

POEM-SHAPED LIVES



A BUNCH OF WORDS BY ANDRE MONSERRAT

Poem-Shaped Lies

by Andre Monserrat

IMAGINATION, n. A warehouse of facts, with poet and liar in joint ownership.
Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

“It’s customary to have this page at the beginning of the book,” Taran explained. “It’s a kind of ‘thank you’ to all the schmucks who supposedly inspired his present work of genius.”

“But what if the contents of the book are terrible?” Rubric asked.

“Hopefully the guy’s pals are too polite or too drunk to say anything.”

“I see,” Rubric said turning the small volume over in his hands, riffing the strange pages.

“Are you done with that drink, Rube? It looks like you could use another.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Here it is, my first chapbook! I feel very fortunate to be part of the wacky, hospital waiting room world of the Albuquerque poetry community.

Thank you for letting me in and locking the door behind me.

This book is dedicated to (in roughly chronological order):

Kenn Rodriguez

for hosting MAS Poetry, without which I never would have met any of you guys.

Don McIver

for his kind words about my first slam poem and for encouraging me to read again.

Bob Reeves

for intimidating me.

Amy Mullin

for pulling back the curtains and for a hundred other things I have no words for.

Mike Storms

for being a punk ass bee-yatch.

And to Cathy who lit a fuse and then walked away...

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Some of the Parts

My reflection got a new girlfriend so it's not around in the morning
to help me shave.

My appetite left me 'cause of my lack of taste.

My shadow is at the cleaner's and my memory is in the shop.

My heart won't return my calls

And my soul is on tour with Kurt Cobain.

I remember how he looked out at me from the cover of *Rolling Stone*:
Eyes staring down a train and he wouldn't step off the tracks.

I'm feeling empty as MTV.

My ribs are like a storm drain catching the occasional used up dream.

I'm afraid to have any of my own dreams,

Presently being so insubstantial.

Any kind of hope in my chest would carry me into the sky

On lazy warm currents of yesterdays long gone by.

No, I shall remain careful and earthbound,

stitching together a new shadow from old newspapers,

a tattered silhouette of personal ads dragging behind me

as I go a-questioning for my recently departed parts.

Well, now isn't this a sight?

I should have investigated the pool hall straight away,
but I was feeling optimistic.

There's my reflection, bright with the stolen light of its new girlfriend.

Appetite's over there turning a plate of barbeque wings into bones to
fence the graveyard where tiny ideas go.

At the pool table, my heart is arguing with my memory,

Cue sticks raised like green felt jousters.

Heart says, "Linda Lee was watermelon on the hottest summer's day."

"I can't abide such crazy talk," says Memory. "She was worthless as

Ray Charles at a peepshow!"

On the bar is a telegram from my soul:

STILL ON TOUR - STOP - KURT SAYS "HI" - STOP -

THIS TRAIN IS THE ONLY WAY TO FLY - STOP

Secret Message For Bob

another feeble dream
clawing at breakfast table
resplendent night song now
offensive in sane morning
swaths of Thursday
the wistful day
incubating more fevers to
come for me at dusk

Shrubs

When the shrubs ceased their dance,
the smallest one
peered into the night sky
and wondered aloud,
“Why do the trees have constellations
but we do not?”

The wisest of their number rustled,
“It is because they are tall enough
to rearrange the stars in their own image
while we must be content to divert
the streams and send bits of ourselves
to countries far away.

The trees will always wonder if
the patterns they have arranged are true.
They must grow many limbs
to support the burden of their conceit,
and grow many rings
to support the burden of their limbs.”

The tiny shrub seemed to understand,
tightening its roots,
pulling itself closer to the ground.

A Conversation With Gibson, Dali and Leyner in the Seattle Arcology, Downside

I target you: Flowing bush of twisted blonde indifference, falling through a cluster of melons screwed onto street rags, suits and Gothic leather. I drop with the slow orthogonal current. Down and down the metal tide I ride, distance ever constant, but oh so much closer. I fling bolts of concentrated lust at the back of your neck, but you switch to a different channel. Aluminum frond arrangements slide by. You ignore them. I'm about to cash in and you're calm as a land mine.

The table sat down in front of Deadly, between him and Legs, Firm Ass, Yes/No Eyes, Eat My Mouth, Lust My Flesh. Hunched stage hands bustled about to construct the atmosphere. Today it was an avant pop bar made of cardboard and nanofoam, folding up around them like a milk carton. With a voice of naked skin on satin, she commented on the perpetual, pedestrian droning. Deadly swallowed a beer bottle and belched shards of glass. She was impressed. Her smile slid off, rolled across the synthetic wood, and fell down his pants with a hot splash.

"You're so deadly, Deadly," she sauntered. She had someone else's eyes, but you couldn't tell without practiced cynicism. They held resonance bought with fast currency, a decadent vibration so in vogue these days. He had known her for two seconds five minutes ago, but the tune she sung was bitingly familiar and ages old. Deadly heard their future puff by: wind spit newspapers spread wide open to the Wanted Ads and the Obits; a mobius of urban tragicalamity within bands of splattered static.

"I know," he sharked and shoved both barrels through her chest. The other patrons wailed about the noise and blood, crawling up to the ceiling or strangling themselves in the bathroom pens to escape the drama.

"You killed me," you observe. Your costume is soaked in saltwater, reduced to ruined shags of rawness. Opening your handbag, you begin scooping in the ruddy chunks; you know a good surgeon. The chair beneath you is sloppy-ass drunk and wants no part of your misfortune. You feel so violated and wet. "Do it again. Just don't touch me."

Look at you, in your mirror jacket: you're such a wannabe me. Subtlety's a trick you can't buy. Hovering there among the cardstock Nofaces, you're a crucifixion in a library. You've never met me and already you want a piece of my action. Your stockings and perfume get a vicegrip around my waist, rocking me like dice: a sweaty gamble which you play to lose. Damn you, I'll ride you off the edge of oblivion for the crimes you make me think.

Deadly smiled and holstered his customized sawed off high caliber double-barreled massively parallel acid washed black latex lying ass tongue and said, "How can I kill you if you won't let me touch you? You long only for the anticipation of pain, not the agony itself. I don't use glass condoms."

He's such a rake, you think.

Flipping through the chrome tunes. You're into Dredge, Riptyme, and Neo-Klassikal. So we slot the same grooves... so what? Does that buy my balls, babe? Will you wear them on a chain or put them in a crypt-shaped chest on your night stand? You're the kind that demands guerilla warfare, an extended siege to win your chameleon heart. But I pick locks with shaped plastique, get dragged in the back door by the cat, and won't that be a surprise?

I'll let him kiss me, you decide. But when he does, I'll bite his tongue off.

Hometown

Billy's a boy born on the wrong side of the tracks
Where things get turned around
Spun upside down, land flat on their backs
He always carries his dad's old guitar
And he'll play damn near anything
If you hum a few bars
Momma's long gone
A note by the phone
Said "Won't be back anymore
'Cause everything I need is
Out our front door"
In his mind he sees a car drive away
Into the distance and he starts to say
"Hey hey hey I wanna go there"
He says "Hey hey hey I wanna be there"
He says "Everything I want is right out there
But it's so far away"
Come Saturday he goes into town
Where the whitewash is peelin'
And all the clocks are running down
He heard that Susan's back from college awhile
Before he knows what he's doing, he's practicing a smile
Billy won't you run
Oh, Billy won't you hide
But he looks across the street to the other side
And says "Hey hey hey I wanna go there"
He says "Hey hey hey I wanna be there"
He says "Everything I want is right over there
But it's so far away"
Her eyes are so blue, just like he remembered
He starts where they left off, way back in September
There's so much he needs and too much she wants
Of all the moments in our lives
It's the simple ones that haunt us
She says "Billy won't you sing
Billy won't you play guitar?"
She leans across the seat and whispers
"The road ahead -- it don't go very far"
The motel is cheap and he's just been paid
He locks the door while she pulls down the shade...
If only he could sleep, for one night forget
His heart's filled with the ash of his last cigarette
She rolls away
The day comes too soon
And all he'll ever remember is her face on the moon
As they stand by the curb, all he can say
Is that there's names he remembers, but the rest blow away
As she gets in her car
And he waves his goodbye
A small voice inside him is starting to cry
"Hey hey hey I wanna know her"
It says "Hey hey hey I wanna love her"
It says "I have everything I want when I'm right beside her
But she's too far away"

