

Paralysis



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Paralysis
by
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HOW TO TAPE A SNICKERS TO THE WALL (So you can take a nap)

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FORWARD

This is my third collection of poetry. Written mostly during an ugly gray winter in Cleveland. Not quite as angry as my second collection of poetry but the depression is still chugging away in the background of life. Don't worry, it gets better...life and the poetry.

Butt dials are never intended but the butt wants what the butt wants.

**I should be able to talk about depression without hiding it behind
poetry**

sometimes it's not the depression
that makes us tired
it is the people
they roll their eyes at us
because it does not exist—

it is not a thing
but they offer their wisdom on the subject
they tell us to smile more
think positive
go outside and get some sun
as if the sun's rays hold a magic power
we are unaware of
so I don't bother trying to convince those
who don't believe
nor do I try to explain it
to those who will never understand
I simply talk to the ones
who have been there

Discarded litter

should it be unsettling to know
that somewhere in an empty
and overgrown vacant lot
under a century's-old pile
of tangled roots and discarded litter
there is a rusted old shopping cart
I will use to carry around
what is left of my life
around the streets of the city
for all to see

After thought

the afterlife
isn't much different
than the real thing

I spend my time
wandering
with nothing but time to kill

occasionally making a mark
but mostly ignored
as if just by coincidence
or a fluke

I tried to call you

and one by one
they shuffled their feet
down a perfectly mundane path

mindless and numb

oblivious to their surroundings
that their lives might be real
or that they might even be dead walking

no one knows
or even asks
because no one speaks
or looks up from their dreary lives

The arts district

I sat outside the Kennedy
on a cold and lifeless day
with a stiffness like rigor mortis setting in
not just my bones
but my skin and soul and veins
listening to the intensity of it all
wasting a perfectly good day
waiting for the slow burn of
some filthy sickness to settle in
feeling like I'd rather be dead
enclosed in dirt
sleeping forever
than feeling the dull ache
of this disease

Like dandelion fluff

what you call lazy,
sitting in a wooden chair
on the front porch
watching the sunset dissolve
into the soft grays and blues
of evening on Lake Erie

the melting popsicles
dripping down my chin,
staining my shirt
and sharing the color of the melting sun
on the horizon

and following the drunken dance
of the fireflies
or waving to strangers
with the children on their backs

letting my thoughts trail off
like dandelion fluff
I don't think is lazy at all

The bullies of the world

I had awoken from a dream
where those who had killed
were now all dead
and those who were hungry
had all been fed
the rich who abused
had all been bled
and the sick had been healed
breaking free from their beds
the bullies of the world
had all since fled
and as I lay paralyzed
confused
rubbing my eyes
I sat up, staring at the wall for a moment
in profound disappointment
that it was all in my head

The luck of a penny

I don't believe much
in the luck of a found penny
as much as the tarnished life
of an unsuspecting fool

Life

is a snake
eating itself
blissfully unaware
that all its efforts
will lead to
the same place it started

Asteroid shoes

there are precisely the number of hairs
on my chin
as there are years to my life
and as many petals of garden flowers
as years yet to come
the dimples of my skin
match the number of stars
in the universe
each grain of sand is a fear in my thoughts
and the thoughts in my head
collide like atoms
each breath I take,
a quick puff from a pipe
every window from the buildings
a snapshot of our lives
the roads we have covered
give way underfoot
like a crack in the ice
yet we step
and step again
with boulders for shoes
the wind never asks
before taking it all
merely held together by what we call Earth
spinning frantically on an invisible wire
in the spotty blackness of space

And it took no time to get used to it

the sun was out,
I remember that
and I needed a change
I needed something outdoor
away from the flour
and puddles of pizza sauce
It was a chilly morning
but I was young
and it took no time at all to
get used to it
I spent a good couple hours
with my hands in my pockets staring
at different pieces of wood on the ground
it was a slow day, they said
“well, we don’t really need you the rest of the day.”
“Ok,” I said
“probably not tomorrow either.”
“Ok,” I said and drove home
construction work was
rather boring I thought
as I dusted a cloud of flour
from my sauce stained shirt

Jesus goat on a gently warmed tortilla

there is nothing
interesting at all about
goats in trees
Jesus in a tortilla
an ornate Mexican costume you
spent seven months constructing
I have no time for it,
as I am watching ice shelves
float by the break wall of Lake Erie
and it takes up much of my day
your shoes are not special
nor is that mechanical bull
you are riding
old people
pop culture
news of the day
college athletes
the shelves are floating
the clouds are moving
and I am staring down
at the birds
on their mobile homes

A penny for your dreams

I closed my eyes only for a second
and when I opened them again
I found myself in a place
most people would not want to be
I can't say how I knew it was hell
but it was, I was certain
contrary to what people would believe
it was actually quite beautiful
the flames were not angry
like you might imagine
rather very soft
flowing
vibrant
little droplets of rainbow fire
popping off into the air above
and all around me like liquid fireworks
all that was bad
did not intensify
like you think hell might do
I had no thoughts of the end
or eternity
but that I would live to see another day
no matter what may come
even hell
and those who think
it is a bad place to be
have not spent their lives
in a frozen grave
so it is really quite comfortable

