

no demon no god

I don't usually like to read. especially not poems.
too complicated. that's what i want to remove
from poetry. what I hope remains is a voice that
anyone could understand, and a picture that anyone
could see. I wrote these poems the way I talk.
I published them so I could talk to more people.
-j.s.

no demon no
poems by jason stoneking

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Speak for yourselves, or not at all; this game
is up— your mannikin has had enough.

Kingsley Amis

An intellectual is one who says
a simple thing in a dif f icult way;
an artist is one who says
a dif f icult thing in a simple way.

Charles Bukowski

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to chris burke
for suffering through me

in the crapper

that's where I find
all the good ones
without fail, sometimes
before I even sit down.
they're waiting for me
in there: stories, poems,
outrageous escapades,
strategies for world domination.
they hide in the wall-cracks,
the piping, and I suppose
even in the bowl itself,
ready to jump out and
surround me when I sit,
get the better of me
when I'm vulnerable.
and I get most of them
out of there alive, running
them back to my room
with my pants half-zipped
and piss on my leg. anyway,
that's where I find them
before you find them here.

phobias

I've always been terrified
of motorcycles, which I wish
were not the case, since I
love them so much in theory.

one night, kicked out of somewhere,
I was standing at a crossroads
in the pouring rain, surrounded
by farmland, twenty miles from town
wearing thin clothes and praying.

sure as shit, the first and only
vehicle to pass was a neon green
kawasaki with a hot-headed college
student crouched over it, in a brown
leather jacket and tight jeans.

he seemed to arrive from a script
like a hero in the night, and
impatiently told me to get on.
it didn't take too long to figure
that this would be my only ride.

he had only the one helmet, so
I pressed my face between his
shoulder blades, trapping my notebook
against him with my chest, and
wrapped my arms tightly around him.

the bike was light, and I
could feel the road bumps slightly
changing its course as the wind
ripped tears from my clenched eyes
and I gripped this strange man.

I'm going to die, I'm going to fucking die
right now, I thought, right now
I'm going to die, and this guy
is my Jesus, my last lover, my
hero on a final shining horse.

he kept going faster, no idea
what the moment was for me,
probably not with too much
to live for himself; and I could hear
the rain smacking his facemask.

I'm going to die, I'm going to fucking die
right now, right here, I know it.
and as I began writing my tearful
benediction to the gods, I felt it
finally slowing down at the roadside.

I thanked him dramatically, checking
myself to verify that I'd made it,
and stood there wondering at all the things
I'd feared as much: green beans, vomiting,
spiders, dentists, a girl named Hayley...

part of the paris skyline

in that apartment, it was clear
that only the housecat ever knew
what the hell was going on, exactly.

the girl was a young American.
militant political, shaved head,
she was a writer. and the man
was an old French, a benefactor.

he was always amused, in a way
nostalgic for her energy, that he
considered useless; and she was forgiving
of his age, his money, she hated him.

I showed up some nights, to mediate,
translate, or drink up the whiskey.
mostly I watched the cat.

rare weather girl

she tells me she hates the spring
because the melting snow
just reveals all the dogshit
people left behind, and she
can smell it all over town
as it's thawing.

then she says she likes the fall
because at least the others
are walking around depressed
and that makes her feel
better about everything.

she asks me if I understand.
I have to nod, I guess—
preferring the fall myself—
knowing she doesn't like summer
or winter either, but she
seems to like me.

she is so beautiful—
when she's laughing and
showing herself— I worry
for her, that the autumn
is so short here.

gratuitous lighting

middle of the night,
all the lights are still on
all over the city, but
you know you can't
call anyone or do anything.
can't catch a bus or even
buy the shit that gets sold
all day out there.
why the hell are those
damn lights on anyway? who for?
this one is not new york;
this one is in europe
and i'm sure i couldn't find
a single person underneath
any of those bright, violent
neon lamps, but i can see them
each from across town.
god it makes me wish
that just once,
it would all go dark.

the painter's daughter

in a dream I was
visited by the daughter
of a great painter
who came to tell me
that she knew she was
an angel, but didn't
know why, so I tried to
think if I knew of some
reason I could tell her.

after a few minutes,
I hadn't come up with
anything, and she seemed
in a hurry, so I simply
agreed with her that
it was so, and made
my apologies for not
being able to explain.

then she disappeared, gently
into the wall behind one
of her father's paintings,
one that I had always
particularly admired,
and I woke up.

I paced around the house
for hours trying to determine
why this sullen, impatiently
beautiful young girl had
come to ask me such a thing
in the middle of the night.

I felt so guilty to have no
answer for her, that I
decided I would have to
compose one in the morning
and send it off to her.

but the dream being over,
and she being so young, I
finally thought it best
not to mention it, especially

as I am now an even
greater admirer of her
father's paintings.

fantasy, jealousy, and the mechanics of the thing

I come back from the shower
and she asks 'did you have
a nice time?' to which I say
'I guess so' and she demands
'who did you fantasize about?'
so I think carefully for a minute,
knowing she's insecure about
such things, and I say 'I'm not
telling you', which becomes
obviously not the right thing
to say, so I try to explain how
the answers to those things
just piss women off, the way
the questions piss men off,
and she says that this is
pissing her off, so I say 'alright,
it was that bitch at the sports bar,
the one who winked at me'
and she says proudly:
'that's what I thought'
which is exactly what I thought
she was going to say.

for posterity

I try to make it
as often as I can
to the sperm bank,
honestly hoping that
in the future, there
will be more kids
like me, although
it would break my heart
to have to put them
through college.

lullabye

(for chris)

if you are ever sleeping
easily, it is unfair to me—
painfully awake at your side
fretting and pining for your
beauty and the hard true
things you don't know
about it yet, but you will
if I have my say.

I stretch to surround these
things for you, to simplify
and soften them for you,
and I wince as I let them
kick and scrape at the insides
of my skull for you; only
it is simply too much that also
your sleep would be sound.

early to bed

everything's starting to
shut down early— the bars,
the supermarkets, my body
(at twenty-four). it even seems
the last movie starts earlier
than it did in my childhood.

the horizon is sliding back on me,
and it does no good to retreat.
there's not much to the mornings,
just the blue cars and grey cars
and green mini-vans crawling along
toward jobs and schools, with doors
locked by time.

in oslo they leave the cemetery
open all night, but close up
the 7-11s and the record shops.
I wonder where the kids go
and who the kids are
and what everyone's talking about
and who set the clocks back.

like it or not

I think the kids
listen to rap music now
instead of reading books.
well, more power to 'em.

when I was in fifth grade
I was supposed to read
treasure island, and my teacher
really got on me about it.

he jumped through hoops
trying to convince me
that it was a classic
whether I liked it or not.

he even went so far
as to say that if I didn't
read it, I would still have
to read it in high school.

