hear my Lady wheeze; I finally make my choice:

"Liar Liar, Mr. Driver, your tailpipe's on fire,  
and the devil's in this concrete serpent's spiralling coil,  
strangling, spitting smog and oil, until she's hoarse;  
Milady's ill, I know her well,  
I spent a life walking astride her;  
she's inside me still, though pale now; I'll lend to her my voice."

So I march to the edge of the Avenue path, where

there, I stare at it, squeezing slowly 'neath the overpass;  
high atop its shimmering, scaly mass, I holler at The Snake:  
"Hie thee hither, Mr. Python; you can consider me St. Pat;  
do your best to heed me, and dare not my Lady take;  
go swallow someone else's town, or  
slither back into The Lake!"

But with noxious carbon venom, its hissed monoxide breath

The Snake has kissed My Lady City  
with the crude exhaust of death, whispering unto her:

"I grow fat on your vitality,  
I expand with all my gluttony  
You're addicted to my enormity;  
and I'll feast upon your breast."

And so we dare not exterminate  
The Snake, or drive it underground  
for it's wormed its way into her fibre,  
wasting, rusting till she's brown  
From suburbs to the Gardiner, the Snake poisons our plans  
And the Don will no more teem with fish  
Because the Valley's paved with fangs.

## Loveless Rita

Loveless Rita, lesbian  
power trips in single file  
perches, swoops as time expires  
pitiless tagging parking cars

Arrive at dash, five minutes late, the  
coldblooded bitch doesn't hesitate  
what can you do, it's all she wrote  
all she left is a yellow note

Her methodical cop car, outta the blue  
I rush inside to tell you, then  
it's acrobatic adrenaline haste to  
outrance relentless Rita's pace

Mocked, loathed, scorned, feared  
sows resentment with her pen  
the eight by ten notice clearly warns of  
Rita's wrath in rush hour

But we despise you Rita; you're who we blame  
(bottom of police food chain)  
our every meeting is the same—it's  
20 more smackers, down the drain.

Susie and the tomcat (vigilante justice)

Sexy Susie walks a lot  
a good thing she's wired  
Sexy Susie works the corner  
until she gets hired  
But Sexy Susie pulls a gun  
points it at the Rat  
Sexy Susie doesn't blink she's  
—fired just like that.

## Murdered on a sideroad

Evil inhabits the unseen spectre  
Gleaming with a laugh, an average insane Hector  
Knife blade grins in the summer-sweet air  
Driven through the jugular, bitten through her hair  
Laid and left to bleed in the seldom service road,  
Memories of Steinbeck and the anger inside Joad  
Cruisers on the radar range, sight a speeding Chev  
Witness frantic sheriffs, tracking footsteps hot as lead  
A trust to dismiss a lawsuit and the settlement denied  
The townsfolk choke on disbelief—their baby, she had died  
Angel up to age eighteen, a woman in the wings  
Taken on a Sunday, you don't pray those kind of hymns

## Floppy fish

Floppy fish gasping on the dockside pier, I'm a fisher without peer, wiping down the tables with a moistened veneer. The killer cleavage of that woman, and what's she doing with that man? Redwood sturdiness, café flirtiness, the best dressed-up comment to impress the guests, when salty pretzel snacks don't pass the test—it's a jungle out there my snake-flake favourite mistake heart breaking out in sweat shake faker. Whizzled, woozled until I hear hip-check heart attack illegal knee on knee a neon symphony; frock, sock and chopping block, smockwearing clockmakers tick tick tick from Bell's Palsy, and Admiral Halsey was a good song by Wings, and the first time you read this'll be the only first time, and after it is analysis and meaning and never again enjoyment unless something sticks and then it's the secondary joy of psychic anticipation. But **never give yourself a name or number you can't live up to**, like when I was 11 and I wore 99 on my back and I don't think I scored one goal all year. And who walks in and who walks out—and why are you afraid, not of being alone, but of appearing to be alone? Because we don't want people in the bathroom when we're taking a dump; we don't want to ride an elevator with anybody. Dristan revisited, Tylenol inquisited, miles of paper statutes replaced by metrical digitization, pulmonary artificial respiration, the resuscitation of resurrection theories, and clown seltzer-spray water-bottle instruction manuals—talk about overkill. Peony pot shards and card shark lowlifes, crowing strife and advocating oversimplified reductionist solutioneering, to marginalize and eliminate bureaucratic waste, and for slippery civil servants the public is enemy number one; oh the tiresome endless agony of democratic debate!

## Sour & Sweet

### Sour

Gimme liberty or gimme debt relief, just gimme a minute to sell my soul. And the jerks who cut me off in the left-turn lane, I'm gonna brain them painful with a frying pan, cuz I'm a man who can't stand breaches of roadway etiquette, what with charcoal briquettes bought recently sitting in a truck, it's enough to remind me of my down-on-my-luckedness, or the woken conscience of the quaking Loch Ness wildebeest, the rising of the dough despite the paucity of yeast. And the younger ones are dismissed as ignorant of this, so it's left up to seniors to calibrate the nation, but they're wearing adult diapers—that's love they won't be making.

I called you Fiona but you shat on my shoes, so I grabbed my guitar and drizzled some blues; I am Sad Stan Wild, the October child of a mild-mannered trucker, carting goods to the electric river of indifference; I'm sucking on my thumb but you don't mind; I am sour ever after as I peel the lemon rind. And daily nightmares jostle me to sleep, but the incubi are stinky—they refuse to wash their feet; so I'm gorging on platefuls of veggie crudité, while the erudite librarians are haggling over the Dewey Decimal Festival party protocol, and sheesh, man, I tell ya, "manic, mercurial, ocean-parting" Moses knows where I put his clothes: it's a place behind the stairs, where the danger women stare, laughing so politely and wishing I was there.

### Sweet

Here's to sunshine and motherhood and flowers on Father's day: I'm against all manner of sullenness, in favour of silliness, I'm here proclaiming symphony, announcing a race to the top of knolls, to place a flag atop a pole, to suck a jelly donut hole; smiles follow frowns, they circle around, upside down—they make a person whole.

On with the fun you humbug huns, let's fire up the Barbie; call your gravy baby and purchase wieners, send your nice dress to the cleaners, as we watch the Saturday evening Cleveland Steamers; tonight we get high in the sugar mines—we are the Daring Dream-Schemers. And as rays of light shine out my ass, exposing dumbass twits, I notice your girlfriend Velma, she makes you happy—and what a pair of tits!

## My Cat

My cat, he slinks

He drinks his water regally, quiet and royally  
Ferally stalking, he's walking or ambling

Finally feeling sane, he pauses—

feline claws clenched for an ambush

(A fine game of rat or mouse. Oh to kill and eat a defenseless baby duck!)