***MY FIRST MAGAZINE ACCEPTANCE!!**

It's not polite to stare

“Kenny, David, wake up.
your mother died last night.”
I can't really blame her for the blunt,
cold behavior
some people are just like that
but she never went down in the books
as the favorite relative as I saw it
I sat up and stared at the wall
staring a hole through it
and through the houses and trees
of nearby neighborhoods
through the air and the cloudy gray sky
through the ozone
until it reached the darkness of space
when I was finished staring I got up
walked to the kitchen
it was full of people
people with tears running down their faces
people who were laughing
making coffee
drinking coffee
rustling through papers
I've never seen so many
and didn't know who they were
I just knew there were too many
so I walked to the dining room
through the maze of figures
and there were more
doing more of the same
I made my way to the living room
it was mostly empty
no one even noticed the 12-year-old boy
wandering from room to room

and I didn't seem to notice
that they didn't notice me
I stared out the large window
into the backyard
there was nothing
no trees, no grass
a blank white sheet of nothing
and I stared at the nothing
for the next thirty years
burning a hole in the universe

I don't go to parties

the list of rejections is growing
I have tossed a hundred poems to the wind
and it makes sense, I suppose
to keep track
to see what blows back
there is another list around somewhere
under a pile of forgotten papers and bills
along with a single acceptance letter
that came on Christmas eve
and I'm becoming rather indifferent
to all of it
it's all just for show anyway
when they ask at parties, "so what do you do?"
I can say, "I'm a published writer."
some people are comfortable with it
milling about in a room full of strangers
an overly bloated sense of importance
but I don't go to parties
people do nothing for me but
make me uncomfortable, itchy
a stream of thoughts in my head, overflowing
written on torn sheets of paper
scribbled on napkins
random junk mail tossed on the floor
I write for the audience in my head
and they don't seem to mind that I am
uncomfortable with them
they understand and accept it as all part
of the tortured artist's character
I don't mind that they don't mind
my discomfort
my indifference
as long as I have an audience

The lights from the Christmas tree

and the storefront windows
seem a bit dimmer this year
the pain, consistent
the idea of life fading quickly
while people are still barfing
their Christmas joy all over the rest of us
the tinsel scratches my eyes
and tingles under my skin
little statues dance in the windows
as little old men and little old ladies
slip and shuffle along the slushy sidewalks
fragile glass ornaments hang from the roof's edge
tinkling like wind chimes
before colliding with a cloud of red and green dust
the slush-covered buses spit at us all
I hear the bells of poverty ringing
down in an alcove of the Terminal Tower
the sky looks like rain and snow,
end of the world all at once
people beg
pushing and shoving, blocking my path
while the statues keep spinning
smiles cemented on their faces
I see the tiredness in their little ceramic eyes
but they dance on
there is an old man sitting on a trash can
whittling sticks and branches
as pieces of bark blow down the sidewalk
from the heavy Lake Erie wind
but the ghosts of Woolworth, the May Company
sit silently, the counters and frayed stools
from a defunct luncheonette
are resting in a forgotten landfill

I see a thick line of fog move across the horizon
growing darker
moving quickly
little droplets of cold December rain fall
the red and green dust runs through the cracks
in the sidewalk and down into the gutters
taking with it the vomit
and Christmas cheer

Cincinnata,' 30 miles!

Uncle Bob

had his own way of seeing the world
his head swung sharply to the left when he drove
and when he watched television too
in a dead silence he would exclaim,

“Oh Minnie!”

his mother's name

and I would laugh

his face looked as if it were chiseled from

a block of rare, expensive marble

and his hair was a blinding white snowstorm

Vitalis perfectus

“Cincinnata,' 30 miles!”

I heard from the back seat

on road trips though Ohio

a lab technician at the local hospital

he could draw blood

without you even knowing

and after his shift we could find him

at the Knights of Columbus

drinking cheap beer and smiling

and when he came home

he was even happier than usual

if that were possible

tilting his head to the side saying,

“Oh Minnie!”

Tomorrow is coming

the fever and chills have
finally broke
the snow, melting away from this frozen tomb
I can see the grass and smell all that blooms
so I go outside and throw dog shit to the wind
snort coke off a hooker's ass
fart like no one is listening
and smile at all that is not dead
because tomorrow is coming
and who knows

A tiny little hell with tiny little pitchforks

I ate snails once
all lined up on a fancy plate
with a fancy pattern around the edge of it
and sprinkled with bits
of chopped parsley
while I poked at them
with a tiny pitchfork
if you smother anything
in enough butter
it becomes palatable

Dirty old man

the train was late again
as it so often is
and it smelled like pot
as it so often does
and the noise is unbearable
as I'd come to expect
the laughter
the yelling
the music
rattling off the dirty old walls
of the dirty old train
clattering down the tracks
and it stopped
started
and stopped again
and the air was colder
the sky darker
and none of this was new

Of space and time in between the moments

there is that moment
in the first heavy snowfall
when everything is covered
in a perfect white, glittering sheet
untouched by even the wind
somewhere in the early black hours
when life is asleep and unaware
I begin to wonder
if this is how it was when the world began
when there was nothing
not a single being
or creature doing
the ideas |of greed| |of destruction|
weren't even ideas at all
the curiosity of such a place
nothing more than a dream
as the reflection of the moon
cuts through the trees
with crackling bright blues
rolling across the untouched snow

Resting universe

the winds so rumbled
through the hills by the lake
the trees swayed furiously
and stretched
bowing to the people
as they held tightly to their hats
but the people could not fight against
the gusting winds
so they all blew away
one after another
violently crashing into each other
until they resembled the flicked paint
from the quick tap of a brush onto canvas
and though it seemed random
like wrinkles of skin
resting on a weary brow
I assure you it was all very much with purpose
but the universe will never tell you that

The silver sun

the man rides in to
the silver sun
and in his arms
a silver gun
until he meets the man in black
who carries his weapon
upon his back
they both approach a woman in red
who acts as if
they both are dead
all ride off
in blue and gold
paying no heed
to what's been told

I am something of an anomaly...

in this depressive world
coffee makes me sleepy
benadryl makes me itchy
and medications
make me angry

I am a woodpecker
savagely beating my head
against the bark of a tree
but he has something
to show for his efforts
whereas I walk away
with a bloody face
and brain damage

Worse places than this?

winter in Cleveland...
sure, there are worse places
but grim is grim
where the soul is concerned
cold is still cold
and a gray sky here
is the same as a gray sky
in Colorado
people still complain about
the smell of piss on the train
or the bus
as far as the soul is concerned
winter is winter
and everywhere
is everywhere,
all relative they say
but still better than being
a dried-up bush in
the Arizona desert

I was talking to the wall the other day and...