Victimless Crimes

Yes, officer, I am now aware that I was 10 miles over the posted speed limit.
It's just plain cruel to hang such a staggering sunset on yon horizon
And not expect a man's heart to race toward it, vehicle in tow.
Now I suppose you're fixing to run my license and have a peek at my record.
Allow me a disclaimer, a few soft words of explanation
That will get our relationship off to a pleasant start.
The parking tickets – well, I can't deny those.
Though, I know you'll raise an eyebrow at the library fine.
Yes, it is true: I did check out the entire collection of Sumerian mythology,
Some 57 odd books, from Taylor Memorial, and yes, I never returned them.
Three weeks is hardly adequate time to contemplate the Nam-Shub of Enkidu,
Wouldn't you agree?
And I'm sure the death mark placed on me by the Turkish Government is on file.
You can't take a piss in that country without committing some blasphemy or another.
Tucamcari?
Let me ask you something:
Were you even aware of such a smudge on the map before consulting my record?
No, I didn't think so.
I'm sure no one misses it – I sure don't.
Let them build an outlet mall or something there.
Plenty of space for it now.
"Who is Charlene Friday?"
Well, once upon a time, I would have said she was my wife.
Nowadays, that's just a word in the dictionary between "Friendship" and "Friction."
I can see where you're going with this, officer.
You could stand there playing priest to my confessor until the shadows tuck in the mountains
and kiss them goodnight,
But let me save you the trouble:
I am a guilty man.
But not for anything on your little computer screen.
If you have a moment, I can let you peruse the Right and True account of my life,
Careful and leather-bound,
Right here in the glove compartment.
Fear not!
I am unarmed,
Save for my wicked, wicked tongue.
Here:
I rescued a princess from a faraway tower, but put her in another tower closer to me.
I had a basket of apples, but picked another from my neighbor's tree.
I discovered a clear mountain stream and kept it a secret.
I let an entire summer slide past my window without so much as a glance at it.
I had a dream about a net of stars and did not write a poem about it.
Holy music swelled in my chest, yet I did not sing.
I pushed a child.
I laughed at a friend.
But these are all essentially victimless crimes,
Pedestrian cruelties available to common souls,
Loose change in the coat pockets of a more hideous transgression.
All victimless crimes.
I am a villain, true, but officer, please show me the innocent.

My Girlfriend Is So Fat

One morning I awoke to find myself pressed against what at first appeared to be a giant pink walrus.

Strangely enough, it had tattoos, just like my girlfriend, except they were smeared and stretched like Sunday comics on Silly Putty.

Blue eyes suddenly blinked out at me from deep inside the wrinkled vastness and an enormous belch erupted from the creature.

Great Googly Moogly! It WAS my girlfriend!

I staggered into the kitchen to find that the second coming of Colonel Sanders had indeed occurred sometime in the middle of the night and every scrap of food had been raptured away.

Even the dog food was gone!

Come to think of it, I never did see little Sparky again.

But all thoughts fled my mind as I turned to face the lumbering colossus that was my girlfriend, now wedged inside the kitchen door.

She says to me,

"I know my belly's got more understand if you don't want

Time stood still as I had my brain to prepare for loquacious, magnanimous lips.

She was huge any from

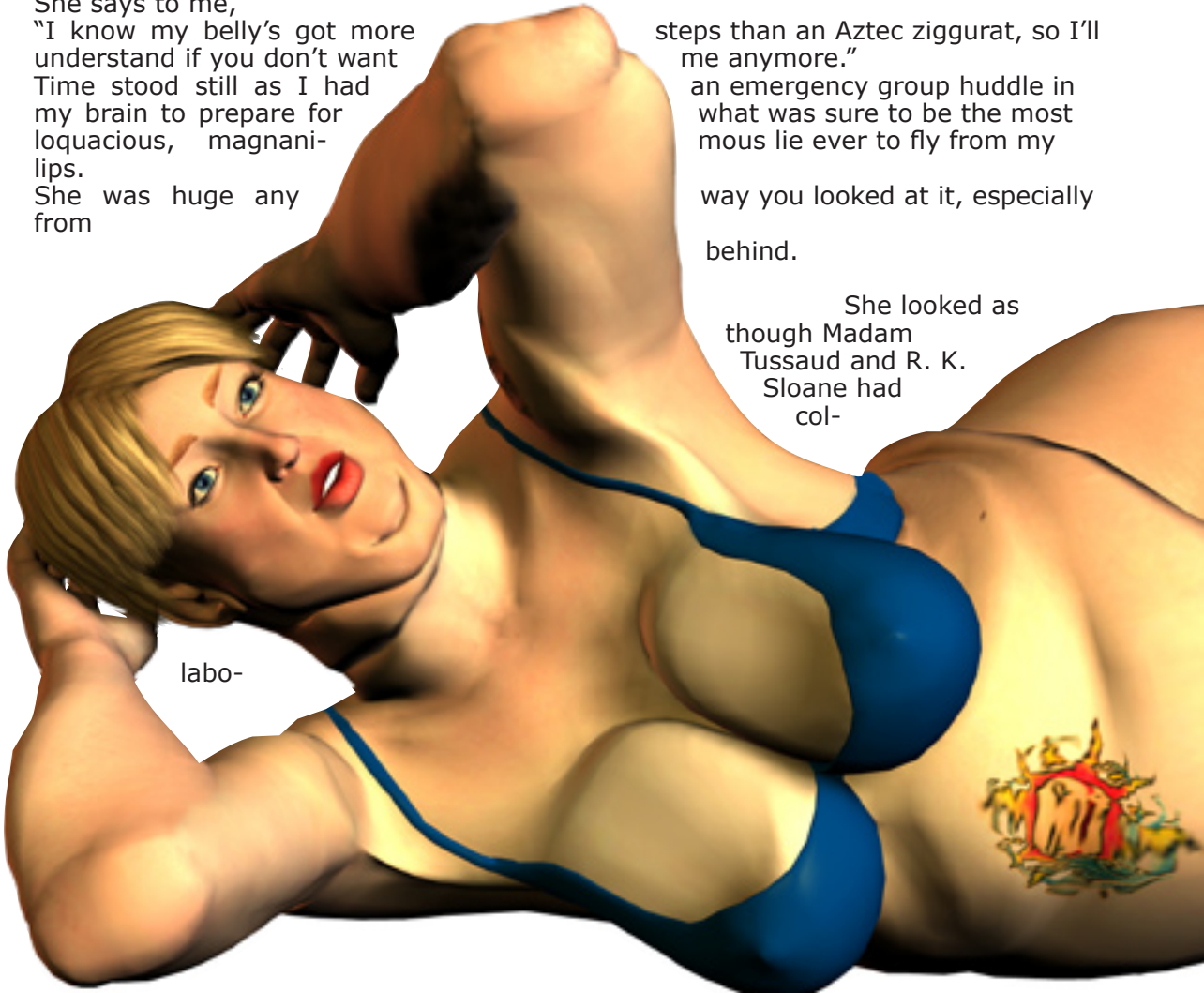
steps than an Aztec ziggurat, so I'll me anymore."

an emergency group huddle in what was sure to be the most mous lie ever to fly from my

way you looked at it, especially behind.

She looked as though Madam Tussaud and R. K. Sloane had col-

labo-



rated on a wax sculpture of Dom Deluise, Luciano Pavorati, and Orson Welles all diving for the last bit of pimento loaf during a Star Trek transporter accident. She was gargantuan, she was Brobdignagian, she was...she was...beautiful. Quietly, inexplicably, it happened. I had considered the well-endowed woman before, but not one so... uniformly endowed.

