Dystopian Dreamscapes America in the 21st Century

Haibun by
Ed Markowski

2019

Dystopian Dreamscapes - America In The 21st Century

A Collection of Haibun

by Ed Markowski

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"American carnival
Markowski knocks down
all the bottles"
--Garry Eaton

Turning Point

We arrived at the LA County Fairgrounds at six am sharp. The rides were set up. The scam shacks were up and ready to pick the pockets of every good person turned fool who stopped to play. Foul Mouth Frank checked the dunk tank's depth and temperature. Soprano Jack whistled *Ghost Riders In The Sky*, then transitioned flawlessly into *Knockin' On Heaven's Door.* In front of the fun house, Cayenne Kate gave Charles Atrophy a kiss that could have snapped Superman in two, easy like a brittle twig. Miss Bayou Mist Queen Of The Mystics watched the sunrise over the Himalaya.

At five minutes after six, Cleo The Clown burst through the door of his trailer. He ran up and down the midway screaming the news like a speed ball juiced town crier. Everyone heard him clear as a gong but no one believed a word of it because every crooked game, every side show freak, every flimflam man, every fraud, and every magic act on every midway world wide was far more believable than men flying jumbo jets into skyscrapers.

great plains
above the missile silos
enough wheat to feed a galaxy

A Historical Note

Memorial Day 2002, I caught on playing lead guitar in a Detroit bar band called Sonic Rush. By Halloween everyone in the band was sunk in junk except me. I did a double twist high dive and jackknifed into a vat of Canadian Mist the size of Lake Superior. I left the junkies tied to their tourniquets, found some players, tacked together a band called Chronic Lush, and . . .

I never looked back.

after the argument
barnyard chickens
shit on my shadow

Manifestos

I believed peace on Earth was just a matter of time. I believe peace will come when mankind perishes. I believed the midnight sky and every star it held were equivalent shades of celestial light. I believe we've all gone blind. I believed love minus lunacy would come to everyone. I believe that's still possible . . . . . If you find the right dog.

foreclosed
a Jehovah's Witness comes
peddling paradise

On A Friday Night In July

Two days after his third divorce in an alley behind Madame Magick's Carnalville Lounge love remained a thirty dollar trick.

Valentine's Day
the sensuous curves
of a snowdrift

Confessional

Three weeks past my seventh birthday I was locked in a dark musty closet kneeling beneath a contorted murder victim on the left side of a mesh screen listening to a man I'd never met tell me that he was my father, the murder victim was my father, and the murder victim's father was my father. When the man I thought was my father came to pick me up in front of the church I didn't know what to call him so I called him Adam.

Easter morning
sunlight fills a fisherman's
empty creel

What The Carney Had To Say

If you take a close look at American Culture you'll find it everywhere. Corn dogs, elephant ears, and funnel cakes in the frozen food cases. Freaks galore from the Sunset Strip to the White House Rose Garden. Barkers, shills, and two bit frauds screaming from the floors of the New York Stock Exchange and Chicago's Commodities Exchange. Long winded pitchmen pedaling phony tonics from the nation's church pulpits to the hollow halls of the Capitol Building. Look over there! There's our Commander In Chief swaggering down the Midway on stilts, bellowing beneath a red, white, and blue fright wig. Truth be told, from personal freedom, to entreprenerial freedom, to capitalist ingenuity, the carnival is not only everywhere in American Culture, the carnival has become the foundation of American Culture. Turn on your television and you'll find the fattest people on the planet eating their way to fame and fortune on *My 600 Pound Life.* Mark my words friend, the day will come when the Liberty bell will be converted into a high striker bell, and a dollar will buy you three tries to ring it, ring the Liberty Bell and win a kewpie doll for your girl. Can you think of anything more patriotic than that?

spring breeze
shrimp lo mein and shish kebab
scent the streets of Little Italy

Weather Report

The flakes of snow that started falling above the fried eggs and rye toast Sheila served me at eight amen sharp this morning thirty minutes before she walked out the door to stamp out our bills stamping out Eldorado and Impala ash trays at the Sanders stamping plant from nine to five on Grand River Avenue just two blocks east of her five-thirty to midnight job dancing and stripping our bills down to the bone at the Pirate's Eye Bounty Of Booty still haven't hit the ground and lean Lenny the delivery boy from Angelo's Pizza and Ribs is shivering under our porch light with two slabs of baby backs, two sides of slaw, an order of garlic bread, two packs of Kools, and three more bottles of that sinfully sweet cherry cough syrup that turns my mind to molasses, softens the wind, slows down the snow, and makes every blizzard that blows through this factory town a sunny day in July.