I'm convinced these walls
have nothing to say
sleek and clean
perfect

I'm looking for stories of
how life used to be,
the simpler times
and these walls just stare back at me
glazed over and stupid

the smell of stale cigarettes
of old wood and rusty nails
the sweat of the working class
with grease on their shirts

it is gone

there is no smell at all
the walls are perfect,
empty
and my eyes are glazed over and stupid
as I stare back at them

On almost missing the morning train

two birds were arguing in the trees
as I walked half asleep to nowhere
lovers in a drunken quarrel
dancing on the bar top for all to see
I say this because it was loud and boisterous
rumbling above all the other sounds
above the noise of my own footsteps
above the rattle of the coming train
and the booming of airplane engines in the sky
they were in two separate trees
on two separate streets
the air was cold,
the kind of cold that settles in the bones
and makes its home for days
with no intention of leaving
the sun was coming up
as it had been doing so earlier and earlier
and I could tell just by staring into it
how it reflected from every branch
in the spiderweb of trees
how everything was lit just so
spring would soon come
the sunrise had that look to it today
sometimes in the fall as well
but this sunrise doesn't come with a sadness,
the awareness that every living thing
will start to wilt and crumble
but instead, be born again
so they argued
in the naked branches
of the separate trees
unaware and indifferent
to the idea that I was listening to everything

I pulled my coat tightly around my neck
adjusted my hat for the hundredth time
fumbled for my house keys
stepped over a tree root
squinted from the sun
and walked on
letting them continue their disagreement
I let the wind blow through the branches
I left the squirrels to forage
stepped aside allowing the waking life to
reach up into the rising sun
watched the feral cats prowl
watched it all fade behind me
until everything was silent once again
except the sound of footsteps
drumming in tune
with my own beating heart

Some things aren't worth fighting for

let me tell you something
about fighting for the cause
if it doesn't mean anything to you
then it is meaningless
and good luck convincing someone
to help fight your battles
when they are too busy
fighting for their lives

Among the decay

there is a clear and wretched line
in all of this
where the world that used to be
meets the world that is
and sits comfortably among the decay
a place where nature meets man's destruction
claiming for the betterment
of humanity
a lake held back from the break wall
and the mountain you won't see
past the high and rising brick and steel
somewhere along the edge,
a thin line of where they meet
we stand and tell stories
of what was
and silently question what
will be

Rock star life

Eric Clapton said:
it's in the way that you use it
but really
it is in the way a seagull
doesn't freeze its ass end
when it splashes down in
a cold December river
it's in the way a bee doesn't sting you
as it buzzes around your head
or how the trickle of water
in a drainage ditch leaves the soil beneath it
a dirty rust color
in how the train smells like burning electricity
wafting from the lines above your head
or how only parts of Lake Erie freeze over
and other parts don't
it is not in the science at all
but in the aftermath of wonder

Perfecting one's craft

I sat in the Black Bird
with a coffee and apricot croissant
watching one of the bakers cutting butter
for twenty-five minutes
the Sunday church crowd slowly streaming in
the men in khakis and nice button up shirts
the women had on tight spandex
showing off their suburban middle-aged asses
while she stood there meticulously
cutting butter
it looked to be about 5 pounds worth,
piled high on a half sheet tray
I thought about the jobs in the world
floor sweeper
shelf stocker
gas station attendant
and *this* person standing at a table cutting butter
seemingly content with a slight smile on her face
and her attention to detail
the pieces were neither too big
nor too small
but the perfect size
when she finished one block
she walked to the cooler for another
and who was I to judge a person's craft
when she looked so happy in the moment

Say nothing

you tell people you're a writer
they will ask...

“oh yeah, am I in one of your stories?”

nobody wants you to write about them
unless it's good
and if it's bad they run ten miles
in the other direction

they don't want the truth
they want to be glorified

but they don't understand
sometimes there is glory
in being an asshole

Life, the endless wave

life is not beautiful
with a rainbow of opportunities,
puppies and happy little trees
it is, however, an endless wave
of drunken beatings
untapped anger that claws away at you
with its acid covered fingers
bounced checks
and a dark, foul smelling alley of vagrants
waiting to rob you
of the little that is left
while the rest of the world
turn their heads and laugh
at the misfortune you so rightly deserve

The light of a thousand universes

what a strange image burned in my mind
the skyline
but the buildings were nothing more
than a silhouette of thin red lines
against a glaring black backdrop
as if the structures were no more than an outline
of red burning embers
in the vacuum of space
bold and tall
horrifying yet blissfully calm
this city, this silhouette
what I called home
burned with the intensity
of a thousand universes igniting at once
and long after the fire burned out
and the dust settled
after the universe cooled
until nothing was left but black sky
this image of the city
was etched forever into the canvas of space
and I hoped that in time
burning red flowers and trees
would fill the landscape with the same intensity
until one could no longer look at it,
gaze into the fire
without fear of blindness