He stops stalking when I look at him

he returns my stare, glowering. I glare, almost glowing. Mad at my cat. Why,  
he doesn't even love me, my tabby. Me?

Ok, so I am chatty, admittedly. Lonely yes, but dares he pity me?

Me, his master? How durst he!

Must he? This cat of mine, coughing up a dust ball! Nine lives, p'shaw!

First of all: "Get off the couch, you hairy beast," I shout right through my home

For now he brushes against my leg, and again against his scratching post

fur rubbing gently now

almost erotic for such a heavy pet

almost 'sexy'

like the clubs on Queen Street where I feel like

the real deal

or the ace of hearts.

And I'm on fire, shuffled out onto the deck for smoking,

but it's like I'm burning, stuck in the mud

smoking outside the clubs

before leeches lovers sucking on each other

wannabees, really

full of beans. They're for the birds

not for me,

Me alone out on in the courtyard on a Friday night,

But it feels like a Wednesday

In there, inside there

I am the dancing king

in rooms full of sweaty courtiers.

Those are diamonds in their eyes

"Oh, but you're so shiny"—that's what they tell me, tauntingly

*Don't patronize me,*

I feel like scowling, but instead

I walk away

I want to say, "Listen cats, you do as I say."

"You're just cats; you can't speak English—you depend on me in every way."

But

with agility they leap away

And I think,

*oh you silly cat,*

*you stinky dirty rat—*

*I'll have your ass one day.*



## You and Me

Goonish, prudish, I was withered on the vine  
    you opened me slowly, and we had a good time  
I tweezed out all my facial hair  
    you took those estrogen pills  
I recommended beer, domestic  
    you dismissed it as swill  
I'm worried for society  
    and you're an anarchist  
I asked you please to feel my lump  
    you said "it's just a cyst."

You showed me Tarantino  
    I was shocked at his mouth  
I asked you where's your moral compass  
    "always pointing south"  
You took me to the pervert opera  
    "assless leather is the bomb"  
I sang the naked arias  
    You got your freak on.

You and me, we got on famous  
    my love was sacred, like the bible  
Hosea and his wayward wife  
    You played me like Delilah.

(checking the dictionary for the meaning of life) Nov 3 poem

Colon flips, a sonar blip, tasting ratatouille. Logs in the Lincoln, Beverley Hills Hilton, the ash tree threatened by a little Asian bug, pewter mugs and the war on drugs, fried bat wings, the perpendicularity of things. Orthogonal, diagonal, high pot in use. Wembley stadium Mississauga Playdium, the knack for the wiring and the electrician I never hired. Eglinton and Avenue, the need for venue, retinue, the feudal dues, the poverty of Chad. Big band went bad, too many strings play original things, Britney, Christina, an Oscar Meyer wiener. The drama in a teapot, a tour of Islamabad. Rock Jakarta and you're joking, the prohibitiveness of smoking, the technology for cloaking, it fascinates my aunt. Lionel Hutz, cosmic klutz, a skater's triple lutz, it's like robbing all the banks. Toned firm calf, a subtle bit of cleavage, knighthood for Sir Burbage, let's burn all the garbage. Yodel on the boulevard, take a tour of Scotland Yard, root out all the evil, bleach kills pesky weevils, teetering but stable like a mountain trolley cable. Wiggins and the bum show, bombarding all of Tokyo, reasons I don't like Yoko. Pickles in the ozone, quirks of clowny Bozo, gyrate through Yom Kippur. Assiduous in meaning, with difficulty gleaning, a need for dry cleaning, the juice tastes like chicken pie. Venerable and withered, Mr. Weatherbee and Grundy, something pops into mind and so I write it down.

## Peanut butter on a celery phone

A man who walks and talks on a cell phone  
smothered with peanut butter,  
creamy thick paste,  
He has a face that reminds me of someone's father  
too old, too tired too tied-up to bother  
a spare tire  
I have three.  
They are good to me and I live happily far far from them  
and maybe they'll stop kidding me  
and maybe they will phone  
or maybe they'll just watch me on TV.

won't eat celery stalks  
or any other crop or crap  
crushed nuts with almond taste.  
Or is it fate?  
too mild, the child, forgetting, forgotten, forget him  
in the water I swim, I can float, I'm a boat  
a bacon wagon, a joke, or a lover  
I'm King Arthur, brothers; I have read big books (but never Gulliver)  
O, Arthur, authors—big red books, borrowed from my brother  
Brothers.

## threeminute throwaway

love drugs n sex n sad  
wunnaytee seconds till it  
ends up bad  
chorus zips  
zaps me clean  
big fad momma is a  
beauty queen  
catchylil mambo  
dirtiosbcene  
you know what I know it's  
u no wut eye mean?

## Penny on the ground

Penny on the ground, every day pick it up  
One cent closer to your dream home  
No room for it in your pockets;  
maybe buy more pants first?

Gregor turned to something ugly  
an insidious insect  
gave the world something beautiful  
Did anyone expect his soul?

Zundel deported to Canada  
land that welcomes Nazis  
Lollipop sugar is sweeter when licked  
Is it ok to be racist, if you are a hot chick?

Alright, you convinced me, let's get outta here  
Aren't you tired of repetition  
these quadruplicating rhythms  
this mental taxation?

I'm just sitting here  
pretty much ok; all I need is  
1600 calories every day, to stay alive, is all I need  
a love of routine, and the daily news?

Cover letter #99

Dear sire

You can kiss my ass

I wouldn't bother asking you to hire

Me

But I feel like putting myself through the  
wringer today

And the rent is due tomorrow

If I call you boss, you can call on me

I guarantee:

No one smokes pipe quite like me;

So please, roll down those pants,

Stick that hand up my dress

—and I'll wipe you up after

with my perfumed résumé

## Respectfully declining hospitality

The beaver chews a log  
leaves soggy  
dried out in the cabin  
smoking wood and salmon  
humming birds sip honey  
tinker bell ringing on the phone;  
farmer's wife takes my pulse  
'you should eat a banana'  
I nod 'good advice' and roll a fag.

-----

I need to find  
a newspaper  
to check out 'New in Homes'  
looking for a place to rent  
among the catacombs.

-----

I ran away from winter  
out of gridlock, into crowded  
blankness, muffled  
hitchhiking on the off ramps  
stuck out my swollen tongue  
cursed at by underpass tramps—  
'get your own damn place to think.'

I snuck into the dressing room  
Cherry Blossom Studios  
asked the makeup artist  
to make me Valentino  
but he laughed and rolled his eyes  
--'we don't condone libido.'  
I enlisted at the dating base  
clicked on the singles scene  
(I don't mind discrete reminders  
like 'you could use some Listerine')

I dried out on the wagon  
the vodka cured my knees  
but it made me vicious  
too

I never knew what dreams were true  
I always woke up screaming.