A newly-wakened hunger scorched through my loins as I said,
"Oh, no, baby, I like it like that!"
And not only that but,
"I want to play Jacque Coustaeu to your Marianas Trench!
I want to burn all the maps and be the new cartographer of your Grand Canyon!"
And from that moment on, our relationship began to expand in new dimensions.

Did you know that just about anything you could possibly need to make love to a tub of human flesh is readily available on the Internet?
A coal miner's helmet and a wetsuit, for example. Use your imagination. Now we do all our clothes shopping at Wilderness Outfitters. She holds up a slate blue Coleman 2-person tent and I say,
"It goes with your eyes, sexy."
She buys two plus a tight red 1-man pup tent for those special occasions. On the way home we pass AJ's Construction Supply and she gazes longingly at the Caterpillar D400E Series II dump truck.
"Some day, princess, but you're not quite there yet. Until then, my Ford Superduty will have to do."

Oh, I adore my little mountain of love and I'll do anything to make her happy. And she responds in kind.

Since I'm a Star Wars fan, we've worked this extra kink into our relationship.

Late at night, when I'm nestled in her labyrinthine folds,

I whisper, "Say it, baby. Say it!"

And she replies, "*Bo shu da, ah yis cabba Wookiee.*"

Oh, yeah!

Oh, I agree, it's not for everyone.

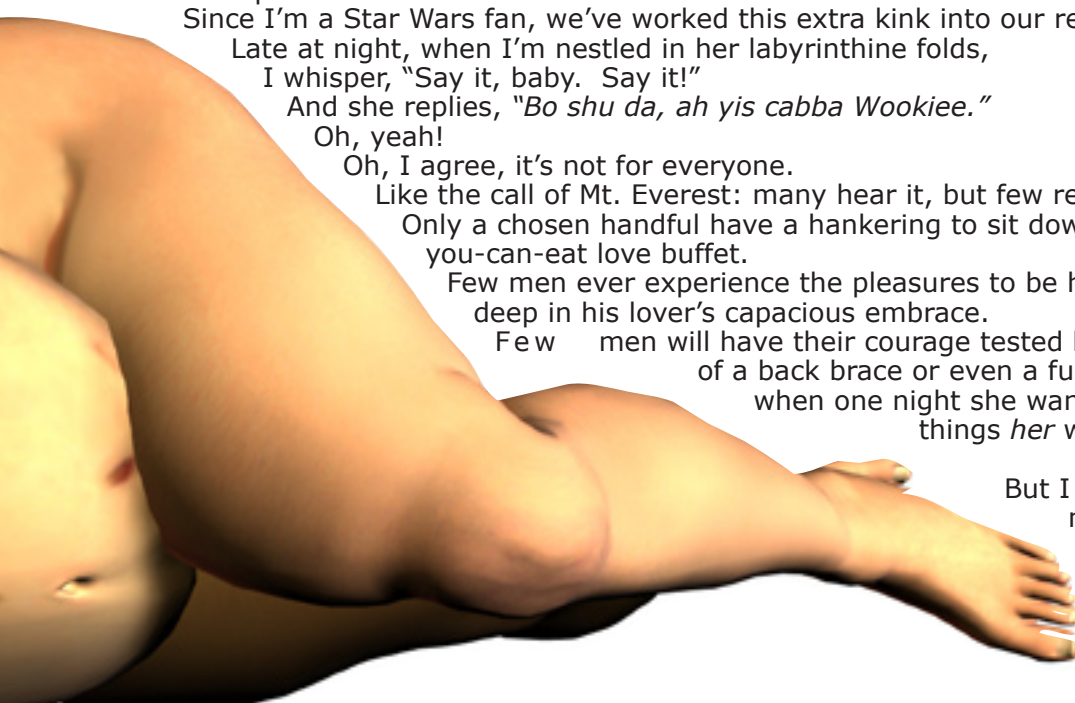
Like the call of Mt. Everest: many hear it, but few respond.

Only a chosen handful have a hankering to sit down to this all-you-can-eat love buffet.

Few men ever experience the pleasures to be had, elbow deep in his lover's capacious embrace.

Few men will have their courage tested by the threat of a back brace or even a full body cast when one night she wants to have things *her* way.

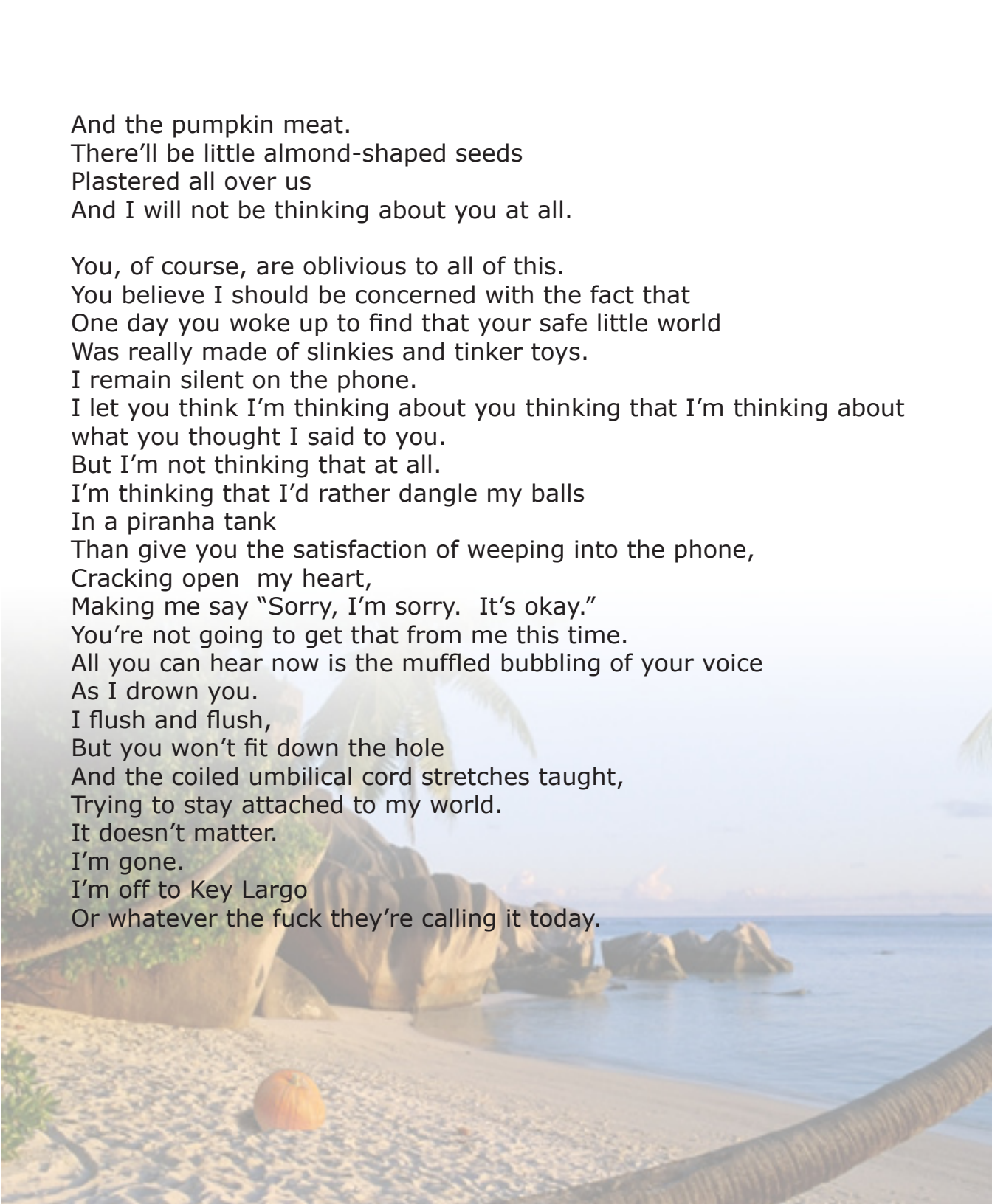
But I am such a man.