but he was wrong,
because I avoided that
damn book, my whole life,
partially by quitting high school.

and now I write my own,
which aren't classics, but
I enjoy having them around
and I live in paris, france

and drink wine on the river
and go to the same cafes
as hemingway and f itzgerald
and I've learned to speak french.

my life is a modern classic;
I even have a small room
with a stereo, a couple of
eminem cd's, and no library card.

the heart grows fonder

you're the one I think of
when I piss in the sink.
don't know how you got
stuck with it, unless it was the time
you complained that I spit there
and it was revolting. the viscosity,
(I think you told me)

but you've got a piece
of me now, 'cause I see you
every time I do it, and
in your absence, I've been
doing it really quite often.

ashes to ashes I guess

our window overlooks
the hospital property,
and immediately the view
contains a single smokestack
which I'm told belongs
to the morgue building.

every couple of hours,
while I'm writing or eating,
it will start up, giving off
deep thick charcoal billows
of smoke, every so often
without fail. but you know,

I don't mind it much.
actually, it's just the thing
to keep me from taking
myself too seriously.

reaching out

sometimes you send
a card or a letter to
someone you know, usually
someone in your family
because it's their birthday
or they've had some luck,
good or bad, or maybe
they just got back in town.

more often than not,
the someone is confused
in a bad relationship,
or working too hard.
their mother is dying,
the money is short, or
some other arm of humanity
is beating at their skull.

and the card or the letter
says happy some holiday
and guess I'll see you soon
and say hello to him or her,
and the cards keep coming
and the letters keep coming
and the human keeps
plugging away.

listening carefully

the guy next to me
at the bar (where you'd
expect) is talking, and I
am listening carefully
"that's what it's all about
with women", he's saying
"that's what they want
these days, all of 'em".
I nod solemnly and touch
the rim of my beer glass.
"and someone'll give it to 'em"
he continues and stretches
a hanky out of his pocket.
"but you can bet it won't be me",
and he commences to blow
his nose into the handkerchief,
goes for a few seconds,
pauses to take a breath in
through the mouth, and goes again.
I keep waiting for the buzzing
of air through clean nostril
to break through the muf^oe and say
that he's done it, cleared the airways.
he goes again, huf f ing
and pushing at the blockage,
wishing he could hold more wind.
then again; and once more.
f inally the sound comes. he stuffs
away the hanky and resumes speaking
"ya' know why?" he asks.
I nod again, thinking of the time
I came down with ou
and thought it would never end.

one of the most beautiful sounds

a window being closed
when it is necessary
against the weather,
while the wind and raindrops
resist its pressure until
it finally clicks into place
and the roar of the storm
is tamed instantly
to a dull echo of nature.

clippity clop

there's this one girl
who when she's not around,
I'm kind of like a cock
with feet, stretching against
my will towards anything
that looks warm or soft.

but then when she is around,
I'm like a horse in blinders
nodding my head gently
to the rhythm of the reins
down central park west
and back around the same
loop all damn day until
she gets tired of playing.

the how and the why

the women were out
of town for the night
so my buddy and I
were left to fend for our
evening without company.

when he woke up, late afternoon,
I collected the change
from a pink plastic dish
on the table, and put on my shoes
to go out and get a six-pack.
not enough to get drunk,
just to change the taste
in our mouths, and why?

because why not.
because what else.
because sickness beats
longevity down the stretch.
because we all must believe
there's a prize to be attained
by arriving there first
at some conclusion.

down to the supermarket,
then over to the little shop,
and back to the house, Saturday-
everything cheap is closed.

Insomnia

been up every night
lately, trying to explain
to myself: the difference
between boredom and intrigue.
I've memorized the route
of the paper delivery,
and scoured for clues
in the cracks on the walls.
I've counted the city lights
picking against me,
and learned to predict
the arrival of sun.
I've sickened myself with juice
trying to smooth my throat
between obligatory cigarettes,
and held my eyes open
by their corners, straining
to glimpse the secret
mystic twilight solution
that must hide there
to evade the working man's eye.
and after weeks of this,
I've drawn the conclusion
that somewhere, deep in behind
the smoky devious skyline,
some son of a bitch
is sleeping much better than me.

another recurring dream

the retards have me surrounded.
hands joined, circling around,
taunting me in paradigm,
chanting what sounds like my name
and farcically knocking me down
from time to time.

I twist and writhe and
give it my all to break free,
faking directions and strategy,
but they're quicker than you'd think.
I'm betrayed by a pinch, and again
they're back dancing around me.

it can go on like this here
for hours and days. stumbling,
falling, trying again. succumbing
to insidious cackling laughter
and never a minute goes by without
a direct hit or kick to the groin.

but I drag myself up
and make lunge after lunge,
not caring anymore what's on
the outside. just living on instinct
playing my part in the game;
you can see now why I can't sleep.

drunk women

she was face down
on the bed again
with our brown plastic
utility bucket at her side
when it hit me, the irony
that my girlfriend always
(whoever she is) will be
sure to drink much more
than she can handle
and abuse me throughout
my attempted graceful drunk.

I think about bukowski's women
or perhaps more aptly,
the women who wanted
to be bukowski's women
but were pissed on until
they gave up on him.

I tried to tell her
that at least they
could hold their own liquor,
if not his.

I raise my glass

bad enough to show up alone
at a bar, but truly depressing
to be the only one in the place
on a week-day afternoon.

one starts to imagine
all the things that could
have gone wrong in life,
even the fictional.

I never worked too hard
for anything, if I could
find a way around it, although
I guess I worked hard at that.

I wonder about my father for a while;
I have a drink for my father,
unwavering honest working-man,
a solid rock of humanity.

I didn't have any real
athletic ability. a slouch.
none of that all-american
gusto or schoolyard pride.

I muse a bit about great baseball players.
I have a drink for babe ruth;
who could really slug 'em far
even if he couldn't lick the bottle either.

I wasn't born with natural
poetic talent, passionate verbs
or beautiful adjectives. I made do
with whatever I had.