So I begged my professor  
a reference letter  
a scholastic potpourri  
'please send it by December  
addressed to Mr. Gandhi'  
(not making love  
or war  
sounds like  
a good idea to me.)

And yesterday  
I was cutting up an onion  
—tears add flavour to soup—  
when you walked in with  
a five-course dinner  
from a five-star restaurant;

and so  
so much  
for honest eating,  
what could I do but  
accept  
you in my home?

by dessert  
I knew  
I had chewed up dignity  
when  
I chose your bone.



riff#99

Hey miss  
can we talk for a while?  
Hey miss  
can you outlast  
the only thing I ever gave you?

I am done and over the hill  
we can talk about the rest  
of the world after noon.  
we can talk about the only thing I ever tasted  
that was bitter.

pleasure trips inside  
the only feeling we had was jealousy,  
the only first draft ever written was meant  
to make you cry, tears of presumptuous agony

## Isabella

'her grandmother and my grandmother  
were cousins  
that makes us cousins'  
third-cousins  
you just called us friends  
but I never met anyone  
like you  
I'm sorry  
I was too mortified to  
tell you  
I was sort of  
*innamorato* but  
I'm sure you could tell that  
anyway; after all  
We are family.

Ecco il mio amore (song for De Andre)

I met you in January, four years  
after you died  
-it was cancer of the liver-  
the two of us in my father's country;  
you would have been 63.

I heard you soft, lilting  
singing in my father's tongue, after  
I finally learned to speak it;  
my timing wasn't right  
but yours was always perfect.

I was only three when  
you asked me "where,"  
"where is your love?" and  
"when did your heart die?"  
but I never answered, I was just a child.

21 years flew, and  
"they're coming to ask about our love"  
for once I did not hesitate;  
we sang of Marinella  
and the king who kissed a prostitute.

And they kidnapped you; locked you in a cave  
that's where love, red love, got you  
-to the Mountaintop Hotel-  
how you forgave those bastards  
I'll never understand.

Then, you fell. To me, it mattered  
you're far away, that matters too  
so I play a record for you  
a candle song to you  
wishing I had met you.

But I swear, that afternoon  
on the church steps, in the porticoed city  
-such human, wistful sound-  
a guitar and young man made music  
he was you, Fabrizio; he was you, and I was found.

## Sandra

She's no longer around, not in Kingston town  
    One extra frown, here in town  
Stop the parade and kill the clowns;  
Clean the yard and clear the grounds:  
    She's not around.  
        Not here. Nope, outta town.

I miss her by the pole  
I miss her two-room hole  
    on Frontenac St., by the school,  
        Where the hackey-sackers slacked  
    (when hackey-sacks were cool.)

I'll see her in the fall, I guess  
    and she'll buy me a sub and laugh at me  
        'oh pat you silly mystery'  
        'less is more, and more is best'  
    and so we'll play at verbal chess  
        when breezy trees undress  
            and colours change and pigdogs fly, I guess

I'll tell her how I wish I was black  
    how 'not so bad' is really good  
        and the difference between 'could' and 'should'  
            between what feeds and what's food  
            between bad people and bad moods.

And she'd fake a heart attack  
    when I showed her how I waxed my ass  
        Oh yes I swear she would

Let's face facts:  
    i am a hack  
        a talking ape with a broken back  
            one-half too intense; at the same time detached  
    a gasoline inhaler with a strike-anywhere match  
        'Floom' goes the flame and I torch the past  
        as I sit in the mirror and paint a new mask.

A mask—that's my task—all complex with colour  
That shimmers like a ribbon or a beard on a scholar  
    a face I could trade for one or two dollars  
    or a coffee stain and a poet's pen  
        all new wave funky with dreamy zen  
    maybe black & blue, or even white-collar  
I'll sit still, read, and paint and holler  
    and smile  
    sit still and smile  
while I track down my friend  
    and ask her to read this again and again.

**Today** is a sunny day, sunnier than most.

**Today** I am choosing a different font. **Today** I walked around and not once did anyone point out how worn out my shoes are. I haven't got it all figured out **Today**. **Today** I did my laundry, as I did fourteen days ago. I haven't kissed anyone **Today**. **Today** I got good news. **Today** I wished I never got old. **Today** I walked in snow. I am trying too hard to be original **Today**. **Today** was lonely. **Today** I have plenty of friends. **Today** my parents weren't right. I really should get a job **Today**. **Today** the wind was not so cold, nor the pavement too hard. **Today**, I am going to play. I wish I could tell you I had something to say **Today**. **Today** I was looking for some simple beauty. I cleaned the floors **Today**—they get so dirty when you don't pay attention. **Today** you walked past the house, and I never saw you again. **Today** you got someone else's mail sent to your place. **Today** you didn't have the guts to tell me off. **Today** I made you smile. **Today** dust is collecting on my desk. **Today** laughter is still free. **Today** somebody won the lottery. **Today** planes bombed a city. **Today** is too obvious for sarcastic people.

I am not gay **Today**. I need to shave **Today**. **Today** cockroaches are getting along just fine. **Today** I looked for God. **Today** was "all about Vietnamese cuisine". **Today** is as good as any. **Today** I ripped off Van Halen. **Today** today, tomorrow the world. **Today** the blues are playing in that building--the one with the clock tower. I didn't just sit around **Today**. **Today** your favourite teacher was thinking about you. **Today** I couldn't handle the pressure. **Today** I am for sale. **Today** your eyes said something different to me. **Today** you ran, and once you run you will never stop running. **Today** I almost got run over by a truck, seriously. **Today** you told me the one about the Pope and Racquel Welch in a lifeboat ("...those aren't buoys!"). **Today** I have to go. I am missing you **Today**. **Today** is all we got. **Today** is Saturday.

man in mirror

I am good

*I know this is true*

you are good also

*I hope you do too*

**please don't leave**

I woke this morning in  
an empty bed,  
piled up  
with  
every letter you  
ever wrote me;

you said you would  
call me  
in the afternoon;  
I waited until  
midnight  
—now I'm turning  
into  
a pumpkin.

when I was a boy,  
I had a friend,  
his name was Jonathan;  
I wonder if you two  
somewhere, are having a coffee  
and laughing at me?

