

# no demon no god

poems by jason stoneking

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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<sup>o</sup>e 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

First edition limited to 250 numbered copies.  
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