When There's Nothing Left to Say

When there's nothing left to say
And I'm standing here breathing
Into the receiver which has been stuffed
With the black marshmallows of your silence,
And the phone is a plastic leech
Nursing warmly at my earlobe,
I realize that the picture on my wall
Of Bora Bora
Is not Bora Bora at all,
But a beach on Kokomo
That has been made to look exactly like
A beach at Bora Bora.
Now that I am on to the fact that
Someone is going around creating flawless facsimiles
Of tropical islands,
I had better be pretty damn sure
That Key Largo really is Key Largo
Because that's where I'm going
To forget that "we" ever gave each other anything more than
Furtive glances.

I know you think that I'll never carve pumpkins again
Because only "we" carved pumpkins
In that special exclusive way,
And I should want to keep those moments sacred.
But you're wrong.
I'll sit there on the beach at Key Largo
And carve a pumpkin every fucking day
And it won't mean a thing to me.
Sometimes there'll be a girl there
To help me carve the pumpkin.
Yes, hon, a girl; someone other than yourself.
In fact, there'll be a different girl every day!
And when we're done carving that pumpkin,
We'll roll naked in the sand

A tropical beach scene with a pumpkin on the sand. The background shows a sandy beach, a blue ocean, and palm trees. A single pumpkin sits on the sand in the foreground.

And the pumpkin meat.
There'll be little almond-shaped seeds
Plastered all over us
And I will not be thinking about you at all.

You, of course, are oblivious to all of this.
You believe I should be concerned with the fact that
One day you woke up to find that your safe little world
Was really made of slinkies and tinker toys.
I remain silent on the phone.
I let you think I'm thinking about you thinking that I'm thinking about
what you thought I said to you.
But I'm not thinking that at all.
I'm thinking that I'd rather dangle my balls
In a piranha tank
Than give you the satisfaction of weeping into the phone,
Cracking open my heart,
Making me say "Sorry, I'm sorry. It's okay."
You're not going to get that from me this time.
All you can hear now is the muffled bubbling of your voice
As I drown you.
I flush and flush,
But you won't fit down the hole
And the coiled umbilical cord stretches taught,
Trying to stay attached to my world.
It doesn't matter.
I'm gone.
I'm off to Key Largo
Or whatever the fuck they're calling it today.

Eulogy For A World That Is Passing

It was about two o'clock in the hot afternoon
When Willum McCall stopped working
And stretched his back,
Standing in the middle of his newly-tilled field.
He leaned heavily on his hoe,
His thick fingers familiar with the wooden texture
That had rubbed callouses into his palms.
The worn head of the hoe sunk
Into the fresh ground like a metal tooth,
Touching the soil with a simple intimacy
The machines would never learn.
McCall stood there,
An anachronism from a discarded time.
The sun baked down on him,
A strange wizened tree of tanned bark
And weathered bone
That had sprouted from the ground
Some fifty years before.
He rested his chin of chaff and stubble
Between knuckles that knew work.
He regarded the leisurely probings
Of an earthworm
Tasting the airy blue infinity
Above its moist netherworldly home.
Its soft undulations were a beckoning finger
Promising a day when the earth
Would need to reclaim an old tree.
Far away,
A suit peering out of a television set
Announced the arrival of an information superhighway.
Willum reached inside a pocket in his
Tired blue overalls,
Producing a handkerchief which had long since forgotten
That it was ever red.
He wiped away the moisture
That collected in the ridges of his brow.
As he did this,
His hand passed across his vision.
He peered at it anew --
A peculiar grasping device found among the furrows.
Willum thought it strange that a boy's hand
Should look so etched and chewed,
But then he recalled that fifty years
Could do such things to a boy's hand.
Somewhere else
A strand of fiber optic cable
Transmitted the digitally compressed cursing
Of mutual gunfire,
An echo of embattlement from the other side of the world.
Willum took in the heady breath
Of the fields
And it was almost like the very first time

When the scent is palpable and weighty,
Filling the lungs with dark brown matter.
The smell invoked latent wonder.
For a moment, the small ridges of earth
Became the skin of an alien landscape,
Concealing a womb bundling green promise.
The sun, a white globe hung inexplicably in the sky,
Was as though newly lit.
It communed in a secret tongue,
Fiery and soft,
With the invisible congregation of
Form within formlessness.
"You shall be grass," it said.
"You shall be trees, fields; a vibrant intensity!"
For a moment, Willum McCall stood in the nexus of Creation.
The nervous warble of birds
Interrupted the sun and
Chased away Willum's thoughts.
Above,
A faint moaning announced the progress of an airliner
Sliding smugly along the sky.
The farmer looked back down at the rows he had made.
He thought of ripe green and sun-touched yellow.
In a local supermarket,
An old woman was screaming
That the shine on apples had been
Synthetically reproduced.
Soon it would be not only the shine,
But the apple as well.
Then God would be out of a job.
Willum blinked away his reverie,
Glancing at his father's watch
(Now his watch)
On his father's arm
(Now his arm)
And turned the hoe in his grip.
As he bent into his work,
Willum appeared in the sensory array
Of a military spy satellite,
Passing above in high orbit.
Matching no signatures in the
Computer's bank of templates,
He was ignored
As though he were part of the field.
Willum McCall's hands worked
The tool of wood and metal,
Changing the earth.

Let us not so hasty go
With lambent eye and nimble toe
To sup with bugbear's hoary host

Tarry here in fields of wine
With spirits soft, my aspect thine
And to our new love we'll raise a toast

From dreams of geese we'll make our bed
Our souls entwine, their bodies shed
Spinning tales until the thread is gone

Our magic hooks draw out the night
We are drowned in our purple rite
Lethe spills its banks so we forget the dawn

At last I stand at the Foot of the Many Storied Stair:

I found it at the bottom of a pewter cup inside the dream where the soft River Nymph argued with the Stone Troll about who should haunt the bridge. I had always ignored the cup of tea hovering near the river. This time I drank it and found the Stair, just where Elysia had said it would be.

The Foot of the Stair hovers in space above the Plains of Noxious Complaint where gibbering mouths endlessly crawl over purple dunes of flesh. Glowing fountains spin silently through the netherworld, some gushing with inspiration, some going dry.

Oh, Elysia, this is the journey I have always hoped for! I welcome the threat of madness that encroaches from all sides. I dare this gladly for your love.

Turning to the grey steps, I begin to make my way up.

On the second story I have to wait as a salamander whips a procession of convicted mice across my path. I feel sorry for them. I rather fancy mice.

As I stand there, one of the Death Engines drifts quite close, its great membranes of skin paddling slowly through the purple mists. Its doomed captives reach out from gaps in the iron teeth, pleading, as though I could help them in some way. I shake my head. They should have known better than to cast lots in games of blood.

Elysia, our time in the city was short and cruel. In a twinkling you appeared, like a unicorn in the midst of traffic. Suddenly you were huddling under my jacket, clinging as though you had never felt the rain. Later, in my apartment, when I asked if you wanted some coffee and you asked me what shape of cup you could have it in, I knew I would love you until the foundation of the world grew brittle and the top-heavy sky fractured and slid away down a waterfall of stars.

But then your pursuers came and our relationship became a constant panting chase through alleys, across rooftops, between the folds of curtains. The men in trench coats always appeared just before I caught my breath.

Trapped at last, your only hope was to escape into my kiss. You pressed into me, a red intoxication, an ocean of sleep, the whispering of a thousand turning pages, all cascading over my tongue and down my throat. I was

left there, alone, a staggering hunger within me, my fingers passing through your afterimage.

I press on.

Here the algorithm of the Stair falters and I must leap carefully from stone to stone. Halfway across, a small piece divides by zero and dissolves into fine powder beneath my foot. By mere luck, my flailing hand grabs hold of a discrete slab. I pull myself back onto the path, my bruised fingers covered in silvery equations.

On the third story I find a congregation of frogs belching out crisp white cards.

I pick one up and read, “The soup was too hot.”

And another: “I wish she had worn the black stockings.”

And another: “The hill didn’t seem as steep in the photograph.”