I dream of the highly respected poets.
and a drink for elizabeth browning;
who would have been cuter
if she were really portuguese.

to english poetry students

if it were up to me, I'd beat
the larkin out of you with a switch,
then turn you and swat the byron
out of your other side—
repeat the process, swapping out
the writers every two turns,
leaving you with a few: the wild
boys of the early century, but
mostly I'd suggest you listen
to your rock singers; ignore
the americans as you always have;
don't give so much attention
to the history of the thing,
and for the love of man please
don't publish until after
you've left school forever.

teen idols

when I was in school,
I always wanted to be
this other kid, marco.
his family was brazilian,
and he knew all about
sartre and kerouac, and
dylan and sex and drugs
and everything else, long
before I did, so I
followed his lead, trying
to win his attention.
my mother always worried
that I seemed unhappy,
but I wasn't unhappy
about marco. I was
unhappy that I was not
marco; so eventually
I quit school, hit the road,
did the thing for real
and never heard from him again.

how I lost it

the first girl I had sex with
was a big girl, not very attractive
and not terribly nice, with
no interest in me at all.
got bored with it before
either of us came, but then
it happened again the same way
about a week later.
I told her I wasn't a virgin,
and that was the only time
I remember seeing her smile.

for juliet grown up

it may have been true
that she was too young
when it started; but we
carried on and on that it
would go the distance somehow.

her parents hated me, until
they got to know me, and then
only hated me in theory, because
they had to keep doing their job
while she was still so young.

and eventually it ended, mostly
because she was young, but
in a good way, and deserved to see
more of the world than just me
before she had to give up free food.

but she never forgot me, although
I think her parents have, and
I still get letters that don't sound
so young anymore, and everything
we believed in then was true.

we knew each other quickly, all
the way through, and the things
that came were what we expected.
sometimes she thought I was too young,
and only I knew what she meant.

now life makes us both feel old,
and we make each other feel young;
and the people who told us things then,
and the people who tell us things now
still don't make us feel anything different.

on having convictions

aw hell, it's no use.
these days you just can't
convince anyone of anything,
even when it's in their mouth.

you get headaches trying,
when it's for their own good,
and in the end they accuse you
of trying to do something else.

the longer you can go
with your mouth shut,
the better; they hate that.
they won't know what to do.

and if you're strong enough
to take my advice, then
more power to you. I won't
be the first who died trying.

death and memory

when I was eighteen, I saw
allen ginsberg read a poem
about seeing neal cassady's corpse
when he came in his hand.
(a nothing if not memorable image)

and now that allen is dead,
I have this nasty habit
of seeing him say those words,
his right hand raised in the air,
as I come into my own.

gender politics

I'm confused about feminism;
it rolls right off of me.
never understood why anyone
would want to write about
who's wrong and right about
something that scares us all
evenly. something we have
to live with, books or no.

the only writer I ever
related to on the subject
was camille paglia, but
then I heard the feminists
kicked her out of the club,
and from that day forward
I've been lost about it,
not knowing any longer
how they all choose sides,
or what any of them want.

timesharing

don't you ever
wonder 'bout the
time it takes to
peel a shrimp or
shine your shoes or
wash or your car and
don't you ever
worry 'bout the
time it takes to
write your book or
love yourself or
live your dream and
if not, then
what is it that
concerns you?

the oslo glue sniffers

while living in oslo,
I came to find out
about these three homeless
guys, who looked about
alike. I'd see them
everywhere I went.
they'd always be tottering
along in different directions,
falling asleep in the road,
yapping incoherently at
each other and at us,
not even they being sure
which, or exactly why.

I asked about them, and
it turns out they're brothers
who also have a sister
and they've spent their lives
huffing rubber cement
to the point of no return.
(I had done it once
for 25 minutes, which
is another long story,
but I could imagine
after 25 years.....)

well apparently everyone
in all of norway knows
about these people, who
came from the same suburb
as a small generation
just like them, who all

got into the jar at about the same
age, and never got back out.

for whatever reason, these are
the famous four, and nobody
seems to be helping them,
so an entire nation watches
with some kind of solemn
sad awareness, as they fall
all over themselves, struggling
to coordinate space and time.

but I guess maybe their trip
is working out better than mine,
'cause not a soul in norway
knows the damn american fool
who keeps writing the poems.

even in manufactured company

my imaginary friends
can really be assholes
when I let them, or
it seems, even when I don't.

they're clever little devils
but awfully lazy, and they
always want in on whatever
I'm doing. they want credit-

and it's not like they
help me very much, except
they're always egging me on
to do the stupidest things

and then lying around
laughing at me afterward
as if they'd set me up
by themselves, without me.

fucking jackals. I'm sure
they'd run me through
if I didn't have it in me
to throw the switch on them.

interpretations

one night walking in the cold,
we passed by a window ledge
on which sat one, single,
fingerless, left-hand red glove.

I asked my friends if they'd
seen it there. they hadn't,
so I went on to describe
the scene to them and how I saw it.

my first reaction had been that
a left-handed homeless man
must have been having a wank,
on the spot, sometime earlier.

my companions decided that I
was a weirdo, which made me
self-conscious. Still, I really couldn't
think of any other way the glove
could've wound up there.

poets

there are the good poets,
few and far between,
and there are the bad
lurking at every stop
of traf f ic, eager
to thrust on you some
militant uninformed tirade.

the bad poets are much
like me, and sicken me
with pictures of myself
drowning in my bed,
holding my ass tight
and praying to never
be discovered there.

the good poets are less
recognizable, but catch
my attention with a marked
necessity; a vital oame
that spits up and out
of their conf ines like duty
and attacks my throat.

the good poets say things,
beautiful new vivid things
like 'holy f ire breath licking
the birth wounds of fatalism',
but not really like that.
more like 'dreaming peru
in the fog', or something.
anyhow...

the bad poets read
the good poets and console
each other in predictable ways,
strapping to one another
against the storm, and tracking
the others down by instinct.

so many of them
I find at my door.

travel plans

everywhere fast cars, planes
in the air, and trains underground,
luxury boats, cruise missiles;
how far we will travel around
for a fight, a fuck, or a food.

I move across town
being blown along the walkway
by the speed of it all,
like a tumbleweed caught
in a voracious wind

trying to glimpse each of them,
the contraptions that rush
the bodies back and forth
between priorities and pressures,
between yellowness and black.

I enter peoples' houses, looking
for books and journals, well-loved
photos, cat-food, karaoke tapes,
some evidence of the smaller distance
we will not traverse to know ourselves.

what do they want from me?

believe it or not, I get letters
already, from girls in other parts
of the country, or sometimes the world
who speak to me as if I'm unattainable.

a few of them want to talk about
my poems, and all of them want
to talk about their poems, and dreams
and fears, and fantasies, etcetera.

some of the fantasies are about me,
occasionally even romantic, full
of borrowed references to stars
or moons or other things unattainable.

they all want to hear back
from me, that I liked their thing,
that they're cooler than their friends,
and that I too hate their parents.

but none of them want me to say
that I'm coming to town,
that my life is not glamorous,
or worstly, that I am attainable.

if you live with it

if you live your life
in a certain way,
you will find yourself
in situations where
a group of people
is sharing one small room
as sleeping quarters.

and if your luck runs
in a certain way,
it will be an odd number
of people, three for example,
of which the two
who are not you
are lovers.

and there is nothing like
the sound of their kisses,
of their whispers,
the slow sure speed
of how their bodies
move against each other
when you are lonely.

then again, if you live
in a different way,
you may never know
what any of these things
sound like, or feel like
when they happen up close,
right next to you.

and that might be
a new kind of loneliness,
which leads me to think
that I'll stick with this one
for a while, for as long
as it is probably
the second best thing.

as yet undomesticated animal

someday I will find a mate,
and marry, and make children.
I will bring home the bacon
and cook it, and clean
the dishes after, and help
around the house, fixing things
painting things, planting things
in the yard. I will rake
for one season, and shovel
for another, and keep a garage
full of tools and maintenance
supplies for every occasion.