## Tony the Tiger

*Pucks and sticks and pickup bricks. Licks and phones and caked-on bones, but drains swill lever curtly. Round tree vagabonds and the night of friable onions. Lost in the day's ending, away from the time of men, wheezing and sneezing causes pollution of the mind soul body and loins; verbosity and pomposity go hand in hand Here we dance and away we tuck the little tykes and the bed phones mothers use to check on their infants, those are out of batteries, I'm afraid. Can the drinking continue? Can the weather change for the better? Will the waste come back to kill him? The negative and lovely positive, flower grass and sails, half-mast, blow down wind, cut away at the galley.*

The cutlass and the sabre, rattle in the naval, the harbour, men born with no navels, the ocean that time forgot... and so it goes unto nigh, never-ending and always bending, lectures of Aristotelian nomenclature, and getting to know the properties of things. And speaking of knaves, Plato's in his cave, and Socrates is drunk again—time to drag out the vote, the fool Athens gadfly. Though to Delphi he's wise, it's the council has spoken, and he really must die. Executed. Tis a shame: he's a good chap deep down, in spite of his lies.

Oh my brain, with its plasticine furrows and squirreling burrows. A rat and a mouse tucked away in my house, so we talked of our lives in the four-legged joust. Rodents digging and chewing and hiding, from trouble brewing and the pouncing--of the cat in the maze who had seen better days. A dog on the fence pants; blowin' in the wind is a papyrus bone, artifact of Egypt or a mummified tome. So he chases his tail, befriends a few snails, in cavernous jails out under a rock, unaware of the clock and the one woollen sock. The dog did advise him 'beware of the salt and the kids with their shoes'. But he boozes, confuses; he tries but he loses. A snail that's crushed—it's sticky and oozes, texture of mucus, it resembles what glue is. And though I love symphony I'm a mango off a fruit tree. A fool who jabbers. A nation that clobbers, a toddler who stammers will one day become a failed young writer, a typing machine, a reporter with dreams. Take down good notes, I'm afraid you'll elope; we try not to touch, we are frogs and we croak.

Wither spoons, and where are the forks; annoying the clown is a kid with a cork. Have you unstopped the wine? It goes rancid and sweet, drunk by the elite; municipal taxpayers vote with their feet. A cold cup of beer and a dog can't be beat. I flavour my soup with red pepper jelly, an anonymous tip-toe to town hall and Eddies—that's Shack and the Eagle, hockey game beagles. (The currents of power with toasts of the town. Whether mayo or mustard, the sandwich goes down.) Afar and beyond the men with their togas, or an Indian's claim about yogurt and yogas. A rose from the butler would never debase you, I said to the receptionist crossing the stairs. She swore and she chuckled, as she pulled out her hair.



A dragonfly gnome can toss around foam, but so can mechanics with urethane blends, or a sweet song from Sloan—*The Lines You Amend*. A chased shooter with lime, stuffed cupboards of thyme. Unpack the washcloths and figure a rhyme. Eaten and tasted, arrive all thin-waisted, you're drained from your travel in a nation lambasted. Inundation, props and paper, or a woman from Gander, a political snitch and a fresh gerrymander. Have you ever observed so many wrong curves, faulty strokes of the palette, this fog dressed as Zen? Derivative drivels and a pantry of shelves, will the gnome and his foam ever sleep with the elves? Or even with men? A racial divide or elision collides. Eyes of a squid, a giant with lids—the size of a legion, it's his left carotid. The French coast off the Atlantic or an even derision. I tried to outswim him but he hates long division, so I fed the remainder to math books and wolves. The victims burn incense, the stench will melt roads. Decisions, delays, false sonnets and odes. Crumble and tumble, infrastructure erodes.

Power blockage angers the electorate. Tone down the rhetoric and try not to fake it. McGuinty and Eves, they watch from the trees, flip-flopping again like the wind and the leaves. Don't stain your clothes from the dying of colours, voters aren't stupid—they're not like your brother. Frowning's a lion, some frugal inveterate, a rabbi of Zion, a bully for temperance. A zealot can block the Quebecois talk, but smoke's not enough for the walkers in chalk. Laboratory assistants are shaving their whiskers (and now rumour has it they don't clean their beakers); outsourcing to minions, the chemistry majors, alone with their burners, zinc-sniffing with neighbours. Jim Henson's a muppet, it's true he ain't swift. Jonathan or Gulliver—down by the station, a string quartet nation, all up in elation 'bout this B.C. conflagration—it's a clear indication: we all need a lift.

Flaubert and the Madame, the changing of seasons. Feminism unleashed with a thousand good reasons. But now ladies—you believe this?—they most miss their manners, confounding the alders, the right-thinking town planners. A new bathroom was devised, with equity in mind and tradition revised—but the women are reneging the teeth they excised. And all around here there is lust in the air; the young ones walk naked and their mothers don't care. Beatify Mary, an immaculate virgin; fish for disciples in a lake full of sturgeon. Go ahead, I don't care, I'm a roundabout Charlie; there's just one way to skin me or ride on my Harley. Call up and ask for the lazy tromboner, or the urbanite poet on the path toward stoner. Call me, I'll answer, I got the afternoon off. Stick your thumb down my throat; I promise I'll cough.

### Stuck in the Friend Zone\*

When I see that person sitting across from you, chatting idly, I envy them.  
Whoever can sit across from you, who can stare at you, and not have their body burn, I envy.

    You glow like nobody else I know glows.  
That person must be gay, I think, don't they realize who they're talking to?

I can't believe I even know you.  
You torture me with the life you have within you.  
When you smile you exalt and mock me at the same time.  
There needs to be a law against people like you, just walking around.

When you tell me you are alone, I hate it. It just teases me.  
I hate it when you tell me you are looking for someone—  
    Goddammit I am sitting right in front of you.  
        How I hate you for being so cruel and stupid. Go to hell.

I try to smile when you tell me about your latest worthless fling.  
    I try so hard to keep up with you, chasing after a dozen others  
        Chasing after nothing  
            To keep us safe  
    You and me—our friendship, at least—is real  
        When everything else is just hormones

I've tried so hard to conceal this; I fail even at that.  
I've told myself you don't want me to be the one who makes you happy.  
    You don't even want to be happy.

why don't we just have sex  
    So we can ruin everything  
        So we can get it over with already

\*NB sarcastic title added by the author three years later, in revenge against his emotions

## money is love

they say it can't buy it  
of course it can  
it's raw potential  
in the palm of your hand  
so if it can't buy it  
nothing can.  
soon all transactions will be measured  
in l-o-v-e  
because we know  
that's all  
that's worth  
buying.

## What to do, if you're you

Ask me for the password  
To get into the club  
What gets you past  
The big fat bouncer  
is: "Let it all hang out."

Hey—let it all hang out  
Hey—  
Let it all hang out  
is a song if  
you're barely hanging on

I let it all hang  
And you kicked me  
Beat me  
But I'm better than you, 'cause  
I was hanging when I sang

So hang in  
Baby, shake that thing  
You get so tired but  
don't hold back  
now—Let it all hang  
Out.