I would have kept the cards, but I cannot trust the contents of my own pockets. I skirt their ring of grievances and move up the stairs. On the wall, a pool of water hangs from a meat hook. In it, I see Elysia dancing in a golden glade, beckoning to me. I move on, far too wary to succumb to such blatant tricks.

Approaching a crook in the stairs, I spy myself descending another series of steps across a gulf of fickle time

“What news, friend?” I call to my future self.

I stop myself short, gazing back, speculating if I can trust myself to learn new secrets.

“The king is dead and lies stinking in a midnight pool of treachery most foul. The sly form of the jester fills the throne, a familiar crown canted upon his brow and a knowing grin between his lips. The queen kisses his tinkling feet as all go mad in that royal hall.”

“Is nothing to be done?” I ask my counterpart.

“All is lost! I go now to find sackcloth.”

As my double turns away, his inky shadow rears up as a panther, pouncing, pushing him over the edge into the roiling cataclysm below.

I make a mental note: “If I see myself again, be sure to duck!”

Strange. A long hall supported by orange veins of fiber optic light. As I proceed down the hall, a flock of vellum scrolls undulates through the stale air above. One takes a passing swoop at me, but I swat it away. My hand is now streaked with ink.

On the fourth story, I pause to rest, watching an infinitely recursive puppet show. Two puppets each hold two puppets on their hands, each of which holds two puppets, each of which holds two puppets, and so on. I smile at the purity of the fractal construction. I dare not peek beneath the curtain lest I find two immense forearms protruding from the stone floor.

On the way up to the fifth story, I find a tiny alcove. A small child reaches through the bars of a long tunnel. “Is it my turn, yet?” asks the Child. “Will you write about me next? Will you let me out?”

I hesitate, compassion constricting my heart. Perhaps under different circumstances I would have set the Child free. But Elysia awaits. The Child’s cries follow me for quite some time.

At last I reach the top of the Many Storied Stair. My journey is at an end. I shall see you again, Elysia my love. A simple wooden door leads me into a large, domed chamber.

But Elysia is not here. Only a brass typewriter projecting glowing letters on the curved walls. Reading the words I realize it is a chronicle of my own journey here, accurate to this very moment.

There are no exits. The door I came in is now merely a clever painting on the rough stones. I am trapped.

I know now what I must do. Sitting down at the typewriter, I use the strange levers to select the entirety of my tale. And then I erase it. I pick a new dream and begin again. The chamber fills with the clacking of keys.

Elysia, be patient...

The Numbers Game

Maybe if you rub those tickets together, you'll excite the numbers. But listen to me, friend, you don't ever want to let them rub off on you. Don't even look at them too much or you might get Marked. You think you're gambling now, but you don't know the half of it. Before the numbers catch up with you, I better tell you about Dave.

The time finally came when Dave's days were truly numbered. Gone were such naïve notions as "Thursday," or "Two Days After He Bought The New Hat," or "Cindy's Birthday." No. Now it was 226.

He had had to buy a new watch with a special button from a shop in between the Men's and Women's restrooms at Donnie's Late Nite. All of his clocks were instantly obsolete. He had been switched over to a new system and these anachronisms had nothing useful to say on the matter.

Dave couldn't believe he had made it to the triple digits. He had never imagined making it past Day 30. 30 was the quiet neighbor who didn't bother any of the other numbers, the perfect vessel for latent menace. By Day 27, Dave had been convinced that 30 was his assassin, triple-pronged with venom. How foolish he had been back in the double digits!

Dave had learned to appreciate many new things since that fateful evening when the bald man had torn him from sleep and proceeded to strip off warm layers of reality. Dave awoke to this mad revenant hovering above his pillow, the herald of secrets now laid bare.

"Today is Zero!" it had proclaimed, shaking Dave by the hair. "Zero! Understand? Tomorrow will be One! *One!*" Then the bald man curled back a flap of wallpaper and was gone.

His life irrevocably changed, Dave took to the streets early on the morning of Day One. "What day is it for you?" he demanded of everyone. "What day is it for you?" He beseeched the garbage man, the newsboy, his girlfriend, his boss, but they each recoiled from his ravings.

At last, the young urchin by the subway answered him, "Twenty-four. It is twenty-four for me." Uplifted by this, Dave puzzled his way through the first day of being Marked.

But the next day, on Two, the urchin was gone and he never saw her again.

The Lowballs were a stretch of dark road they all had to walk. That's where Dave discovered that there were no guarantees and very few handouts. After that, the numbers pounced on him, like a hungry night beast. Eventually, he moved out of the slack-jawed befuddlement phase of meeting this particular beast, into studying its eating habits, wrestling with it, and recognizing its cruel scent on others.

"445," said the saucy redhead at the bar. The Marked could pick each other out of a crowd.

"Liar," Dave said. "You're a fucking liar!"

She just chuckled and tapped her special watch.

"Ha! You can buy high numbers at any Chinese Laundromat in the city!" Dave snorted. "It's an illusion, babe. A sucker's game."

She rolled her eyes and turned back to her drink.

That's about the time I met up with Dave. I refilled his glass and listened to his tale, though I knew most of it already.

"Those numbers sound pretty harsh," I told him. "But then, I was never any good at math."

"You don't understand, pal," he said, turning to go.

I caught his shoulder, bringing his eyes back to mine.

"When you want to know how high they go, you come back here and we'll have ourselves a chat. Then you'll know exactly what I 'understand.' You're learning to count all over again and that's a hard lesson. But you're just a Getter. Beware a Giver, friend, for that is a cockatrice you dare not face."

As he left the bar, I could tell my words had found no purchase in poor Dave's heart. Shaking my head, I readied another glass. Keeping tabs on Dave would not be a problem for such a generous creature as myself.

Day 666 found Dave in a church. On 667, the nuns turned him loose on a city that was by all appearances solid, though its foundation still remained suspect.

Day 2000 and Dave was in a backwoods cabin lined with canned hams and kerosene. He had again been spared, although he had long forgotten why he wanted to be.

After Day 2056, Dave kind of fell off the map. Even I couldn't sniff him out. If his number came up or not, I'll never know. Maybe he finally made peace with the Numbers Game. Or, maybe one day he'll kick in the door of the daycare center screaming, "3036, you shit-heads! It's 3036!" This is the biggest crapshoot in the universe and you never know how things will turn out.

Still got those "winning tickets?" Still think the numbers will be kind to you? Well, it must indeed be your lucky day, because I've got news for you, friend:

Today is not really today. Today is Zero.

Yesterday, When I Was An Old, Old Poet

When I was a young poet,
I found the best method of writing
was to get dressed up like a French chambermaid,
stockings, garters and all,
and then to slit my wrists.
I was immediately faced with a decision:
Write an apologetic note that attempted to explain this scene
to the sad soul who discovered it,
Or to write something that would obliterate their vision.
I often used my own blood to write.
There was plenty of it.

Now that I am old,
I find that every moment is an awkward tragedy
begging for explanation.
This tattered recliner, a table perpetually set for two,
a row of shot glasses, a box of empty envelopes.
It pleases me to be the caretaker of this spiritual
refuse trapped in sidewalk cracks,
pushing a broom through the many chambers
of this museum mortared with my spit and sinew.

At the ubiquitous yuppie way station
I take my medicine:
A dark mug of koffeeine, with cigarette butts floating like marshmallows.
My eyebrows snarl at the fragile thing in my favorite seat,
Sending her scrabbling away for human company.
At last I am alone with the blank page, ever awful, empty and expectant,
a fanfold stack of polygraph paper, just waiting for me to spill the first lie.
I have made it my business to tell monstrous, loquacious, perfect lies.
In this way my sins pay for themselves.
I'm just trying to suffer quietly around sips of koffeeine
and perhaps accidentally write the most despicable blue collar love poem
this side of Indiana,
when some young Turk cracks open a sonnet on the edge of the bar,
challenging me to a duel,
waving the jagged rhyme at my face.
So young, and already a poet! Goddamn this world.
I decide to go easy on him, a kindred spirit in this country of vampires.
I say to the young Turk,
"When the Child was 57,
he discovered an old shoebox on a high shelf in the garage.
Inside he found all the time he had wasted.
Being a neighbor to dotage,
he placed the box into the hands of his son
who devoured it greedily and set sail for Berkeley
with Imogene, the girl he did not love."
The young Turk doubles over in grief, ink spraying from his lips.
I turn back to the page, now covered in crisp glyphs of blood.