I will be more or less
like my father, who does
all of these things and more
with a smile on his face,
a confident handshake,
and no doubt in his mind
that his life is exactly
what he wants it to be.

but for the time being,
I don't have a home
that I share, or a girl
I always see there, or
a small happy face to feed.
I haven't the inspiration
which brings the strength
I would need to be better
than I am right now.

though I guess I'm alright
at what I'm doing; I think
I make a good young person.
I know the music pretty well
and I've seen the big movies.
I have a small sense of what
is considered popular fashion.
lots of energy, lots of dreams,
a frantic libido, and even
a certain recklessness.

but I'm sure I could do
the other just as well
if I had a bit of practice,
if I had the missing ingredients;
that is to say, if a woman
had patience and heart enough
to give me a shot at the thing.

the dying art of romance

every guy I know
has lost a woman he loved,
and every artist among them
has lost the one that he says
is the one that mattered most.
well, I'm right there in the boat
with all of those guys,

convinced that if I ever
wrote the one that made her
come back to me, the nobel prize
would seem like a bubble gum
ring, that's already in the mail.
and there are probably already
enough guys in that boat to sink it,
but I haven't lost hope yet.
I'm still working it out--

and I give you my word
that someday I will take her
across a bed of rose petals,
even if I have to drug her first.

I admit it

the little girls torture me;
they do, and it's not their fault
or mine, that I lust for them.

it is not as I would sometimes
say, the way they move or sound.
it is not some inherent spring
of forced desire in their nature.

I'm more inclined to believe
that it's somewhere in me,
a longing to boast of some innocence,
to laugh in a higher pitch

and something about this world
we inhabit, where we're encouraged
to destroy almost anything
that we can no longer possess.

I think it is when we wish
that we were little girls
that we imagine we
would like to fuck them.

dream #16

in a nice hotel room
with britney spears.
round oak breakfast table,
panoramic windows,
uffy white carpet,
big king-sized bed with
larger-than-life pillows
and thick comforter
on which sits britney:
legs crossed, wearing
a baggy t-shirt,
pigtails, no make-up.

she says:
it's just so nice
to sing for someone
who knows how
to listen to me.

I say:
it's just so nice
to be in bed
with a girl
who knows how
she wants to be
listened to.

love wins in the morning

'I can think sometimes
that you're an impossible bitch
and still not truthfully say
that I love another woman as much.'

'I love you too,' she said.

'but you are a bitch sometimes,'
I pushed it.

'and you are an asshole,'
she affirmed without looking up
from her book. fante.

after a pause I ventured,
'well that's good to know.'

'sometimes,' she added.

I thought maybe
it would be good
if one of those times
was right now.

learning the ropes

my best friend lives with me
and usually also a woman
I'm having a relationship with;
an undoubtedly strange position for him.

he often comes to me
with questions and concerns
about the way the game is played,
to keep the sexes from killing each other.

he listens carefully, always
as if taking notes, collecting
pieces of the puzzle, and filing
all of them away somewhere.

tonight he walked past me
into the kitchen, where
my girlfriend was making
some food for everyone.

'it really smells like
sausages in here,' I heard
him say, and then heard her
reply: 'I think it smells like eggs.'

'alright, it does,' he tossed back,
nonchalantly as though
nothing about the situation
was of any bother to him.

'you're getting it!' I yelled
out to him, and heard him
chuckle under his breath. I thought:
I'd like to think she got it too.

breakfast alone

I was just waking up
and resisting, when you left;
and when I finally rolled out
on my own terms, my friend
was still clinging to his nocturne
on the door. so I stepped over him
and went straight for the kitchen.
no one around taking turns
with the appliances, or finishing
the last of something I wanted,
which wasn't much. I found
the cornflakes, and toasted
two slices before I put the milk in.

it all fell together just right,
and I took up the table
with my book stretched out wide
so I could read beyond my bowl.
slurping, and only pausing
to munch the toast or sip the pages.
so quiet and in control of my day.
it was so perfect even, that
when I carried the empty bowl
back, and started brewing the coffee,
the only thing missing was you.

the difference is being there

living in france, I spent
two weeks in the country
working, and the weekends
in paris: playing, singing,
shopping around for girls.

this one girl I met
said that I wasn't nice,
that I had hate in me.
and then another said
she didn't like my haircut.

and one of the bartenders
said I couldn't sing, and
another said I drink too much
on not enough money.

my friend said that I
don't show enough interest
in her, and then her cousin
(who was also my boss) said
my painting looked terrible.

the guys I worked with
said I'm a fairy, and usually
before the day was out, everyone
would have said that I smoke
too many cigarettes.

now rimbaud never said
such things about me. nor did
baudelaire or sartre, but
damn, after a while
I wished I didn't speak
french.

two means to an end

one morning, on my way
to work, to a job
I didn't really want,
I caught the last
possible train to be
on time, and just when
I thought I'd be there,
some guy decides to throw
himself under my train.

of all the low down
dirty stunts to pull
on a monday morning
when absolutely everybody
feels that way already.
he couldn't have picked
a tourist bus?
the river? or at least
a tuesday or wednesday?

it had to be my train,
my last possible train,
on the first day
of my stupid new job.
I felt like he was
rubbing it in, that he
had somehow gotten
off of my hook
and left me squirming.

the worst was that
I wasn't even surprised.
it happens every day
in this city, although
usually I'm not there
to feel the brakes lock
and sit in disbelief
through the delay, waiting
to be evacuated.

I wouldn't have wanted
to trade places with him
but I wish I could
have taken another train
so my little problem
would have been bigger,
and so I could have
suffered, without being
reminded of the time.

the party

there is a terrible racket
pushing through our wall
from the next apartment.
the sound, by the time
it reaches us, is the sound
of absolute chaos. something
to remind you of dionysus.

there are faint traces of music
and jumbled wordless voices,
either with the music or not.
knocks of wood, clinks of glass,
arms and legs and quickly
forgotten smiles whirring around,
all stacked up on top of each other.

something will bang down hard
against a door or table, and
be unclear as to whether it
is part of the drumming, or
just an exaggerated moment
in the ritual tumbling around,
the clatter of tribal stupor.

now someone is hammering up
a picture on the other side of
our little room, and it's easy
to feel trapped by conspiracy.
normally I'm glad for a racket
because normally the racket is me,
and the others, on all sides trapped.

so, quick, I turn on my stereo
and am immediately thrust into their joy,
dizzy sick with the beauty of myself.
I dance and twirl around the room
as if drunk, as if caligula, as if
saying my piece to the world by
finishing off their women and wine.

then finally I tire, having gotten
that off my chest, and perhaps
having gotten a bit older in the process.
I sit back down to read my book,
and find it no easier; nothing
has been changed next door by my revelry.
I guess youth is not what waits for me.

the trouble with grown-ups

the whole family was together
at my sister's house, and her
small boy was playing on the rug.
he asked me to play with him.

he had a little plastic ice rink
with red and blue hockey men
propped up on sticks to be
pushed back and forth.