## horsetorcher

no bull  
or excuse  
no more of that—  
I am back  
and  
this is called a  
full frontal  
attack:

I was buried in a submarine  
—I died—  
exploding space-shuttle highs  
flaming from the skies  
I was crowned, beneath me queens  
drowning, gurgling, frowning  
—but that is all, that's quite enough;  
changing colours  
towelling off  
I am not your tragic  
clown  
I tell you  
I am tough.

it is soup of  
ideas  
not intensional sense  
but extensive reference and  
this is my two cents and  
this is revenge and  
it speaks its own force and  
it speaks its own voice so

GET OUT OF MY WAY  
do it right away  
because  
I'm back upon the horse  
and I'm  
charging into town and  
I burn it to the ground  
because  
I'm back up on my stallion  
and  
I am the human torch.

## Out like a lamb?

I'm a flighty little chickadee in the warm March Chinook; I'm a useless wooden shelf when it's finally wiped of books; I'm a tired soda courier in the back of his truck, huffing at a bubble—maybe that'll help my luck. The red laser I lent to the science institute, my blue moon in January—'twas all fallacy, a masochistic mast to which I tied myself, so today I join the massive underground conspiracy, the flaming underwear magenta jamboree. I holler with stylish citizens at the gate—at the plated gold Rolls; the ribald ruckus in the basement of the bar, the squealing pink magnificence of my brand new K Car. That Betty's a blonde with curves, she'll caress my neck and sing; Midge is frigid in comparison, and Ron's a ditzzy fling. I'm hot on Lois and her sister Delores, so I try out for their chorus, and I won't sue Philip Morris for the smokes they make me buy...

Do do do do NOT cross yourself at the crosswalk

Don't don't don't hesitate when turning a corner

Delight in life, smile like a phantasm reborn!

(And walk softly when carrying a club: we are with you stalking loftily the honey up above—stray rocks can stir the pot, the hornets get upset, they buzz and sting; they're zuzzing bloody murder—it's the price you pay in Spring.)

form over. (just) content

The trouble with you lefties is  
you're just so goddamn  
unpredictable.

You just don't fit in with our needs at this time.

Pander pander—just pander.

You can't just depend on creativity all the time—it needs to be diluted. You  
know, rationale, a structure.

Just, you know, dependability?

Mediocrity is just a necessary evil, but

just give people what they expect, and everyone has a nice weekend. That  
said, I'll see you Monday morning, bright and early.

*Fuck that*

Here's the best advice  
I can offer:

*If  
you come across someone with  
talent,  
then*

*chase after them  
as fast as you can*

*—someday they may  
save your  
ass  
with a miracle*

## Dramatic hangover

I walked into yesterday, snapped my fingers, but nothing lingered except the sweet trace of goldschlager on my collar, the spilled ale—so carefree in the midnight acts of id. And today is a vomiting heat lamp, white hot with regret and incomprehension. Oh I was taller than a Nietzsche hero for a few hours; I was tougher than Joe Louis. But nothing sucker-punches like the morning after, and I woke in thick vicious dullness, swallowing my tongue, consequence pounding my brainstem like a sadistic Irish-Catholic prison warden rapping at the door. The daylight laughs at you, shrieks in your ears, meting out its punishment. Nothing stings so much as dawn, nothing gets the glare out of your eye. Oh I've been knocked down and dragged out and through my own ass hole—what's there is my liver, inside a urine-soaked bottle of whiskey, burning, burning...



## The Man Who Could Not Eat Himself

There was a man who lived in a town. His name was Tibor. Tibor was made of the best food. He was very good to eat. Whoever ate Tibor grew strong, happy and delightful. His arms were succulent and sweet. His moist internal organs gave off a pleasant aroma as they slid down one's throat.

All the people commented to Tibor how tasty he was, and this made him happy. "They love me, they love me," he thought, "for I am good to eat. I bring health to those around me."

Soon the rest of the townspeople, having grown accustomed to the nourishment provided by Tibor's body, threw away their other food. They stopped farming the rural areas, for Tibor provided more than enough sustenance to satisfy their needs.

Tibor, however, had nothing to eat, now that the only food source in town was himself!

What was Tibor to do? He did not know how to farm, and had little desire to eat one of the other townspersons. "How strange," thought Tibor with a flourish, "that in order to live I must eat myself!"

But Tibor could not bring himself to eat his own body. He tried many ways. One time he cut off all his hair and tried to chew it one lock at a time. He did not like it, and spat it out. He was at a loss. "How will I function if I eat my own body? How will I walk if I swallow my legs?"

Though he was aching with hunger, he simply stopped eating, and began to waste away. By the time he died there was nothing left on his body to eat, so the townspeople said, "Let's go to Burger King." END

## MiSC. Piggy\*

Once as she was walking in front of the shops on her way back from the supermarket, Esther caught a distorted reflection of herself. Considering what the doctors had told her about her blood pressure, she was surprised at what she saw in the glass. She was smiling. Smiling in spite of what she had done; in spite of all the money she had just spent on bacon. Yes, bacon.

Eating a mouthful of pig meat was, to her, a euphoric experience. Cocaine, amphetamine, Esther would have none of these when she had access to the most pleasurable high of them all: bacon. She had six slices of corn-covered peameal (she liked it dripping with maple syrup) right before her prom; she always said it was the best night of her life. Bacon, her friends cleverly joked, was Esther's beacon.

Her gluttony (lust?) for bacon would be Esther's ruin. The bacon never lasted, yet the bills from Shopsy's never stopped coming. She pawned her watch, her Datsun, her 24-inch TV. She needed money to pay off the box boys in the deli—she sold everything except her "Ingenio" fast-fry pan and her grease-absorbent paper towels. In her more lucid moments, Esther could not escape the dread which suffocated her. She remembered the doomsaying of Franco, her childhood butcher: "Beware the Pig! It has the Demon's flesh—tasty, yes, but treacherous indeed. Bacon leads to Fear, Fear leads to Hate. Hate leads to Suffering!"

She would change in the future, she vowed, and switch to veal, or maybe lamb. "Tomorrow," she said, "I spit aside the Demon flesh!" Today however, she would dine lavishly on the base hogmeats; with her belly full today, she needn't worry about tomorrow. The fleeting ecstasy of bacon (yes, bacon) carried Esther blindly from one day to the next, from this deli to that deli, each one a small step down a slippery slope toward pork-fed damnation. Each rubbery, gristly morsel was an agent of bittersweet self-indictment.

Ultimately, Esther could not give up bacon, a fact she refuted even to the last, though it killed her. Her half-hearted attempts at rehabilitation invariably relapsed into some all-night BLT binge. Tears streaming down her face, she would polish off side after side until vomiting herself to sleep. One night the bacon sizzled louder than before, the vomit came early, and Esther never woke up.