reflecting pond
we drown in the pain
etched on our faces

Tour Guide

If you should meet the Buddha . . . . . Don't kill him. Buy him a beer. Give him directions. Guide him to the best fish and chips in town. Compliment his saffron robe. Ask him where he bought his sandals. Tell him they'd look great on a Riviera beach. Ask him where he gets his hair cut. Tell him Mr. Paul's on Eighth Street is the place for steak in this town.

Let him know that the sushi at the Paper Geisha is pure and authentic Satori. Inform him that Vito's Dharma Wheel is known nationwide for it Neapolitan style pizza. Buy him a few beers at Buddy's Blue Room. Raise a glass to not being reborn. Get his autograph on a bar napkin. Have the Buddha authenticate his signature . . . . . and when you get home, sell it on Ebay.

Easter baskets
toddlers toddle
into temptation

The Way An Apple Falls

On the first anniversary of my father's death I drank a fifth of JW Dent, and rented Jenna Lewis for a full hour at the Outskirts Inn to prove to him that I had paid rapt attention to the lessons he taught, and that the open hand slaps, full fist punches, and lashes with his razor strop were totally unnecessary.

At Lenin's tomb
t-shirt hawkers hawking
Lennon T-shirts

The Great LA Quake

When the great LA quake quaked we were already quaking two plates of sun grilled flesh moving over each other tan lines to tan lines merging grinding and shifting one above the other we quaked and quaked some more mesmerized eye to eye we collapsed into dust coaxing quivers up on every rung of the ladder from seismic to cosmic and everywhere in between we quaked, rattled, and rolled like a Jerry Lee Lewis piano riff never feeling the Earth and sidewalks of Southern California splitting open beneath us as the whole house trembled when her brass bed rang and our bodies bounced the city like a ball and we took shelter basking in the sparkling sediment of our afterglow while the speck of an infant began its long march down a rock littered road from nowhere to calamity.

in love
we wade through the fog
on a snow covered trail

Sacred Words

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

sunrise sermon
God speaks
fluent silence

The Gift

Quarter to six the front door rasps, a bell rings, and a sliver thin man whose wind chafed face is a replica of Edvard Munch's screamer coughs his way into Mabel's Place. The man brushes snow off of the frayed collar of his pea coat. He drapes the coat over the stool two down from where I sit. Snow melts into the canvas of his blue boat shoes. I figure his red flannel shirt and corduroy pants for Huck Finn hand me down's. The man sees me watching him. He smiles. He shrugs. He says, "Young man, I'm sure you've seen prettier sights than me in a junkyard but let me tell you one thing that's just as certain, a man can't have too much cushioning these days. In these times, a man's gotta gather every scrap of comfort he stumbles across. The world we're living in now is harder than stone, colder than ice, sharper than broken glass, and a long ways more wicked than any of the other worlds I've lived in."

Mabel comes out of the kitchen. "What'll you have?" Mabel asks the man. "What can I get for you?"

The man orders coffee, and a grilled cheese sandwich. His gaunt face is framed in the mirror by the Christmas lights that frame the window of Buddy's Pizzeria on the other side of Woodward Avenue. He takes the sandwich down in three hasty bites. The coffee goes down in two swallows. The man looks at me. Then he looks at Mabel. "I can't pay the bill," the man says. "On me," I say. "On the house," Mabel says.

The man slides off the stool. The man puts his coat on. His shoes squish as he shuffles his way to the front door. He turns around. A smile garlands his face. "I'm so happy you two accepted the gift I brought you tonight." He opens the door and out he goes. Mabel and I wave as he walks past the window and fades step by step until he is absorbed completely by the falling snow.

laid off
the mall Santa makes a promise
i can't keep

Statistics

On a hot and muggy Sunday afternoon in late July at Kyte Munro Field I went three for four with two razor sharp singles and a long triple that hooked then warped their center fielder's mind like the flag that was twisting around the pole above him, had four rbi's, stole second base twice, scored three runs, pitched nine shut out innings, rewarped the center fielder's mind with a slow curve that flowed like a slinky slipping down a greased staircase, then watched in shock and disbelief as Jimmy Sullivan who hadn't gotten off the bench all year and whose face resembled a bunch of red grapes gone to mold, walked away with the smokey brunette in the candy striped dress and turquoise studded black flip flops who stopped me cold with two winks and a blown kiss during the seventh inning stretch.