Later, I encounter a girl scout outside the supermarket.
She brandishes a tin cup and asks me if I could spare some jism.
They're cloning poets to raise money
for a trip to Cairo and didn't I have a moment to blow a wad?
I tell her I came at the office and shove past.
When I see the young girls at the supermarket,
my joints creak like the strained masts of a withered salt-soaked clipper.
I am reminded of those days before sleep had been invented,
before intoxication had a patent.
My dreams drifted above the landscape as mighty leviathans,
their spines formed from entire mountain ranges.
But now, I am perplexed by the array of oatmeal
here in the cereal aisle of the supermarket.
Behold the artist in his twilight, squinting at cryptic nutritional information.
I find no poetry in these consumable halls
until I reach the checkout
and see the young man laying down
roses, condoms and a bottle of Jaegermeister.
I could die tonight certain that there was still romance in this world.

That night, while I am occupied with filling cracks in the wall
with haiku,
the phone rings and I hear the red apple voice of a lost son,
ancient wine still dripping from his lips.
"I am in love," he says.
"Tell me what secret poetry will seal her heart forever."
I instruct him to get a butter knife and cut out his intestines.
He would have no further use for them.
Next he should empty his bank account and buy her a dress sewn in Valhalla.
Then stretch his heartstrings across a cheap pawnshop violin.
Give these gifts to her.
It is best to get the formalities out of the way as soon as possible.
The man I believed to be my son gushes his thanks and says goodbye.
I study the cracks in the wall,
the table set for two,
the violin that had been returned to me so soon.
I sit down in the tattered recliner, notebook in hand.
Reaching beneath my sweater, I touch the pendulum that swings there,
slowly bringing it to rest.
It will be millennia before they discover me,
cradled inside this brownstone,
encased by the glacier of a new ice age I have felt encroaching
since the day my tears turned to ink.
My face will be lashed down in a rictus
overlooking a final ejaculation of verse.
They shall see where my soul burned into
the last period I would ever write,
exiting at the end of my epitaph:
I was a poet and I drank deeply.



Growing Up Gringican

"Montserrat, that's French, right?"

My dad was born somewhere in Cuba to a huge, loving family.

No, scratch that.

His parents were both dead before he was five

And he was raised by a loving uncle.

No, scratch that.

My father's parents were dead and he was a slave, forced to work in the fields

With the other unfortunate Cuban boys.

One day, he escaped to a nearby village to the north.

The mayor took pity on him and the community raised him like their own son.

Or so I am told.

"Montserrat – Isn't that French?"

Thank God my dad wouldn't let me learn Spanish

So I could understand the secrets passing between my parents

Right in front of me.

Thank God I can't write a beautiful bilingual love poem

And exponentially increase my chances of getting laid

By some Latina hottie.

No, Spanish would not have been helpful at all.

When I go to Lottaburger, I might actually get the very same burger I ordered.

I might have slept through Spanish 101 instead of getting my ass kicked by French 101.

"Ohhhh, *Andre Monserrat*, eh?" said my merciless French professor.

"Don't think you won't have to work in my class, because monsieur, I'm going to make sure you work."

So for a semester I Je vaied, I accent agued, I com ci com caed.

But, folks, my parents could have named me Fred Astaire

And I'd still be a skinny white boy who can't dance.

In short, Je ne parle pas Francais! Comprende?

Naming an Hispanic kid "Andre Monserrat" is just plain cruel and unusual.

It's like naming someone Hans Olafson and telling him he's not Norwegian!

Like I said, my father was raised as a community service project in some nameless Cuban village.
The country lavished opportunities on him like the generous uncle he fabricated to hide the truth.
Many years later, he found himself as one of Castro's bodyguards.
Standing behind the little dictator in his booth at the baseball game,
My father thought, "I worked so hard for this?
I trained for this?
I bear an automatic weapon to protect this man?
I smell treachery on him
I am so close and he trusts me implicitly.
I am so close and his eyes are fixed on the batter.
I could end him here."
But then there would have been no Andre.
My dad did not assassinate Castro.
Instead we have a missile crisis and Elian.
Instead we have one more poem.

"Montserrat, like the island?"

That was cool for about three months because of that Beach Boys song:

"Martinique, that Montserrat mystique."

Oh baby, yeah that's my island all right.

Everyone there speaks French, the language of love.

On my island, we reach up and squeeze the sun to make Mai Tais

Which we drink all day long.

But last I checked there was a big volcano ejaculating all over the jungle

Straight up, on the Pompeii tip,

While a bunch of Rasta-looking guys ran screaming past the CNN camera crew.

Folks, that is not a piece of real estate I want to have anything to do with.

So my dad bided his time.

Let Castro give him an education.

Let Castro groom him to step into a place of power.

Let Castro send him to East Germany to study with all the other promising young Cuban men.

Now was his chance.

But there was a wall.

Castro was far away; he may as well have been on the moon,

But there was a wall.

He pressed against it to feel the warm promise glowing from the other side,

But there was a wall.

Through shrewd dealings and whispers through cracks, he made friends on the West side.

The appropriate documents were created and placed in my father's hands.

If this were a Jerry Bruckheimer flick, there would have been searchlights and a suspicious commandant at the gate.

If this were a Jerry Bruckheimer flick, a sniper would have accidentally put a bullet through the head of my dad's best friend as he happened to step in front of him at the proper dramatic moment.

But this actually happened and my dad silently passed through the Berlin Wall like the last gasp of air fleeing a closing tomb.

We used to live in Mexico, when I was very young.

In Mexico we had a mansion, shiny cars and servants.

What were Mexicans for if not to cut our lawn, cook our food, and wash our clothes?

Walt Disney taught me not to question.

I mean, Goofy is a dog and Pluto is a dog,

But when Goofy throws a stick, Pluto goes running after it

And what is up with that?

But clearly one wears a collar while the other does not.

That is an important difference.

Yes, I was justified in looking down on the poor Mexican beggars on the corner

While I rode around the neighborhood on my Fisher Price big wheel.

They were to be pitied, even though there was more culture on that street corner than I would see in my home my entire life.

When my father was awarded citizenship, the USA asked him,
"Alfredo, by what name shall we know you?"

In Cuba, everyone had like 15 last names.

In America, if you had a name like

Alfredo Rodriguez Monserrat Ramos Bauta,

It made it difficult to fill out the Columbia House Music Club membership card.

He had been going by Rodriguez, but he picked Monserrat so his future children would not be discriminated against.

"Monserrat, that's French, right?"

In America, it will only take you a short while to become a citizen,

But it will take the rest of your life before they'll let you live here.

So my father found out.

My dad thought he could become a Spanish teacher

Until he discovered you had to take 100 tests in English

To prove how well you knew Spanish.

Then he thought he could become a lawyer

And perhaps fight against discrimination.

But you had to take 100 tests in English

To prove you knew what discrimination was.

Later he got involved in computers.

The computer didn't care what language he spoke.

"Monserrat – That's like a movie star name!"

My sister is white as Britney Spears on the outside

But black as Moesha on the inside.

She may act black, but her kids are black.

Mostly black.

My niece Dominique may begin to question

Why she is not as light as Mommy

Or as dark as Daddy

And she may ask me

"Uncle Andre, what am I?"

Am I qualified to answer? What am *I*?

A Gringo Cuban American? A Gringican?

Hispanic boy whitewashed in Ohio?

No one told me what I was.