The next morning, on the cover of *Newsweek*, the ironic headline ran, "Baco-tine Patch the real deal—Docs go hog wild over cure for pork addiction."

The good news came too late for Esther though. The cholesterol had taken its toll. Too long had she floundered about in the cesspools of gluttony and hot grease. Her coffin was like a 'non-stick' receptacle, claiming innocence for Esther's overdose; a wooden skillet, which buried her bloated, bacon-addled body.

*\*originally appeared in the Queen's Journal, Sept 28, 1999*

## Trials of a silly man

I walked out of the house that Monday not realizing how silly my life was about to become.

But when I tripped on the sidewalk and landed on a kumquat, it struck me: things were indeed quite silly this morning.

Yes, the kumquat was my first clue. The offending matter squished between my leg and the concrete. The sound was rather silly. *Splloosh*. I looked around but saw nobody, not even some stupid kid who might have left fruit lying in just such a spot on the walk. I uttered a curse, "Ryddda Nrygg!", which in the Druid tongue means 'I do not deserve such mischance, not on my first day of work at a new job!' (I had learned this phrase while reading a large book about ancient languages).

To explain a bit: I had just been promoted the week before, to assistant upper class file sorter at Whamco Omniplant Ltd, which is a key Northeastern US manufacturer of wheelles and gaskets for the overseas prefab drywalled drill systems market. It had taken me seventeen years in the mail room to reach this new level, and now a single kumquat was threatening to ruin me. Think of the scene if I were to walk into work with stains on my pants—an embarrassing spectacle, to be avoided at all costs!

Tossing the offending fruit in a wastebasket, I uttered another oath: I wished I were dead; I wished I had never been born. And I wished I had worn kumquat-coloured corduroy that morning, so the stain wouldn't have shown.

Using my saliva as a solvent, I rubbed tenaciously at the soiled material. I poured cream soda on my pants, in an effort to leach out the stain. 'Kumquat comes out with soda water,' I remember my third-grade home economics teacher Ms. Uberkraut in her lectures to the class. I thought fondly that Ms. Uberkraut's advice on stain-leaching was unimpeachable—thank god we had that unit on Very Silly Fruit back in Grade 3.

But leached out or not, the sheer insult of the kumquat left a wound; there was foulness in my heart as I walked toward the subway station. Clutching my train fare like a weapon, I inserted the token into the box with a violence not seen by any other passenger that week on the L-train Rapidex Underground System. 'Ka-ching!' Was the sound it made; the turnstile cranked and I was engaged with the Transit; I was hot under the collar.

It was then, on the platform, that I saw the culprit. Had he noticed me first he would have run, and good thing, for there was red devilry all inside me; I was all systems go to dole out some comeuppance. But there he was—it was Nathan Peddleburg, the man who stood on the corner beneath my apartment building

most days, who was always selling kumquats. That bastard, the kumquat-distributing demon; I should have known it would be him.

I uttered a variety of oaths and curse words as I approached the troublemaker; yes, there were damages outstanding, and Peddleburg would do the paying. I looked him square in the face, and I grabbed his neck with my left hand; with my right hand I twisted his nose, like a restaurant waiter turning a corkscrew.

After a 45 degree turn his nose spurted a familiar red liquid. "Ack, I am bleeding" cried the wretch. When I peered closely at his face, I realized he was right. There was a lot of blood dripping out of him onto the ground—but not the horror-movie ketchup kind. This was much scarier, and was liable to complicate my life with police reports and jail time and such. Yet I continued to twist at the man's face.

For his part, Peddleburg did not approve of my tact. "Street punk! Madman! Let me be! Assaulting me upon the nose in this way is sheer silliness!"

'Silliness'—stinging and ominous, the word caught my attention; it bothered me, like when a big crow flies at you in a narrow hallway and pecks at your forehead. I realized I'd gone too far; I untwisted the nose and let go. Peddleburg continued to wail and gnash his teeth however. I had no kerchief to wipe up the blood, so I offered him a stick of chewing gum, as I fumbled about in my mind for an explanation, my hotness cooling into bashfulness. He continued his lamentation. "No, no, I do not desire gum at such a moment as this!" And so he declined my offer, his nose still spouting a fountain of what, when you think about it in a certain way, looks just like cranberry juice, but, in reality, it is blood.

He got a look at me and recognized who I was too. I felt *extremely* silly as he pronounced my name. "Ethan Pelletier," Peddleburg implored, now pale-faced from the blood loss (for he was a haemophiliac and he would soon die), "What wrong have I ever done you? Am I not a reasonable man? Have I never babysat your little kid, even though he spits up all kinds of carrot-puke and makes the worst kind of diaper stink?"

He was right. Peddleburg was in fact a babysitter of Jebediah Pelletier, my first son by a woman no longer my wife: Fiona Detroit, now a stripper at dentistry conventions, to whom, luckily, I had managed to avoid forking over much alimony (strippers make more money than mail clerks). But I didn't see my son Jebediah much anymore, so I started to forget what he looked like. Call me a lousy husband and an even lousier father, but how was I supposed to recognize my son's babysitter, when I didn't even recognize my son?

"Sat-on babies or not, you ruin my pants with your fruit," I tried to justify myself. "And so, should I not exact revenge, whatever form it must take? For I

am a man of employment, Peddleburg, and my new employ depends utmost upon cleanliness.”

Peddleburg was losing coherence; he made no reply, which satisfied me--it meant I was winning the debate. But his wound was not clotting; blood from the man was dripping onto my loafers. Shoes soiled, I panicked. I thrust Peddleburg down onto the platform, and though I risked the disapprobation of the consterned onlookers, I hurried toward the street exit; thus leaving the fruity shyster in his death throes. It was better that I walk to work, I reasoned—less chance of murdering some other fruit-hawking haemophilic.

It was 9 am, and I was late for work. I had vengeance on the man who ruined my pants with his delinquent produce—he had trifled with me, and it cost him his life. But tardy as I was, I was jeopardizing my new position at the corporation. And, to top it off, it was beginning to rain. What could be sillier than that?

*The vino shot down his throat, and he felt a warmth in his diaphragm. His fingers moved more quickly along her arm. Soon it was as though everyone lifted up their hands and freed themselves of their pretensions and a warm comfort blew through the room. The wine made friendships easy; and made friendships dangerous, because wine makes friends rub up against each other...*

And we were alone on the couch, and you touched my cheek trying to flick off a piece of cheese, and as you did I grabbed your wrist and kissed it. And you laughed. I grabbed your hand, your elbow resting on my palm, and I kissed the length of your arm. And you started to draw away, but I could tell you were just nervous and not really grossed out. And so I suggested more wine, and you nodded ok. I grabbed the bottle and spilled a bit of the red as I topped you up, and I said 'is your head spinning yet?' and maybe I acted drunker than I really was, so I let you think maybe you could take advantage of me. And maybe I was drunker than I thought, but whatever—you were not nearly drunk enough.