I sat down and started
matching the players to their
positions in the game, until
he stopped me, looking worried.

'no!' he yelled. 'we're playing
battleship pirates!' I watched
as he lumped some reds and blues
together on one side of the rink.

he took the ones I'd placed
on their sticks, and threw
them on the floor, making
a whoosh! whoosh! about it.

I tried again, picking up
a man and making him talk
about his battleship, which
really upset him pretty bad.

as if disappointed in me,
he scolded 'this one's a pirate!'
I apologized and excused
myself from the door.

walking back to the table,
I muttered to myself 'damnit!
why can't people play the game
the way it's meant to be played?'

then it hit me, hard
that I had just missed
the whole point of my own
philosophy. I was losing.

I don't wanna play anymore

remember when you were a kid,
playing a game with another kid?
and if you started losing, you'd say
'alright, 2 outta 3, or 3 outta 5;
then 4 out of 7, then first one
to ten;' get used to it.
no one ever stops playing that way.

if you get the best grades in class,
they will make you try out for a sport.
if you're ever doing too well at work,
they'll add something to your job description.
if you settle on a price for a car, the car
will suddenly contain a new attachment.

if you're ever arguing with a lover,
and you start to get ahead,
you will immediately find yourself
arguing about something else entirely.

if you ever accomplish a dream,
you will be forced to build new ones
just to keep living, and on the day
you die, someone will pay funeral costs.

the game's the same as we made it
in childhood, and the real world is
just another kid playing it against you.

the settlement

I lived with this woman
for two years, and we never
truly understood each other.
not that it could be expected,
being that we came from different
countries, and didn't much care for
the other's way of life. but I was
sure we had a few basic ground rules.

for starters, I was indigent, which
wasn't a new trick, but new to her
and she really learned to watch
the coins, and ask about my writing.
not to ignore that she was a good heart
and did what she could to help, right
up to the very end, which was more
an ember than a blast of any kind.

so when it came time for me
to return from exile and collect my bags,
I carefully took only what I brought,
and left untouched whatever
might have stirred up the waves;
until I came across a book of fante
that she'd bought for me to read
at a time when my mind was hungry.

she'd never picked it up herself,
the english being too much for her,
and the art of it useless to her anyway.
but she forced a grain of pride from it;
that it was hers, a product of what
she'd done to make it work against my odds.

I wanted to cry, placing it back on
the high shelf full of science books,
and I turned to look at her,
with a faint ironic grin, thinking
you sick bitch.

here's one for ya

she always asked me
if I was writing about her,
if I could show her something
I'd written for her.

I told her up to the end
that it was hard, that I
never did that until after,
so here goes.....

I felt like a young wolf
in captivity with you;
tranquilized in the bum,
left drooling over pictures of home.

I dragged through many
heartless days and gutless nights
constipated, feeling my age
until the time you left the gate open.

solitaire

playing solitaire is the closest
thing I have to religion.
although I don't profess
to believe much in anything,
when I work my way alone
into a long night of crisis,
I will lay down the set-up
of the cards, convinced
that if I win, it will signify
the positive answer to my dilemma;
whereas if I lose, well
I almost always lose, so
I've got that worked out too.
judging by how close I come
or by how many I have piled
on top of the aces, I'll read
an assessment of my situation
and in the end, as with most
practice of ritual superstition,
no matter how I do in the games
I'm able to tell myself things
which will provide enough comfort
that I can rest my soul.

compared to what

so one day, over coffee,
I wrote a poem for this
girl who sat quite alone
in the corner of the place.

and a few days later,
the news reached me
that a friend of mine
actually knew the girl.

the girl told my friend
that she'd seen lots
better poetry, this girl
who sat quite alone.

and I'm sure she has,
I kept telling myself;
I hope she has seen
lots better poetry

in her student handbook,
in her lease agreement,
on her tax forms, somewhere
in the deeper part of her mind.

open letter to sean

so you're the boyfriend now;
and I can respect that.
in fact, you can have her,
although I know that you do
already, without my consent.
I just wanted to let you know
I'm not bitter about things.

I already know she's the devil
and the angel, who will damn
your soul just to save it,
time and time again as if
the whole thing is for sport;
but I also know, as I'm sure
that you know by now, that
it's not sport. not at all.

I know she's got you believing it,
and that she wouldn't have you
believing anything that wasn't true,
because she's the one who decides
what is true, and when, and for who;
and she will always be aware of
what she controls, and where it lies
in the grand scheme, in the master plan.

don't think I'm being sarcastic here,
sean. I'm not that kind of guy.
I really do know the power she has,
even if I don't know what to do
about that. it doesn't matter anymore
'cause that part is your job these days.

the logistics of the tap-dance
in the minefield, where between
the explosives and pieces of hearts
there is yours and hers, and also
the art of volumes written on love.

I'd sometimes even like to think
there are still some fragments
of whatever I left behind,
but I'm not trying to interfere here.
I'm happy for you, sean—
and happy for her, and happy
for me that she loves you
and she's surely not sitting around
thinking about how I fucked this up
which is what I'm doing tonight.

I confess, I'm a little bit scared
that there's only 3 bottles of wine
some mix-tapes with a few
nine inch nails songs, but nothing complete,
less than one pack of cigarettes
and I can't even narrow my emotion
down to one good one or one bad one
enough that I have any reasonable
chance of getting to sleep soon.

but none of that is your fault, man.
you're out with her tonight, I hear—
keeping her busy, and keeping yourself
in the loop, which is good for both
of you and for me as well, like I said.
I hope she still drinks jack daniels
and I hope you do it with her,

and you really should let her drive
at the end of the night. she likes that.

be careful, though, if you choose
to write poems for her, because
that is the one thing I still have
to hold on to. and I have
a publishing contract now, so
there's bound to be plenty of that.
and that's what I was calling to say
when I found out the two of you
were still together somewhere
on your side of the atlantic.

don't worry; I wasn't planning
to impress her or get her attention.
nothing like that. I just wanted
to let her know I'm doing well,
and that I hope she's doing the same.
I already know you're doing
quite well for yourself, sean;
because I remember the girl,
and you've got all you can handle
right there, whoever you are.