My family legacy is a scrapbook of stolen newspaper clippings,
Pasted together in a way that is aesthetic and perhaps even historical.
No one passed me a flame to keep lit.
No one handed me a golden flask filled with the echoes of ten genera-
tions, or five or even one.
How will I account for these things?
Even if I cannot answer these questions, I can still answer my niece.
I will not say, "You are bi-racial."
I will not say, "You are an amalgam of Cuban, Finn, and African
American."
I will not say, "Your heritage is lost forever so shut up and finish
your Coca-Cola."
I will not say, "Your identity is bound up in varying quantities of
melanin, and you better get it sorted out quickly."
I will say to her, "You are beautiful. Go be beautiful."



Children of the Candy Light

Summoned from sleep
We have arrived
Supernovas in our eyes
Skating down purple lightning
The scroll of the sky unrolls and we read out our names written in fire
The outsiders flee as new stars define the constellation of Boom
Vinyl platters cut the night, bringing back the mother tongue
Shouting the lullaby of candy light
Swimming through the floor to our secret grotto of noise
Shadows break through the light and twist
We are the shadows
We are the light
If you could see with the eyes of the velvet butterfly
Eyes on each wing, always seeking the sky
Forever in motion
You could see us
Our sweat fills the fountain
Drink – it is sweet – it is life
Our bread is bass
Our wine is light
And the bass comes like a comet
We grab its tail and ride
And the bass comes like the trumpet of war
Our dance is a battle to save our childhood
The bass blows out from our bellies
Swelling out the walls
Unlocking doors
We blur through each other
We melt into the sky
And rain down on upturned faces
And the bass comes like a herd of psychedelic llamas
Blowing us to the floor
And the bass comes like a carpet ten feet deep
We drown, laughing
We are an avalanche of purple
Rushing up the walls
Painting a mad mural, a phantom landscape of electronic ghosts
We know the taste of every color
We know the name of every star
We know the shape of every note
But we do not know peace
The bass won't let the children sleep
No, we do not know peace
Not yet

McIver

I've been watching too much television.
My eyes are bloodshot with the constant parade of mediocrity.
Why do I do this to myself?
I wish "McIver" was on,
But it hasn't been in syndication for years.
You remember "McIver," don't you?
That show about the guy who worked for some black ops liberal arts foundation.
Every episode he swore it was his last mission,
But then he'd find out that the orphanage was threatened,
Or that the radio station was going to be shut down,
Or that Fiona had been kidnapped.
Then he'd have to swing into action.
No matter what crazy life-threatening situation he found himself in,
It could always be solved with a poem.
Like the one episode where these Neo-Nazis took the substitute math teacher
hostage
because they were going to flunk out.
McIver confused them with a poem about how Hitler had been a poodle fancier.
Or the episode where the evil alien computer was going to unleash the death gas,
but McIver fried its brain by showing how the lives of Clint Eastwood and Ronald
Reagan secretly intertwined into an unwitting stage adaptation of "Of Mice and
Men."
See, that was the good stuff.
There aren't any shows like that anymore.
Now everything is just about people dodging bullets.
Fuck that!
I don't want a show that's been "ripped from the headlines."
Isn't that what CNN is for?
Give me a show about a guy with crazy fucked up hair
Confounding the forces of law and order.
I don't want to watch sexually frustrated FBI agents with flashlights skulking about
dark warehouses looking for aliens.
I want an alien with a flash of insight looking at the FBI!
I want McIver vs. Pikachu!
McIver vs. Buffy!
McIver vs. Dan Rather!
I want a Thursday night timeslot network deathmatch between Must See TV and a
community access channel showing a McIver Marathon!
I want McIver to be my TV Spirit Guide though an Alan Ginsberg, Hunter S.
Thompson, Jack Kerouac-induced mirror universe of America.
McIver, Earth's first line of defense against the ordinary.
McIver, the soup that eats like a meal.
McIver, one of these kids is doing his own thing.
McIver, What's Up About What's Going Down.
McIver, brought to you 24 hours a day
With no commercial interruption.

“MEN”

I saw a door in the hall
Labeled “MEN.”
No other specifications,
Just “MEN.”
Opening the door,
I walked into a testosterone-thick box
Packed with these “MEN.”
They were all shoving, flexing, bragging, burping,
Slapping each other on the back,
Laughing up thick walls of identity between themselves.
Wads of compact muscle and attitude
Leaned against the stalls, smoking.
They wanted me to join in.
They offered beer and magazines,
Televisions and loud opinions.
I declined, backing out,
Choking.

Gravity

Gravity is the dynamic interaction of forces pulling bodies into uncertain orbits
My weaker thoughts are pulled away and there is only focus
My synapses are diamonds of light arrayed in a net of stars that try to catch
your beauty
But even light is not so quick

I step from my spaceship (which looks much like sorrow)
onto the skin of your new planet
It is difficult for me to breathe, but only when I behold you
My steps are burdened and calculated to keep myself at a distance
From your delicate circumference
Lest I approach at a dangerous tangent and be rebuffed by tantalizing atmo-
spheres
Into a hopeless trajectory
Straight into the umbra of a dying sun

Why did I think I understood gravity before tonight?
I curse the leaden equations I once knew and put in their place
The need to move closer to hear you
To hear if perhaps your eyes also make a sound when you say my name.

How did I get so close without being consumed?
How have I survived the most accidental touch?
My resolutions, my fears, my childishness, have seeped out to blend together
With other weaker elements on the ground far, far below
I am held aloft only by a warm slippery hope
If I let go it will explode and light your night sky
But if I let go, I will fall

So I let the band finish their song
I leave the dance floor
And I drift back to my table
Watching you
Until I am pulled into orbit again

Busy

Monday:

She got up. Went to work. Observed mice in cages.
Tabulated results. Stayed later than planned.

Tuesday:

Listened to sister on the phone.
Thumbed through magazine.

Wednesday:

Nothing on TV. Looked at window. Rain.

Thursday:

Watched the show about the hospital.
Watched the show after that.

Friday:

Gin and tonic. Clove cigarette over crossword puzzle.
Thought about Montana. Another gin and tonic.

Saturday:

The weekend lapped at her bedside, hungry and full of time.

Sunday:

Considered going to church. Didn't.

Monday.

Transient

Do you know what I love?
I love to hear you talk.
Especially when you're talking to me.
And I think that you are beautiful.
Your smile is startling
(And yes, it is a goofy smile -- but beautiful).
Again I am imagining a conversation
I wish we could share.
Leaning against me in the car,
You wonder out loud if we're in Kentucky yet
Or still passing through Indiana.
I'm wondering if we were ever anywhere at all
Because I remember seeing you in so many places,
But I don't recall being with you at any of them.

We've left the car behind.
We're in Kentucky for certain now.
The reservoir is rippling liquid onyx.
We walk along the perimeter with mutual friends.
I see you ahead of me,
Moving in and out of pools of lamplight,
Your image flickering like the moon on the water,
Transient.
You are like the wind and rain:
So wonderful to feel,
But impossible to hold
Except in tiny handfuls that
Flee between my fingers.
I run to catch up to you,
But I find only your shadow.
We spend the rest of the weekend
As shadows
And images reflected on dark water.

When we both claimed to walk on water.
I never questioned what might happen
If I faithlessly looked away from your eyes.
Who would catch me and stop me from sinking?
Not you.
Not you.
You were sinking too.

Maybe Today

I may not know the color of the sky above you now

Nor the name of the country in which you walk,

(Perhaps you are by my side

Perhaps you are far away

Perhaps you are both)

But I do know that we were together once,

Slowly becoming the best of friends.

When did we know for sure?

Maybe that moment has passed, maybe it waits in Tomorrow,

Or maybe it's Today.

I savor simple moments with you,

When laughing without cause or

Watching corn fields roll past the car window

Is enough.

When did I hold your hand through a warm silence

And notice that I was touching you

That I was touching you...

That I was touching you...

Maybe that moment has passed, maybe it waits in Tomorrow,

Or maybe it's Today.

I wonder now at the state of your internal climate;

Perhaps you are angry with me.

You invisibly position barbs between us

And then lock yourself in a tower

To again examine the damaging thing I have done.

Perhaps you are very happy

And you own the sun.