As I walked

the sun was humming through the clouds
just enough that this particular morning
felt brighter but still gray
and the snow was in piles
touched with dirty footprints
the people looked miserable
and rightly so
clumps of ice and dirty snow
fell around me as I walked
all was calm yet dull
and steam was rolling off the rooftops
the coffee was settling in
tomorrow would come without fanfare
without punctuation
but it would come nonetheless
and I would greet it as any other day
with as much enthusiasm
as it did me

Time

there it is again
the tick tock
of time passing
as the second-hand struggles to lift itself
before giving up completely
time is an old man clutching his walker
shuffling slowly, slowly
while the sun rises and sets

with each scuff of his feet
I see movement,
the shadows of the sun
footsteps, falling leaves
yet I myself remain perfectly still
I feel in my bones the slow decay
petrification of human life
falling in clumps like dirt
in unison with the tick tock
of passing time

Paralysis (go to sleep)

I have these dreams, frequently
of being paralyzed,
weighted down
and with this paralysis comes
the overwhelming feeling
that someone is watching me
from the corner of the room
I can't see him
I can't see anything except my own body
trying desperately to break out
of its tomb-like state
no one can hear my screams
because they are trapped inside me
echoing off my sealed corpse
there is a sense that whoever is watching
is also laughing
taking great pleasure in my suffering
and as I try to break free, rocking back and forth
I am somewhere between a dream world
and reality
somewhere between life and death
a lucid coma
a mental patient wrapped in a strait jacket
of his own skin
blinking signals for help with only my eyes
light is coming through the window blinds
for a moment I wonder if this
is the light they tell you to go toward
when you are dying
and not certain which way to go
and it sits in the corner watching me
laughing
I think of those times

I questioned the pointless nature of life
the idea of a world I don't exist in
my indifference to the living
and as I think of these things
I want nothing more
than to be alive in this moment
so much that I scream and kick like a wild animal
desperately trying to move even so much
as a finger
because living, no matter how painful
has to be better than this silent, isolated coma
even if the thing that scares you to death
is the paralyzed life you now live

Using the old pecker

I saw something the other day
you don't see very often
nothing unusual, really
just a woodpecker
I heard the distinctive sound
knocking against a tree in the backyard
and as I looked up, this bird
was really going at it
foraging for food
or building a nest
I thought of how similar we were
beating our heads against the hard knotty surface
in hopes of finding something
to keep us alive one more day
something to live for at all
only to come out of it
dizzy and confused
nothing unusual for either of us

The sun was a mouse

scratching through a thin plastic bag
snow clung to the surface of life
like a cat's claws in my leg
while the wind beat against me
with all the force of an exploding cannonball
anger swelled up
bitter coffee
labored breath
and an unimpressive existence
stinging the back of my throat
aching joints and pointlessness
I see a light in the distance
extend my hand to it
there is a scent in the air
of burning cheese
and burning diesel fuel

Those things called love and happiness

I cannot write so easily of
those things called love and happiness
when the world is an endless cesspool
of hatred
where rage flows through
the washed out streets and gutters
and anger can be plucked from the trees
like newly born blooms in the springtime
all of it spilling over the landscape
with an untamed ferocity
nothing coexists
with nothing
and everything is engulfed
in constant hellish flames
man runs feral and naked
beating his chest and his fellow man
with the bones of all he has killed

- and so, I can't speak of
love and happiness
when the world is so full of shit

A ten dollar affair

I was trying to figure out
how to split ten dollars
between the gas tank and my stomach
so I spent three dollars on
a can of soup
a bag of pretzels
and the rest on a pack of cigarettes
the phone bill was a week late
which was becoming a common theme
but no one calls anyway

You'll never understand it unless you live it and would you admit it if you did?

there was an old black woman
standing at the crosswalk
screaming at her demons
with a voice that made me think of
a very angry raccoon
she was waving her arms
and swatting frantically at the air around her
the conversation tense, whatever their argument
as the people walked on
staring and pointing
and I, unfazed by it all
because unlike those who *had* walked on
absorbed in their normal lives
I had seen it before
understood its place
accepted it to be
knew there was nothing to fear
except for the ignorance
of those who passed one by one
so that we can stone those who are different
ridicule what we don't understand
and call that normal

It is in the trees (can you see it?)

I stood there
a blubbering fool
in thinking it was supposed to be
like the movies
having some deep existential conversation
and spouting all those things I never understood
until now

I stood there
like a child who was robbed
of all those things children do
because I was forced into a life I didn't want

I stood there expecting
that you would answer back
all the questions I had asked over the quiet years
hoping you would rise again
the branches of a newborn tree

but there was
nothing except
the sound
of wind
rushing through
my soul
and so
I walked away
and did what
you could not
by living, still

Poetry is a smear campaign

poetry is easy they think
everything is about love
so they pull every cliché
word or phrase
from their ass
and smear it on a piece of paper
and most of what they write
is just that,
a pile of shit covered paper
it's too easy
the hard part is
getting to know someone enough
to write beautiful thoughts about them
but no one wants to put in the time
they just want to write about the idea
without doing the research

The Cleveland epidemic

they had us packed in
real good today
sweat covered sardines
mindless, drunken
brain damaged fish out of water
gasping for our last breath
and grasping at anything we could hold on to
the March snow was blowing sideways
from what I could tell
being distracted by a sea of flailing arms
drumming on my head
there was an older black man
with a thin white beard
pacing back and forth, talking to Jesus
and throwing curse words
faster than the falling snow
it thinned out slowly at each stop
with enough room finally to stretch out
the door opened at West 150th
I stepped out and exhaled-
a breath I had been holding since 25th street
the snow slowed to a drizzle
and my boots felt heavy walking in the street
dodging dog turds
breathing my last breath
and choking on the small white flakes
and all I could think about
was collapsing in my unmade, uneven bed
and staring at the cracks in the ceiling