I'm sorry, man. I know we don't
really know much about each other.
at least I hope she doesn't talk
to you about me any more than necessary.
but anyway, I'd be happy to tell you
a little bit about myself, if you
would be so inclined as to listen.

I went belly up in the states;
never could handle it really, so
I've been living in europe about 4 years.
I write these poems, which you may have
noticed, are generally quite bland
and conversational, but I try to
squeeze in enough of myself, and
in the end I wind up paying the rent.

I write hundreds of them, in fact,
and I write the greatest number
of them for her, for your lover—
and I hope that doesn't offend you,
but if it did, I'd have no choice
but to keep doing it anyway. you see,
I really do understand the difference
between her and everyone, and
everything else in the universe.

even writing to you, although
it's not the same as writing to her,
is bringing me closer to myself
than I would ever choose
to be, without the wine, or
especially, without her around.
and regardless of my intention
to write something no one else
could ever write, I would never
assume that you didn't see it.

because we both know, sean
that she is everything and more
than any man could surround,
no matter how much he wanted it,

or how much he loved it, or
how many stars, or how many pages,
or how many nights he gave
on the battlefields in his head,
donating blood by the gallons,
hoping in theory, that it would
somehow eventually stop the pain.

and we both know, sean
that nothing ever stops it,
any of it. not so long as she
is the eternal, the universal
solvent of all matters real or imagined.
and I couldn't bear to think
that you don't feel any of this,
so I won't think that at all.

and in exchange, you won't
wish that I knew how to let go,
and you won't expect me to know
how to act around her, or how
to be more mature about this whole thing.
not when you are getting days
and nights long with practice;
while I am simply torturing myself
in a small room in paris, praying
that your ear will have been
more sympathetic to me than hers.

ageism

nothing shakes me
in my shorts, like staring
down the barrel
of a wily old man,
full of sinister mischief
and not much to lose,
balanced perfectly for gambling.

I've always had
my defenses against the young,
strong and boisterous
as achilles, laying it out
with too few skins
to shed in the going.

the young will attack
with less reason,
and find me finally
unfulfilling, not worth
mud on their boots.

but I wake in the night
in fear that I somehow
might strike up conflict
with the purposed, seasoned,
leather face of maturity.

barry johnson

barry johnson is a singer
and without a doubt
the best I've ever heard.
and also the best by far
that most people have never heard.

he must be forty by now,
and plays in the irish pubs
of paris, most of the time.
tuedays at one, thursdays another
and so on, for as many years
as I can remember.

he was at some point from oakland,
and last I heard, hasn't been
back to the states at all,
not even for a visit,
in twenty-some-odd years.
vanished forever from a world
which should miss him terribly.

he's been in and out of bands,
big stages and small alike,
and has written his own songs.
but when I go to see him,
in the bars, for the most part,
he plays covers, traditionals,
old favorites and crowd pleasers.

thing is, he does it better
than the original artists,
even the new ones, and he

(unlike them) can do it all.
from opera to blues,
rock to jazz and back.
even a touch of country
if he gets hold of the tequila.

now I listen to a lot of music,
but I swear to you he's the best,
living or dead, past or future,
the best damn voice I've ever known.
though hardly anyone really believes
that I mean it, being that favorite singers
are supposed to be famous or dead,
or lovers, or relatives, or have some
other advantage outside vocal control.

but if you don't believe me,
then you weren't there
when he silenced a barload
of brawling, drooling, drunken
scotsmen, with of all things:
'the greatest love of all' a capella.

and you mustn't have seen
his 12 minute version of 'summertime'
that night when I was depressed
about a girl in another country.
or his high note at the end
of 'ain't no sunshine,' which
he will comfortably hold
until somebody tells him to stop.

not to mention, if there happens
to be a band you don't like,

he will do things to their songs
or rather, pull things from their songs,
that you never knew were there.
and afterwards, you will wonder
how you ever lived without them.

if that's not enough to convince you,
it's because you haven't been around
to see the arguments swell up
at his shows, between locals
who all claim to be his biggest fan;
who say they've seen him more times,
or for more years, or that they
know more of the words by heart.

and I can personally guarantee
there are poets who stay up
all night long, trying to express
to the entire world, the beauty
of what he does to a microphone.
and they babble for pages on end
without doing justice to the man
or the music. without ever being
able to find the right words.

because he will take a request
of almost any kind, and
from almost anyone, and then
he will harness that song,
own it through to its core,
ride it like a goddamn pegasus
through the guts of the universe,
then land it, give it back,
and leave you all at that moment

as I am left just now:
with nothing more to say.

so anyone who still has doubts
should come to this irish pub
called 'le galway' in paris, france,
on a sunday night, sometime
between 10 o'clock and midnight
and find out for yourselves.
but hurry up and do it
before the others find out
where we hide our treasure.

after work

I no longer wonder
what goes on in the offices.
I've seen that when
the people leave those places,
their eyes are dead glass
on the buses and trains.
their voices are beaten
in the bars and cafes.
they don't even want
to go home anymore.
they don't see what
anything is worth, and
they no longer wonder
what I'm doing, so I
no longer wonder
how they got that way.

on loan application

no matter how I try
to avoid it, I wind up
sitting in a bank, every
once in a while, waiting
for someone to do their business.

in this one today, we
are surrounded on all sides
by pictures of happy
people and couples suggesting
I take out a loan.

I don't qualify for a loan,
and neither do the happy people.
the happy people are paid actors
working temp-jobs to stay afloat
and they are exactly as happy
as I would be, getting 5 grand
to kiss a baby, or stand with a realty sign.

hair care

beware the natural red,
a venomous lightning
that is never expected;
could easily take down
a house or small family.

feel safe with the ones
who dye it that way
from a genuine, timid
longing to be led astray—

and chances are,
when the usual damage
is done and undone,
you'll be the one
who crawls from the wreckage
with a tale to tell.

camilla's feet

I'm always telling her
she has the most beautiful
feet, because they don't
look meant for walking
but more like the feet,
carefully shaped, of a woman
sculpted and lying down.

she seems unimpressed,
doesn't like them as much
and complains also, about
her knees (like her parents',
she'll say)—so I examine
my own and find them
random and excessively useful.

I hunger for such
integral pointless beauty
casting irreverence
into the machine,
and all this poor girl
can think is that
she's got to walk.

prisoner of war

lately I can't figure out
why women make themselves
beautiful. they come and go
around me, not seeming happy
when I look at them or
wish for them, but they
wear these beautiful clothes
and accentuate their eyes,
their lips, their walk
with paints and special shoes.

then there are some who
shave off their hair, and
dress in shapeless dungarees
and old flat sneakers. they
even scar themselves some,
and I don't look at them
as much, assuming they've
made a point about that.

but the other ones; they
put some effort into it
before they leave the house,
and then outside, they walk
slow, and glance at the men,
and sway back and forth
while waiting at counters.
so I watch, and I dream
to hold them or kiss them,
and when they see this,

I become a social criminal,
a monster on the cross
for whatever the last boyfriend
did wrong before I arrived.