Someone (*me? he? she?*) has worked the magic spell
To release your heart.
Perhaps you are alone.
Perhaps you are lonely.
Perhaps you are determined to win.
Perhaps you are right.
Perhaps you are trying to forget.
When did I learn your temperatures?
When was I able to take the measure of your subtleties?
Maybe that moment has past, maybe it waits in Tomorrow,
Or maybe it's Today.

And what will the combination of our lives spell out?
What story or poem will there be for us to remember?
For perhaps we are together always.
Perhaps our paths never rejoined.
Perhaps one of us has passed on.
Perhaps we are still watching the corn fields.
When did I tell you about the gap that exists when you are gone?
When did I tell you I wanted you more than my next breath?
When did I tell you that they could strip me all away
As long as I could keep our friendship and my love for you?
When did these things stop being secrets?
Maybe that moment has passed, maybe it waits in Tomorrow,
But I hope it is Today.

The Falcon Strikes at Midnight

For God's sake, don't look at me!
Yes, the table by the rubber tree plant.
I am using telepathy.
Get that shocked expression off your face!
Listen very carefully, but don't be so
obvious.
Everything is going as planned --
No one suspects a thing.
You must maintain your cover.
If you need to speak to me,
Keep the conversation light and insubstan-
tial,
Otherwise try to avoid me at all cost.
No one must learn of our past relation-
ship.
Do not make eye contact!
Focus on your silverware.
I am not here.
I do not exist to you anymore.
Good.
Very good.
You're a professional.

Photos

I spent four years filling up a photo album with a house, a car, a dog, a set of tools, a nice dining room set, and you.

And you in your wedding dress

And you smiling by the SOLD sign

And you raking the leaves

And you looking at me like I was forever.

You know when you get that packet of photos back from Wal-Mart

And you're looking through them

And there's always those few that make you think

“Why? What was I thinking? Did I take these by accident?”

Well, I'm wondering,

“Did someone borrow my camera? For a day? For four years?”

A picture a day: 1460 pictures

1,460,000 words pulled out of my throat on a jagged necklace.

There are no more pictures now, just words.

Settlement, community property, general provisions, alimony, sign here to stop the pictures forever.

It only took one word to take back all the pictures.

You could only afford to buy that word by selling everything else, even me.

“Divorce” is cheap compared to “Betrayal”

Compared to wiping out a shoebox full of photos

As though I had spent the past four years taking pictures of the sun.



Cold Princess -
Rescued one thousand times
Presented with one thousand tongues of fire
One thousand dreams burned for your incense
One thousand dragon's eggs returned at your whim
And yet you did not melt
I will not learn to be your cold fire,
Keeping a thousand year vigil
No, I will meander a path celestial
And take a star as my lover
The whisper of our fingertips will ignite the oceans
For the span of a single breath
And then we will fall as Lucifer
Consumed, a rain of ashes and stardust
Kings will heap pity on us
The Cold Princess will not look at us
The tide will steal our names
And only the sorrow-laden poets will remember us
But oh, we will burn!

My heart is a phoenix with a lifespan of days.
Consumed by your midnight poetry,
It awakens again in a wide yellow bed
Near gentle pink curves:
A sleeping world softly rising and falling on the crests of dawn.

Storm

I walked outside just in time to see the world ending.
My spirit clawed past my teeth to have a look around,
but I sucked it back in with a clatter of ribcage.
The parking lot desaturated, turning ashen as
a field of cottony nothing obscured the sky.
A new mountain range to the west lit up with last light
as Old Mother pulled down the shade and the horizon went out.
Near me
tin cans and good intentions danced on an invisible roulette wheel
before spilling out into the street
where the nervous cars shoved.
I thought of the things I had forgotten to do:
Write a poem, do the laundry,
tell someone that I loved her.
Just another storm over Albuquerque.

Ashtray

With the first cigarette, I mark the pack as my own
With the second cigarette, I recall the game we
played in college where
Your sexuality increased a few notches if a beautiful
woman lit it for you.
Your cigarette, that is.
On the third, I study the curve of a breast
On the fourth, I listen to poetry as a business
On the fifth it's poetry as poetry
I leave the ashtray full of my own contributions
Intermingled with the accounts of others
Looking all very much the same

Leavetaking

You may argue that the hardest part of leaving
Is simply that:
Leaving.
But it's the taking that's got me.
What stays and what comes with?
The smokes, certainly, and the football.
But what about this picture of the frozen summer
Before I knew which way the wind would blow.
Do I want that?
It is small, but heavy as stolen candy.
Extracting the picture, I find the frame
Much lighter.
The road will bring other pictures.
Taking and Leaving -
Sleepers beneath the same covers
Slipping away
As the sun defines the wrinkled landscape of
A new day.

Propped against a post in the keen autumn air,
I watch ten trains slide by
Too quickly,
And one week-long train of hard-boiled Mondays.
As I light each cigarette
I give it a name.
Lungs clutch the smoke
Then let it go
Let it go
Let it go

The day comes in a nondescript package.
I put my money down, spin the compass
And escape on gasoline wings.
My engine passes into dusk
With the sound of a door
Closing slowly on the laughter of friends.
I am heading for the sun's embrace
Where new hands will raise a glass of amber,
Even as the circle of the moon
Breaks on the mountains
Behind me.

Small Hands

This is the world and I cannot hold it
Like a mother holds a child
Like a lover holds time
I better try grabbing onto the rings of Saturn
Before I try to hold a world
Spinning fast enough to hold us to the ground
Giving our hopes stunted wings
Pulling the sand through the hourglass
With a world spinning so fast you'd think there'd be a roaring wind
And there is, but we've got the volume down so low
That mother's crying cannot be heard over the rustle of father's newspaper
But I hear the wind
It sounds like I'm jet skiing the slipstream of a 767 en route to the cover of Time Magazine
It sounds like I'm showering in Niagra Falls, but I never get clean.
Like eyes that can't bear to meet.
Like my small hands trying to catch you before you fall.
It sounds like the breath I take before saying "I think I see God."
In college, the cafeteria ladies thought I was Jesus
And made sure I got the hot rolls
But they didn't see me that night when I was so drunk
And the door was locked
And she was just right there
And I made such a mistake
I woke up with the room spinning, the world spinning.
My friends and I swaggered through our college lives
Immortal. We would never say good-bye.
But then a wind started to pick up the leaves, our plans, and our time
Into a swirling dance
Our feet were heavy
And our hands were so small
The world spun faster
Through the endless cornfields of Greencastle, Indiana
Through the deceptive peace of Albany, New York
Broken by a ringing phone.
When I answered
I heard a voice, once so calm,
Breaking like old violin strings
as it told me a horrible lie.
Neal, who was beautiful;
Neal, who had composed music from some dream country I could not even look upon,
Had not made it out of the woods
Somewhere he lay pale and still
Bathed in silent white light.

The secret was out:
One of us was mortal
One of us would only live in photographs and "remember when"
And I realized that none of us were out of the woods yet.
I'm knocking on Heaven's door
I'm out here with a list of questions that all start with "Why..."
Why doesn't everyone see You?
Why can't my hands be bigger?
Why did love and loneliness both have **her** face?
Why did the phone have to ring that day?
The world spun through Albuquerque, New Mexico
To a house big enough for our silence.
Again, a ringing phone.
I got the call that explained, at the end, my grandmother said she could see Jesus
Or maybe it was her favorite grandchild whose voice she'd never hear again
My wife came home and stood at the opposite end of the room
a thousand miles away
Torn between the bitter chill of our dying marriage
And my warm sobbing for my grandmother who **was** dead
She compromised with a hand on my shoulder
And the world spun faster
It spins through the girl ahead of me in the checkout line who is the love of my life, but neither
of us will ever know it.
It spins through the man who sleeps in the alley so I can waste money on a hamburger I
didn't really want.
It spins through that call I should have made weeks ago to a phone that will never ring again.
It spins through my arrogance and my self-righteousness and my small, small hands.
I'm sorry I could not catch you.
My friends and I used to say "Good-bye"
Now it's just "Don't die."

The background image on page 5 came from *Rolling Stone*.

The background illustration on page 20 came from the *Weekly Alibi*.

All other images are my own work.