Annual review

in submitting
my self-review
which is deemed necessary
for those who were supposed to
but were too lazy
too busy running things
too busy being in charge
I have put myself somewhere above shitty
but below outstanding
because no one is perfect
no future review
is needed

Candy coatings in rainbow land

some days I hate it,
I really do
this business of being a writer
to be a braggart
as if dying face down in the gutter
is any less noble
than writing poetry about it
to take something as simple
as a flower petal
twisting it into an existential
trip of the mind
a hit of acid on the tongue
all to the background music of
clapping hands from strangers
and when they no longer clap
when the room is empty
I am left with the flushing sound
of a toilet full of useless words
swirling around my head
and feeling just as shitty

World war me

I'll be buried in the dirt for ten years
like a child's plastic army man
before they find me
and when they do
I imagine they will say,
"Oh look what I've found!"
waving me around like some trophy
chiseling away at the clumps of dirt
and burrowing beetles
"I think it's a fossil!"
until they realize with utter disappointment
I am nothing more than a child's discarded toy
before throwing me back for another ten years

I waited patiently but have not patience for that sort of thing

I have been waiting for you, Death
for many years
but for you to come
I must also wait for
the water to boil
snow covered grass
to turn green again
the collection notice
loss of mind
and sight
financial decay
others to die
endless beatings
the train to stop
sunrise to sunset
seventeen thousand times
I have waited for
the blood to stop
the riots to cease
the day to be over
and a million more things
to add to the list
did you even notice
I've had the time, of course
life is nothing but a bore
waiting for things
and now I wait for you still
like some kind of savior
I should say I will be excited
for you to come
but I'm so very tired
and will probably be asleep
when you arrive

The sting of a streetcar's tail

the wind was furious again
yelling at everyone who would listen
and even those who wanted nothing to do with it
it shook the streetlights back and forth
and they made a sound
that reminded me of the bell from an old streetcar
as they swayed violently
trying their best to stay rooted
I held tightly to what I could
while bits of dust and debris stung my eyes
no matter which way I turned
I could not escape the brutality of nature

Eating before bed

a one-dimensional bird
stood on a one-dimensional rock
that seemed to be floating
above the pale water
he wore a derby hat
and held an umbrella
under the flat blue sky
the colors were off,
tedious flat pastels
lifeless, I will say
and when I looked again at the bird
he was wearing a monocle
each time I glanced at him
he became more ridiculous
there were strings
attached to his limbs and beak
that stretched up to the clouds
as if someone were putting on a puppet show
an intensely boring and colorless show at that
his feet pointed in opposite directions
and when his beak
was pulled by the strings
it went up and down
but nothing came out
not a *quack* or a *bawk*

A full and tiresome day

toothpaste

soap

floss

pots

pants

how do they do it...

...get it all done?

Sometimes even the monotony is monotonous

the piercing quiet of the train ride
was a bit unsettling today
the commotion of voices, deathly still
were they plotting some silent revenge
or just sleeping with the dead
there was an occasional click of the wheels
on the rusty tracks
a quiet rattle off the thin metal walls
but nothing else
7:20am and they push through the turnstiles
like spooked cattle
apathetic to the cliff just on the other side
the smell of the city
rushes through Tower City station, thick and musty
7:25am everyone is ass-to-mouth
on the escalator
people climbing over people
it is snowing as I make my way outside
pelting me from every direction
I stop for a moment
light a cigarette
waiting for the egg to fry
the coffee to brew
the frigid air makes me itch
I would sit down some time later
and write my thoughts on all this
contemplating describing in great detail
the gray sky
but gray is gray
and not worth describing today

The bar had changed

since the last time I was there
it was still full of stiff old guys
fresh off the factory shift
but they had knocked down a wall,
really opened the place up
the dull paint scheme was the same
that's good though,
these old-timers
don't like change much
there was good music and everybody
minded their own business
I'm not in the mood to talk anyway
so it worked out for the best in my opinion
I take comfort in staring off
and taking it all in
all of it seems so familiar
the uncombed hair
rows and rows of missing teeth
the lights are low
the neon is buzzing
Cat Stevens is singing sad ballads
on the jukebox
and no one is listening
well, I have to admit
I have missed it some
my gut can no longer take the rush of alcohol
like it could years ago
but sometimes it's good to cleanse the soul
with a night of cheap beer
chasing a low-grade buzz
with a buck or two and the freedom
to do so

Whoring myself for the arts

when night falls
when the lights go dim
and most of us are asleep
is when things really get going
I'm fixated on a man wearing
a monkey mask
with cheap sunglasses and slicked back hair
there is a mummy next to him
smiling for pictures
just another pretty face
with a milky white eye
that makes me uneasy
in the back of the room
under the smoky light
is a man hammering a nail
into his nose
and it is much less unsettling to look at
than the mummy
all around the room in the stale darkness
are people with blood on their faces
hovering like the dead
slogging along in their dead little world
it is a carnival of lost souls to be honest
and I with no mask
or gauze dripping of blood
the odd man out
I feel as if I should lead them
but at the moment I am
too lazy to walk
even to the bathroom

Why do they wait until you have a cigarette up to your mouth before they tell you their life story?