We stared at each for a few moments in the bliss, the torpor of the wine, and it didn't matter that we were friends who had never before even hinted to each other 'what if...? why the heck why not what if...?' Because when you drink wine, it's always a good idea to kiss your friend-just-friends on the wrist and along the length of her arm. Why not, we're both still young and more or less unattached. We are young, yes, but are we not adults?

I still think it was a good idea, to kiss you on the arm.

And we danced--Benny Goodman. Rose Room; Slipped Disc; You're a Sweetheart. And halfway through that last number I stopped you in your tracks and before we knew it we were lips on lips, breathing our wine into each other, finally making good our unspoken proposal. Man was that kiss ever inevitable; looking back it was almost poetic. A Horatian ode. *Carpe diem*, and so we did. *Carpe diem*. But that is some tricky advice. Seize the day, yes—but what about tomorrow? Well we just had to find out ourselves.

One kiss two kisses three kisses four. Four kisses to realize we need to take our clothes off as soon as possible. It worked again, the red. Hot wine in our veins, warm breath in our mouths, cool wind blowing through the shutters; we were alone together all night. It was like a drawn out flash of lightning.

-slight fiction for her

## Waltzing Matilda (for TW\*)

[\*to be read listening to 'Tom Traubert's Blues' or 'Anywhere I Lay My Head']

The morning click of the doorknob as you return from the shower; the muffled whoosh of moccasins on my front porch; the itchy screen door you scrape with car keys; nodding furious your soft, earnest forehead, to follow where you're going--that's what I need to make it through another day. But I couldn't jump as high as you; I wish I could've, but oh the things you can do and I just can't, and I'm sorry dear, I never did. You didn't ever stop trying though, with your platinum gold smile and growling raspberry tenderness, until your giant spirit fluttered off into the whirling pea-green river... And before we met, the first hello, the first time, I already knew your name; you took my fingers in hand and squeezed my calluses and asked me 'how did these get here?' and I just shook my head and grinned and your eyes were so big, and you looked in mine and whispered your secret; time was running out. Now I'm losing my voice every night, with Tom W howling beside me, and wondering--why won't sad Lady Matilda dance with her man? Why won't she waltz with him? Was I afraid of sliding across ballrooms with you, sparkle, spin and we spun, out of control we were. I was an amputated sailor once; you took me by my arm, and I was weak when you led me up that hill, and you never let me fall asleep, not even in the cloudburst. But on Friday, you left me good--you left town nonetheless; you left me and I'm pacing in my bedroom now, pummelling my forehead with fists, and knocking myself out in the closets, digging for at least one of your tattered shirts, because I need a piece of something to hold on to, and I bet you come back someday still, because I have something you own. My heart my heart--but my heart is so big, and some days it spills all outside, and there is never enough kleenex. And you said you'd remember everything I once told you; you said you'd never let me sit alone in those tired blank spaces, but the footsteps I'm hearing are just foghorn echoes of passing ships, and that night-sky supernova, those feathers, remind me of beach sand and the boardwalks--hey, remember that time I let you cut my hair, and when I looked in the mirror we burst out laughing? What a disaster we two. And you promised to keep the sofa-bed free whenever I needed to lay my head, and today, boy do I need somebody's somewhere to crash--and do you ever wonder, how we'll look when we're old? You'd be more stunning than now, even; you have those black eyelashes and dimple on one side. And I never say goodbye, because you can't leave me, and if you leave I won't forget it ever. It was blinding how you rushed inside and took me, but just as blinding you brushed past... and do you ever find what it is you're looking for? Answer me, please, I am begging, you--fucking... answer me--say something... I remember, Saturday night was holy when we were together; that kind of waltzing was the only kind: we two spinning madness in my front hallway, back porch, my face flush in the middle of winter, in the upside down world you took me through, your silver horses and magic powers, your morning-after promises. And so to get me through today I'm always falling on my knees; I worship those memories and I want to bury myself inside them, naked, dancing in your arms and shivering.

I wish I could quit my day job, he said with a coffee breath and a tired smile. I miss the madness that made me mirthful. It's been the longest while, this nine-month trial. You'll be a new man soon, this builds character you see. For too long I have been sitting in such pain; when your guitar stops making music and there's too much responsibility to bear. And your friends all wonder where you've gone, and when you reappear it's like you're no longer there. And the weather gets colder and you worry about the holes in your socks, and your mother phones and asks how you're doing, but you can never tell her the truth that something somewhere along the way drove you mad. And all you have left to show the world you still have sanity intact is blazing intelligence, which most fear, and others ask no questions because they are afraid you may answer. And music is your only salvation, and the things that eat at you aren't half as unsettling as the things you are eating for breakfast lunch and dinner, and no, man there is certainly not enough fibre in your diet. And the only solace you have is the book in your drawer which takes you to another planet and there it is that you are warm and surrounded by good things again, and what is it really that bothers you man? Is it the pain in your neck that reminds you that you are mortal? There is no really good metaphor in your head and you are drowning in abstractions like a centipede in a toilet bowl, so much good do your hundred flailing limbs do you. And what can one person do to fix the world? You may as well admit that you are feeble and that change may or may not come, but it certainly won't be at your behest for it is fate that determines your course in life and any choice you thought you had control over, well the illusion of that crumbled along with so many others the day those giant flaming gas tanks flew into those towers. And now there are so many babies crying, so many more than yesterday, and they will grow up stunted and without any illusions which is the cruellest thing of all to have to face reality at such an early age. Or wait, maybe it is crueller still to have illusions to have them all your life and then one day they vanish and you wake up and even though there are hundreds suffering and even a few laughing along beside you, you still have to realize that you are alone, and it is then, and only then, and you rue this moment for it shatters your aura of invincibility, and it is this one thing: that you need God, but where is He? And you look for meaning in the events that you can't believe even happened, and it is futile to try to explain so you do your best to hold on tightly to those around you, even though they can't look into your head and see how deeply you need them. And someday I will understand what it is that one-year-olds giggle about. Until then I cry, so much older for my realizations, so much at a disadvantage for the more I understand, and I wish my brain would stop its wicked neurological consciousness as I seek to reclaim the spirit that possessed me as a young man who knew nothing. And so many changes overtake me and it is all I can do to try to relax, and we go out for beers you and I and you tell me about your ex-boyfriend and I could care less, but polite as we are we must nod and smile and pretend that we aren't two solitudes and I don't even speak the same language as most of my countrymen. And we discuss academics as though we were scholars but the moment we shut our books we already begin to forget, for all education is an attempt to stave off the decay, moral and intellectual that reverts the human in us to the animals that gave birth to our intelligence. And the price of intelligence is that one day our brains will stop ticking and our hearts will stop beating and our bodies will decompose and will go back to being mulch for future cornfields and other plants that future generations of doomed humans will eat to survive momentarily, but alas I digress, for what I meant is that the irony of intelligence and understanding is that we die. For to lack consciousness is to be immortal, for we never wake up one day, fresh from the womb, blessed with a starting point but altogether doomed to suffer through an end point. We crave immortality but it never will come now will it.