I wrestle with my instincts.
I try to do the right thing.
I am only one of them, also
hoping someone notices my mind.

protest

there are people marching
on a building today, probably
about street-gang firepower,
gas or needle, union rights,
who fucks who and where.

and I go on slugging
alone for my causes,
which never seem to generate
collective concern.

I march against thirty-year-old virgins
and nine-dollar cigarettes in norway,
public pay-toilets, elementary-school prayer,
and professional athletes on strike.

I suppose I could lend a hand
against war and national famine,
but it's got to be an even exchange.

electric company blues

well they finally did it,
cut off the electricity.
in our sleep, no less.
bastards.

we had been scamming it
free for so long,
we'd forgotten it
was even an issue.
back in september,
a little more money,
it didn't matter too much,
and the guy down the hall
showed us how to rig it
in the fuse box.

now here it is january,
and we'd just gone out
to load up on pasta
for the winter poverty,
and woke up the next
evening to discover this
small, black, rubber
contraption fitted over
the place where our fuse
used to fit, and no chance
of atlas removing the damned thing.

so we did the ritual
that eventually must
happen to everyone,

digging out old supermarket
candles, and cramming them
into the ends of old
wine bottle, liquor bottles,
till we'd configured a view
of our own little room
and even one to spare
for carrying down the corridor
to the community toilet
for a seventeenth century crap.

now back to living again,
while we await our
first ever utility bill.
and doing everything
in half-light, with a slight
headache, but other than that,
it all looks just the same.

on pacifism

strangers in bars
of whatever age
tell me a lot
about the sixties.
up to and as much as
the movies and books.

it seems to me,
from what I can gather,
that some people went
to war in the far-east,
some people went
to war in the streets,
some people went
to war about war,
and some people went
to war about peace.

amazingly, everyone knows
somehow how they felt
about everything.

in my time,
far as I can see,
no one goes to war
about anything anymore
and I'm not even sure
how I feel about that.

I guess it's saturday night

there's a million people
in the streets, lost
for something to do
with themselves.
some stumble and howl
drunk obscene thoughts
into trash bins and intercoms.
some laugh and forget
what their time was for.

some cheer against work
that they've escaped
with some hours.
some work twice as hard
and begrudge the extra pay
as a gesture of solidarity.
someone reminds me
not to check the mail tomorrow
or that I'd better go
and pick up my liquor early.

a couple in the window
of an expensive restaurant
looking at each other as if
they haven't been together
in so long that they're uncomfortable.

there's a line for miles
at the cinema building,
another at the burger joint,
and more of the same
at each bar and dance club.

but nothing going on
at the supermarkets;
the butchers and bakers
have their blinds drawn.
the neon up ahead must be
the odd record store
or maybe that pizza parlor
with pool tables and pinball.

with so many people out,
I'm surprised to not see
the men with matching suits
and important telephones,
or the women who wear
those bitter high-necked blouses
and clutch their pocketbooks
like weapons in a storm of hate.

you would think they'd all
ceased to exist, or somehow
been replaced by extra teenagers
with barely scratched skateboards
and clothing that their parents
have obviously never seen.

I walk past the steps
of the library in silent darkness.
the guy who sleeps there
is scraping up change
out front of the doughnut stand.
seems to be making
his best wages to date.

when I make it to my neighborhood,
the buildings die, and I can hear
my thoughts stretch brazenly
out toward the doors and windows,
searching against the air
for challenge or company,
then swirling back upon themselves
and coiling proudly around
their strange, playful peace.

I think when I get home,
I may paint for a while
or play music for my girlfriend.
in fact, a home cooked meal
sounds rather inviting.
I quicken my pace a little;
I feel as though
I might invent something
that will still be real tomorrow.

one real evening

nursing an awful headache,
locked inside by the weather.
weak juice, instant coffee,
small room fills with smoke.
sitting around killing hours,
talking about eachother's
ex-lovers and possible friends.
wrappers and cold food
on the table. I can't help
thinking this is love—
so much better like this
than in the movie poster
over on the wall.

some of the good stuff

it may not seem like it, but I do
remember some good times.

like when we hitch-hiked
to venice for valentine's day
and rode the gondola
all over the city, kissing
for other people's photos,
the old italians on the bridges
sighing and saying 'romantico!'

and the time on our trek
through norway, out of money;
we found the abandoned waiting house
at the ferry stop, and slept
with the heat turned up,
and our socks on the radiator
until the next ferry came through.

and how about that morning
in the middle of vienna;
we ordered one of every
cake and pastry they had,
and stuffed ourselves sick
with sweetness until we
were sure we were royalty.

I remember the snow storm
at the highest mountain pass
in geneva, those two truckers
got us out of there and told us

all about their lives in some
impossible accent while we
kept warm sharing the only seat.

I know I used to sing for you
and you used to dance, and
somehow it all got so fucked up
that I write bad poems about you
and your friends congratulate you
for getting rid of me, and
we don't talk much anymore

but at least we had a time
that will never go away
and the rest of the bullshit
eventually does.

subject matter

all night stuck for ideas.
digging into my childhood,
my relationships, my family,
as if I weren't living now.
then this thought hurls me
back into myself and sends
my eyes scattering around
for anything more real.

snow outside, broken sofa,
dirty coffee cup, toilet paper,
which of these things
would you like to hear about?

one of the firing squad

in my head I've got her
tied to a post, blindfolded
and I stand, a perfectly fair
ten meters off, with a rifle
loaded full of my poems,
and I fire away at her.

when it started, she
seemed really scared,
even crying a little,
but now, I've missed her
so many damn times that she
is laughing herself silly
and I am starting to worry

that the post may finally
shake itself free of the ground
before I get around
to loading up the one
that will do her in.

now I owe her one

so finally I got her
on the phone, the woman
I'd been in love with
all this time, but hadn't
spoken to for most of
that time, and she said
that she loves me too.

on the way home,
I purchased five
bottles of red wine,
and some grated cheese.
and when I got in,
I made dinner,
put on a song
by Nat King Cole

opened one of those
bottles, and lit myself
a small Cuban cigar
I'd picked up when I
was in the French
countryside; laid back
with a nice smile

glowing eyes through
a cloud of smoke,
and wrote this poem
for her.

accomplishment

on the rare occasions
when I do something,
I carry it off with me
in drunken swagger through the town.