I was talking to a guy, or rather,
he was talking to me
down on the corner of Euclid
and some other street
I was trying to smoke a cigarette
with the wishful thought of
just five minutes of peace and quiet
I remember nothing of his life story
except the phrase *living the dream*
and I hadn't even asked
but I thought, yes
I can agree with a single word
living
that I am doing
even if it is simply
involuntarily breathing
and I remember a friend telling me
he doesn't remember his dreams
not a single one
I think – how glorious this might be
to have not a single thing to remember

the same car

as the bitter puff of smoke leaves my lips
on this cold February morning
I see a man walking
without a jacket
the same as the man before him
and a woman
wearing the same shoes as the last
I have tasted this stale smoke before
and seen the same car parked
in the same lot
and realized it isn't my life
that hasn't changed
but the world around me
has stayed the same

I don't need a stick up my butt

just dumb it down
is all I'm asking
I haven't the patience for
the arrogance
or pompous nature
of art and poetry
there is no need
I just want to be
I just want to write
without thinking
or hidden meaning
to just...be

It was December 22nd

I was on the train heading home
and the city was lost
behind a wall of fog
all around me
the sky was the same color as my mood
a thick dirty gray
I felt like I hadn't slept in days
all day long people stopping,
asking for spare change
as if I wasn't one short step away from
financial disaster myself
as if something had sucked every ounce of energy
from my body
as if I was somehow above it all
and them

I am

torn
between
space
and
time

New year, new year, new year

I don't find so easy
welcoming in a new year
with exuberance
and open arms
or a renewed hope for things to come
when the old year
is still scratching at the door
with its dried up claws
like an old dying cat
slowly dragging its way
into the new year
and bringing with it
a matted and foul smelling denial
and the thought of
out with the old
in with the new
only serves to rub salt on a wound
that once taught
so much hope

What's the point of being famous if you're dead?

I spent the better part of the morning
convincing the world
that I wasn't dead
someone started a rumor
and in the early hours I was awakened
from my supposed death
by several frantic phone calls
each one more surprised I was indeed alive
I stood in front of the television sipping coffee
watching the local news
but the news was only that there was no news, simply that I had passed
“more to come as details unfold.”
I stood there, watching for the longest time
and waiting for the details that never came
most upsetting though beyond the idea
of my own death
was the mention of my body of artwork
and how the value had suddenly increased
exponentially
all those years of whoring myself
for a hobby that brought little success
and no recognition
selling enough here and there for a couple beers
at the local dive bar
convincing myself I did it for
the love of creating and not just to survive
and all I had to do to achieve such success
was to die
the newsman interviewed “experts” in the field
those people sipping wine, pinky up
giving existential thoughts on what it all meant
they told the world to hold on to it,
that the value would only increase over time

I thought about my work sitting in a closet
wrapped in old bed sheets collecting
a valuable dust
I thought about all those souls
cashing in on my misfortune
and how I couldn't really blame them
god knows I tried while I was alive
"this is a sad day indeed.
I didn't even know he was ill."
they interviewed people on the street
and these people cried, talked about me
as if we were the best of friends
and I began to question why
none of them did these things while I was alive
why they kept their heads down
as we passed on the street
why they stood wasting my time
trying to make a deal,
talking me down
because a twenty-five dollar price tag
was too much
and how they could go home right now
create the very same thing for half the price
with no artistic background whatsoever
though suddenly in death
I meant something to them
I contemplated as the networks ran the story
of melting into the shadows of darkness,
letting them believe the little fantasy
of my demise
go ahead, cry yourselves to sleep
for the man you never knew
but I was awakened just then from my own fantasy
as the phone rang for the hundredth time
I did not answer
life *had* been good to me over the years
I no longer had to beg for acceptance

money was no longer an issue
and it no longer mattered what they thought
being alive or dead
so I finished my coffee and turned off the television

Struggling with fractions

thoughts are flooding my head lately
a flash of childhood memories
various times in the past
flipping through my mind
like an old school projector
I get the feeling
they are trying to tell me something
but these thoughts
the images
are too disjointed, hazy and quick
to make anything out of them
I remember these times vaguely
but struggle to understand how they fit together
in the present moment

The only way to escape it is through death

it was relentless, weeks at a time
I hid in every dark corner I could find
only to be told

“you can’t stay here.”

I hung my head and walked on
pretending to be invisible

but like wild animals

sniffing out an easy kill

they managed to find me

I hid every single day

but they found me

quiet and weak

unable to fight them off

unable to do anything but

stand staring at the ground

and when word came in

cold and monotonous

- she had died sometime overnight

we would be moving soon

I felt a morbid sense of relief

the torment

might finally come to an end

When you control it, all you control is nothing

control
what a useless endeavor
all the world fighting for it
to have everything
so neatly bundled
all within reach
holding on with clenched fingers
until they go red and numb
and for what
so we can watch as all these things
we held so dearly for unimportant reasons
one by one slip through our hands
blowing away in the wind
while frantically grabbing at the air
until all those things we controlled are lost
and are left with the fear
of all those things we had no control of
in the first place

Some people act as if they've never seen a dick before

the train smells like a toilet
the drunk slumped over
probably had something to do with it
he is lying across the seat passed out
unaware his dick is hanging out, limp
nodding back and forth
to the beat of the train tracks
there is a trail of piss
making its way down the aisle
like a creek winding through the forest trees
some people ignore it
some people act as if
they've never seen a dick before
and the driver of the train, oblivious
an otherwise typical day
and the only thing keeping us from choking
on the stale piss and shit
of this typical day
is the occasional stop, the doors open
a slight breeze blows through
and carries them away into the cold April air
behind the driver on the wall
a sign in big bold letters:
this train is a SAFE ZONE