-beside a window facing King Street.



## I am the phoenix

I am the phoenix tonight. I rise from the ash into the light. Evanescent and intransigent, my aura is smoke and incense, split between the perfect geometry of stars, mixed through the last particle.

Do not fear; I have come at last. Do not fear the wind or the brush of frost, or the ice which shears beneath. Do not fear me. You were promised—I will take you on my shoulders.

You were warned it would be me.

Listen to the talk below, behind the closed doors of the sordid inn. Sprawling limbs soak up spilled ale. Men in soiled coats listen for the end of the world.

It has taken much to come together, but this will last forever. We are forever. We look into our innermost reasons, and we are set on fire. Around insane beggars and destroyed egos, we come to cleanse. To be reborn.

But we fail to respond. There is an indecision. I am stolen.

All I can promise is sympathy, not action. For now I am weak, but I will be strong again.

I hear the call every day, but I forget; I lose myself in its clarity. I drive in circles, into motorways at unreasoning speeds. I fly along the ground, hovering at razor's edge between this world and the other. Into dimensions unknown I transport my fury, cast away into uncharted cavernous spaces. The anger withers, leaving me at last, unshackled.

Tested in ways never imagined, ten thousand difficulties snare me. The poisons are many, and the antidote is a fiction—it cannot be found. We dissolve ourselves into the waters surrounding the mountain; we slave in dark anonymous caves. But there is no futility able to keep at bay the phoenix, and I rise above the crater's edge.

I rise above.

This is not the end of days, though night does fall, and the logic of blackness is smothering. Twisting on the rack of my own revenge, there is a sharp clear blast from the horn.

We dress for the moment; we are ready at the moment's notice. And time drives away the hollow, false visions. It is a call many would heed, to receive the gift, the cup whose drop would allow us escape from the bleak chasm, the divide between men and eternity.

Into infinity we charge on silver lightning, into the end of cause and effect, the end of unfeeling order, to the breach between world and dream.

"Stop the smallest man forever from lunging after death"

We are conceived in a quicksilver flash—and I am the phoenix. I am the exploding sun, and the red and white light is blinding.

## Epilogue:

### 99 rejected subtitles

- 99 just desserts
- 99 to-do lists for the unemployed
- 99 hints you should call a psychiatrist
- 99 songs without instruments
- 99 friends you never had, but always will
- 99 feathers in your thinking cap
- 99 instances of kickass ass-kicking
- 99 soapbox hooligans and a snot-snorting whippersnapper
- 99 MS-Word documents
- 99 excuses for my misbehaviour
- 99 conventions to conveniently ignore
- 99 roads—more or less travelled by
- 99 smiles, frowns and obscenities
- 99 typesetter's nightmares
- 99 radiant swimsuit beauties
- 99 days in solitary confinement
- 99 newborn baby boys
- 99 middle fingers, proudly erect
- 99 cracked mirrors and other superstitions
- 99 scalding footprints on the flaming red-hot beaches of sadness
- 99 soul tattoos, in black and blue ink
- 99 things... not quite poems
- 99 problems that aren't your problem
- 99 *ave-atque-vales*
- 99 worst hopes, best fears and apologies
- 99 forests for the 6.2 billion trees
- 99 run-o'-the-mill gluttonies and other forgivable indulgences
- 99 alternatives to self-medication
- 99 transparent secrets
- 99 sermons and impromptu ditherings
- 99 classified transmissions from the interplanetary observer
- 99 concrete sidewalks in Toronto (where love is a one-way street)
- 99 coffeeshops and their attendant consequences
- 99 newspaper clippings
- 99 amateur emotions and mercenary intellects
- 99 derivatives to the power of X
- 99 missionary positions
- 99 first steps to beat the disease
- 99 worn-out crayolas of blood sweat and tears
- 99 nosedive butterflies and surfacing godzillas
- 99 eyelashes plucked
- 99 linguistic fistfights

99 hosannas in the secular temple  
99 left-handed ravings and wrongheaded eccentricities  
99 finales from A to Z: Alphacalypse to Omegaddon  
99 constitutional anarchies  
99 useless miracles  
99 introspective retrospections and prospective expectations  
99 rhyming stigmatas and a drowning narcissist  
99 direct marketers beating down your door  
99 oceans of uncharted depths  
99 lyrical breezes and mystic awakenings  
99 whistles in an abandoned train station  
99 visits to the anthropomorphological zoo  
99 social misfits and semantic mavericks  
99 monstrous deeds, magic bullets and smoking guns  
99 conversations with The Big Guy  
99 grammatical quirks and vocabularial conundra  
99 gallons of rocket fuel for the outer-space astronaut  
99 Marlon Brandos, two cartons of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey  
99 passports to everywhere  
99 meals in heaven (by candle-light)  
99 imperfect solutions  
99 substitutes for rage  
99 platefuls of sugar-coated Brussels sprouts  
99 therapeutic scapegoats  
99 grassroots excavations  
99 constellation points in a single galaxy  
99 unblinking assassinations  
99 post-coital bearhugs  
99 unwelcome beginnings and unwanted conclusions  
99 rectal exams for the street-corner beatnik  
99 token black guys  
99 excommunicated saints  
99 broken hearts and drunken insomniacs  
99 questions begging for a context  
99 exploding powderkegs  
99 symphonic convolutions in the key of U  
99 sounds, sensations and irrelevant epiphanies  
99 jailbirds and their death-row consolations  
99 Shakespearean insults  
99 hems, haws and hahas  
99 (tan)zola-esque j'accusations  
99 genuine imitations  
99 products from the English Factory  
99 letters never sent  
99 events in 9 and 9/10s decathlons (pulled a quad in the shotput and DNF'd)  
99 forms to fill out before you get paid

99 repressible memories and controllable urges  
99 percent of the iceberg  
99 ways of saying the same thing  
99 miles in somebody's shoes  
99 Easter eggs in one basket  
99 cantos in one volume  
99 subtitles, lost in translation  
99 proofs that you love your family  
99 monkeys on 99 typewriters for 99 centuries...  
99 descriptions of what it's really like  
**99 reasons not to write a book**

**(all of them rejected)**