I hear my own strange voice
bellowing out to pedestrians
then shrinking back into me
and bursting forth robustly again.

you'd think I'd been awarded
the keys to a mansion, after
the townspeople not knowing
for years who rightfully owned it.

you'd think I'd won at the olympics
or fallen in love with a model
or maybe that I was an asshole,
but it would make you question yourself.

you'd think I knew the secret;
you'd think about your past;
you'd think I'd done something important
and you'd think that maybe you hadn't.

the kitchen sink

someday I would like to shit into a sink.
not because anything about the act
itself actually appeals to me, but
because I've worked my way down to that.

I've spit into sinks
while trapped indoors.
blown my nose into sinks
not having a handkerchief.

cried into sinks
at least once or twice
while chopping onions.

bled into sinks
after wounding myself
through some simple task.

I've vomited into sinks
in small rooms where that
was better than the door.

cum into sinks
when I knew I wouldn't otherwise
have the time to clean up.

even pissed into sinks
when the toilet was occupied
or just too far down the hall.

and bearing the all too human
weakness for entirety,
when there's one thing left
I haven't done,
I can never resist.

way to go

I've already begun
to lose my teeth,
lung cancer is surely
on its way, and
I have every reason
to expect liver damage,
arthritis, eventual
heart failure, so
I guess I am
kind of hoping
an airplane gets me
before the rest of
that shit catches up.

before lying down

god damnit there must be
one simple thought out there
that might come to me
in a simple way, without
a thousand connections
to previous reference or
possible future tangents.

and while I wait here
for that thought,
you'd be fucking amazed
at the amount of
staggering, stumbling,
puking, farting, complex
bullshit that darts and drifts
and weaves through my head.

at the end of the nights,
all I want is to think one thing
clarify it, say it if I can,
get its weight off of me
and weaken myself
just enough to sleep.

my favorite things

smoking a cigarette
singing a song
reading a book
on the pot in the john
writing in longhand
the phone, when it rings
these are a few of my favorite things

downing a whiskey
or nursing a beer
never believing
the shit that I hear
chasing my freedom
and the sickness it brings
these are a few of my favorite things

bums under bridges
in faded blue jeans
falling in love
and whatever that means
second-hand war brides
with children on swings
these are a few of my favorite things

girls without panties
in cars without gas
dodging the future
romancing the past
giving less credit
to love than to oings
these are a few of my favorite things

blue collar workers
and athletes with heart
the museum guards
who know nothing of art
getting away with it
pulling some strings
these are a few of my favorite things

writing bad poetry
speaking it too
walking downtown
with a hole in my shoe
acting like millionaires
eating like kings
these are a few of my favorite things

whistles on train engines
screams in the night
a half-decent lay
or a really good fight
the depth of the hole
up from which it all springs
these are a few of my favorite things

starving for nothingness
twisting the rope
films about gangsters
and hookers and dope
an outrageous fortune
of arrows and slings
these are a few of my favorite things

postcards from paris
and letters from home
freeing a butterfly
rolling a stone
a kiss on my forehead
the blood on my wings
these are a few of my favorite things

laying my cards down
placing my bets
rolling my dice out
ignoring my debts
and keeping the books
for the ugly ducklings
these are a few of my favorite things

something to do with perspective

you're becoming a bathroom
poet, she said, and I knew
that it was true, but
it could have been worse.
there are worse things
I could write about,
things no one would
understand or relate to.
and there are worse
places it could be read,
like on airplanes or
in classrooms where
the heavy things go
to die. I truly love
the books I take
into the bathroom.
in fact, that's how
I judge literature.

surrender

long information
in a short space
would never suffice
to explain her, or me,
or any of this
to you, in the comfort
of a theory,
in the reading
of a poem.

some kind of eulogy

my friend peter died
of a sudden aneurysm
walking through the living room
on a very average day.

I forget exactly how old
he was. maybe forty-three,
not a day over forty-five,
I think it was forty-three.

he had a daughter, and she
is still alive, nineteen or twenty,
already pregnant. I once dated
her best friend for a while.

her best friend already had
a baby from another teenager
and I think they all lived together
in seattle or alaska or something.

I doubt they even think of me,
but I picture them constantly
how close their road was to mine
and I think the same of peter.

he and I wrote poems together,
played music on stage for people.
I still have all the recordings
in a drawer with his phone number.

so he didn't make it all the way
across his own damned living room
well, what the fuck kind of deal
is that, huh? I'm waiting for that?

someone got his guitars by default
and his bass, and his drums. I hear
hardly anyone made the funeral.
what happened to his notebooks?

he kept copies of my stuff
'cause he was more organized
than I am. he told me that
was a luxury afforded by age.

I wonder if he'd ever heard
a nirvana song called aneurysm.
he would have smiled wide and said
something like 'kids these days'

but who am I kidding anyway?
he was younger than me, the way
I knew him at least. his voice
had more hope and more child.

I'd like to know who spoke
when they buried him, and what
they might have said if they knew
he'd never been very religious.

I thought about it for months
and all I came up with was:
jesus, peter, what's it all for?
I'll be careful crossing the living room.

ok, a nature poem

I don't notice the leaves much;
they change, I change, whatever.
and the trees and rocks,
about as obvious to me as my piss.

the air is too necessary to be
spoken of, and the earth and seas
just surround eachother without much
for either of them to do about it.

the animals are largely uneventful
save a few glorious exceptions
in the wolf, the house cat,
vultures and the odd penguin.

the weather gives me the most
excitement, but the rain is rarely
enough on its own, and the sun
just loses its charm so quickly.

now thunder, that's more my style
and a nice strong swirling tornado wind.
hurricanes, earthquakes and tidal waves;
lightning is the poet of the nonfiction sky.

you can have your grass and rosebuds,
the mountains and the coral reefs.
for anything to turn me on,
you'd have to call it a disaster.

the last one

on my way into the bathroom,
I heard it. slow, steady,
plop.... plop....
plop.... plop....

I stepped into the shower
and twisted the knobs down
hard and tight as I could,
which stopped it. I turned
and started to move away.
plop.

I cursed the water under my breath
knowing there wouldn't be another, but
there just had to be that one final
plop, having its say at me.

much as I hated it, I realized
then, that it was a natural part
of everything— arguments with lovers,
bragging with friends, raking
the damned leaves, even pissing.

and I had done it, and I would
do it again; like everyone and
everything else, there was always
one last drop waiting to fall at the end.

so I forgave the nozzle. somehow
happy that I'd seen them brought together;
the people who do these things to hurt and conceal,
and the objects who do them for no reason at all.

none of us had any choice.

jason stoneking was born in the united states, but has been living in different parts of europe for the last five years. he now lives in paris, france where he has published another collection of poems: Double Edged Pen (fresh hell books-1997), and is currently finishing a book of short stories: Sailor's Wives, to be released early next year. he is twenty-six years old.

jason stoneking

no demon no god

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