Alternate transportation

after some time of doing nothing
I get the urge to write something new
sometimes it flows effortlessly
and sometimes not
I am tired
the whiteness
of a snow covered world
depresses me
my neck is stiff
and people are singing badly
on the train
pressed up against one another
while each step is demanding our attention
in the wrong directions
the music plays against the walls of my skull
soaking in the brittle cracks
the news of the day scrolls on and on
but I'm just not into it today
none of it
and that my mind acts as if it all matters
does not help the matters at hand

**There is nothing worse than the sound of a cat licking itself, except
maybe cancer**

the cat is licking himself
inches away from my face
it sounds like someone
humping a bowl of pudding
so I kick him off the bed
I can hear the snow falling
rustling to the ground
the bedroom walls
are glowing with moonlight
slicing through the clouds
and he keeps licking
the walls are creaking with the wind
I hear all of it
through a dull ringing in my head
and I lay wondering
will they recognize me tomorrow
will they give a wave,
say hello
will it ever stop snowing
will he lick himself to the bone
are they watching
and then I feel my heart stop
only it hasn't
I had drifted off
jolted awake by another thought
and that thought was
I could write a book
of all these thoughts
but I'm tired
and lazy
and warm
so there is no reason

to disrupt my current situation
my heart stops again
only this time I did not wake up
and all the noises finally stopped

Science is easy when you break it down

beyond the science
when you get down to it
we are nothing more
than a pile of bones,
blood and shit

cont'd

and speaking of shit
how about life, huh?
stomping down on my head
like a dirty boot
snuffing out a fire
old hands wringing out a smelly old rag
the pressure
squeezing my head
and my head is in the clouds
I am here but not
I see things, but I don't
I can see through
what is in front of me
but I cannot see what *it* is
in front of me
I can see each footstep I take
yet I am floating
in control but not
and I don't know where I am
yet somehow arrive
where I should be

The shadows move along the walls

I have a single wish
it is completely selfish,
I know
I wish for time to stop
for a single day
for things to align
I have my reasons
a single day
what could it hurt
but time keeps moving
as I stare out at the world
the tiny specks
cars and people
I can see them
a mile above the clouds
they keep moving
unaware of my reasons
the waves against the breakers
keep crashing
a bird floats by
doesn't know I'm here
doesn't look at me
unaware, uninterested
in my reasons
the sun still glides
across the horizon
casting shadows
and the shadows
move along the walls
from where I sit
and time keeps moving too
unaware of my reasons
but who am I to ask

for the machines to stop turning
or the fires to stop burning
for the wind to stop blowing
the animals
to stop scurrying
and tending to their families
for just a single day
for my own selfish reasons

The streets stretch out

like rays of light
until they disappear completely
I wave my hand as if to say
I control it all
and yet they still flee,
the people disappearing
like the streets
into a muddy backdrop
as if I did not exist at all
the sky becomes the sea
and the sea fades
the reflection of it all in the glass
becomes blurred
as time passes like smoke
from a crumbling brick chimney
do they see me
or am I just a reflection as well
those who flee
will come back tomorrow
and it will be the same
because that is what time does

Behind the mask of an unnatural smile

standing on the edge of a cliff
you'll never know how close
unless I tell you of
my ability to balance carefully
on only my heels
the rustling of loose gravel
rolling under my feet
and how that sound becomes
no sound at all
as it tumbles gently to
the ground miles below
if it were to give way
if I were to lose my balance
and how that might not be so bad
at all
because my legs have grown so tired...

I never understood
why people hide the misery
behind the mask of an unnatural smile
straining useless muscles
in an attempt to fool the world
bills stack up and up
toward the sky
fear takes over
the notion, paranoia
that someone is hiding in the shadows,
waiting to take us away in chains
a choir of strange faces
glaring at us
or when the electricity cuts off
then they will know
we just couldn't get our shit together
the thought of scrounging for crumbs

like a rodent, panicked
foaming at the mouth
it's gut-wrenching stuff, it really is
the poetry in suffering
yet we wallow in the anguish
pretending to pretend
the world doesn't know
and it would be nice just once
to walk down the street
and see that same look
of defeat and fear
in someone else's eyes
to know there are others
to know it's ok

I have been driving in the sun for so long

I was told to pass along to you a story
of driving through the deserts of Arizona
and how monotonous and flat
my current situation is
I have taken up counting cacti
to kill the boredom
but have lost interest quickly
as there is too much space between them
I have not seen any sign of life
for forty miles
in fact, all I have seen has been dead
brittle dusty tumbleweeds
four animals, rodents maybe
I can't tell by the flattened dried up piles
of guts and blood
and the redness of blood is the only thing
that adds color to the sandy brown landscape
the vultures won't even waste their time here
I could tell you how the sun
is a blazing flame in the cloudless sky
and flecks of light bounce across the windshield
creating a mirage of dancing light soldiers
along the blinding highway
I have been driving in the sun for so long
everything has become whitewashed
the sandy browns are even paler now
splattered across a watercolor painting
the water having dried up a hundred years ago
everything I touch is gummy and hot
the air from the dashboard vents
is sputtering at best
mixing with the smell of cigarettes
and greasy cheeseburgers

the radio crackles and pops
each time the tires hit a rut in the road
and I begin to hear what I think is
alien life trying to communicate with me
through the radio
it sounds much like Johnny Cash
or maybe they are having a conversation
with each other
and I wasn't invited
the problem with all this is
I have never been through the Arizona desert
and wouldn't know where to begin
with my story

My life up on the big screen

I'd like to see it blow up big
my life, that is
a theatrical blockbuster
"I've read your work," he says
"It's very depressing."
this little man sitting behind an expensive desk
decorated with scenes of Greek gods
killing things for fun
their smiling bearded faces hand carved
into every inch of it
I'm trying not to stare at his sad little head
with its sad little hair
I am however trying to decipher,
I mean really fixate
and figure it out
if it's greased back with purpose
or just greasy
"well, my dad was dead by the time I was two years old."
"that's horrible!"
it was I suppose, but at two years old who knows
what is and what is not horrible
and I sit telling my story
worrying about a desk
and strange greasy hair
"they told me it was a heart attack until I was seventeen."
this idea that someone is interested in my story
that someone cares,
is all very exciting yet confusing
why must everything be so extravagant
the room
the desk
his wrinkled forehead
and everything covered in gold accents

“you make it sound as if they lied to you.”

“they did. he washed down some pills with a bottle of whiskey.”

“Jesus Christ!”

“no, he wasn’t there. too busy winning super bowls.”

“and when I was thirteen my mother...”

I can see he is uncomfortable

but he wanted my story

“oh god, no...”

“not god, it was cancer.”

and it goes on and on like this

the death, destruction, my life

the depressive realism that will be a grand

theatrical blockbuster

he fidgets and sweats

and fidgets some more but knows

they will eat it up, everyone

yes, I would like to see it all blow up

on the big screen

but I have seen the crap Hollywood pukes out

and my life has been crap on top of crap

and I struggle to wonder why

they would pay money

to look at an unpolished turd

God has really bad taste in art

I knew an artist once
who painted nothing but flowers
that's all he had in him
one flower turned into a hundred
all with the same colors
the same style
after a while they all bled together
he said god told him what to paint
and to see his body of work
you might understand why the world was suffering
with cancer
homelessness
poverty
etc.
because god was too busy
telling the artist to paint boring flowers

And why shouldn't I deserve it?

the comfort of prosperity?
I have suffered like the rest
paid the man
lived rightly
chased the dream
watching it fall like dirt
through my fingers
I have gone without
missed opportunities
learned from it
got it
I understood
the notion
money
doesn't
equal
happiness
but it does pay for the comfort
of not worrying about
a tank of gas
or worn out shoes
or bills gathering dust
the wounds bleed intensely
mentally
emotionally
adding insult
so why shouldn't I deserve it
the comfort
or should I be comfortable in the adage
everything happens...
should I be the monk
sitting cross-legged
on a rocky ledge

deep in meditation
in a quiet forest
finding peace with
what he has
or has not
rather than an old river dog
sniffing about
to survive
pissing in the briars
marking my territory
so the others won't take
what little I have

It is always wise to have a cool down period after a hard workout, in this case, a mental workout. Breathe slowly, stretch those brainial muscles and ease back into life with this small collection of short poetry.

there are moments in time when
you have the absolute of nothing
no one to turn to
coasting on fumes
locked in a room with nowhere to go
and all you have in front of you is
rye toast and butter
and nothing compares to
the beauty of such a thing

it is unsettling
to not see the lake
where the lake is supposed to be
completely wrapped in a blanket of fog

the river was almost over the banks
I saw a strange bird
sitting in a lonely dead tree
both looked out of place but comfortable
the bird was the color of a stormy sky
and was hard to see against the sickly branches

I have these bouts
moments of...
well, you might call it anger
I would call it clarity or more importantly
the reality
that life
isn't the fairytale they would have you believe

the devil smiles at me
like an old pencil sketch
with a razor-toothed grin
and I do not share in his happiness

all this talk about love
it's just not my thing
I mean, I am capable of love
but talking about it doesn't suit me
I'd rather wipe my ass with sandpaper
and sit in gasoline

it is a rather abstract place I am in
at the moment
somewhere between
madness and solitude
and a candy coated hell

sometimes you see something that really hits hard
a wrinkled old hand
on a wrinkled old man
and it makes you think about your own hands
and how you're not too far off from death yourself

sometimes
the best you've got
is the bartender who
hasn't seen you
in six months
but still remembers

if I took their advice
and lived my life
like there was no tomorrow
I am certain I would be writing these words
from a jail cell
or the grave

inhale through the nose, hold for 5 seconds
exhale slowly through the mouth
repeat as necessary
all of today has been met with a heavy sigh
to punctuate the difficulty in just being awake
the most productive I have been
was wrestling with a baked potato
and as expected I am confident the potato won

have you ever been in the presence of someone
who speaks as if they haven't seen another
human being
since the beginning of time

old chubby men with old chubby fingers
all stuffed into fat suits with their glazed over eyes
staring at the imaginary people off in the corner
and I think I still have time
before the same can be said about me

some days
being in the middle of
a hurricane
is still better than
being in Cleveland

of all the jobs I've had the one I remember most
first year college, cafeteria dish room
standing in front of an industrial garbage disposal
watching bus tubs of half-eaten swill
swirling down the drain
like watching the entire universe
being sucked into a black hole

I would think it fairly easy
to be a professional critic of art and poetry
I find it rather effortless
to dislike the work of others
there was a painting of a woman
but the proportions were off
and she looked as if she had three tits
it wasn't meant to be an abstract piece
just badly painted art by another so-called artist
taking the easy road
a road to three tits

the streetlights had just kicked on
when I decided to call it a night
my body ached when I moved
and there wasn't enough energy
swirling in the universe for me to exist
the birds, on the other hand
had just woken up with all the sound and energy
of a restless toddler