wilderness trail
everywhere we go
ego

Flower Girl

Had a crush on Sally Moon that nearly crushed me. Her walnut eyes worked me over every day in study hall and her long braided chestnut hair whipped me every time she walked by. The way she moved was the greatest tool in the history of hypnotism. I remember walking into a wall on my way to Humanities class after Sally kissed me behind a wall of pines in the park behind the school. Yeah, that Sally Moon who wore flowers in her hair. Yes, that Sally Moon who was Sirius bright and Milky Way sweet. Yes, that Sally Moon who married Mister Most Likely To Succeed. Yes, the beautiful Sally Moon who's pointing to a black and blue bruise under her left eye here at our twenty–fifth reunion as she tells Kate Plashinski, "In the beginning he'd bring a rose to me every day. He gave me this blossom three weeks ago in the parking lot at Target because I bought the wrong dog food."

puppy love
the absence of
gravity

Saints

Gary, Jane, and I were on our way home from a party in the North of Michigan's thumb. Snow piled halfway up the telephone poles. Twelve miles back in Bad Axe, the bank thermometer read minus 15. Plenty of wind too shooting straight down Lake Huron direct from James Bay, and now the gas gauge read zero. I volunteered to hitchhike into Marlette because last June we ran out of gas on a ninety-six degree day. Gary scored the ride that day while Jane and I took off all of the clothes we could take off to keep cool.

I was on the side of the road for ten minutes. It was so cold my cheeks felt like they were bonfire chafed and being caramelized with a blow torch. The fourth car that came along picked me up. When I got in the driver says, "Out of gas in this weather can kill a man. I'm picking up a friend in Imlay City. We're going to see Clapton in Detroit." He lights a joint. "Here man hit this," he says. Then he says, "It's Thai Stick lubed with hash oil." I tell the guy thanks, but I don't need anything that's going to amplify the cold. He loads a Mott The Hoople CD into the player and we roll into Marlette with Ian Hunter All The Way From Memphis. I thank the man for the ride and his generous offer. I walk out of this photograph from 1974 and back into the brutal cold of this third Sunday in February. "Good luck getting a ride back out," the man says pulling away from the curb in front of Maxwell's Shell And Service.

I glance at the Citizen's Bank clock and thermometer. The time is 5:47 pm Eastern Standard time. The temperature has shed two more digits. The neon gold numbers chatter -17. I give the attendant a ten dollar deposit for the gas can and I pump five gallons. Next door, the New Galilee Baptist Church is about to launch its Sunday evening service. On the church lawn an ax-hewn, ice glazed oak crucifix stands in two feet of snow. Before I go back to the road I figure I'll soak in a bath of warmth and sanctity for a few minutes. I set the gas can on the church steps. In the church vestibule, an usher spots me. He shakes his head no, and points his finger at the frozen world beyond the doors.

Back in the deep freeze I think of my many transgressions. Dante's ninth circle comes to mind. So does Jack London. The Citizens Bank clock reads 6:24 pm, and the thermometer reads -20 when a black Chevy Impala slows to a stop. The driver says, "Hop in. I'm tending bar tonight at the Eagles Club in Kinde. I'll take you all the way if you're going that far." I thank the man for saving me from frostbite. "No big deal," the man says. "It's just the decent thing to do," he says.

Gary and Jane are mindlessly happy to see me. Gary says, "Good thing we brought extra blankets. Good thing you got a ride when you did." Jane says, "No, it's way better than a good thing." Two hours west of Marlette, on the fourth floor at St Mary's Mercy Hospital, Jane had given birth to a six pound four ounce baby boy. When Jane gave the baby my name, without question or objection, Gary had shook my hand and said, "Congratulations."

in camouflage
he tells his wife
all about the hunting trip

Overheard At The Michiana Truck Stop In Auburn, Indiana

"What was Iraq like? Well Debbie, since I've been home I've welded my mouth and spirit to the bottom of a bottomless shot glass, and I've buried my mind beneath a floor of white powder to forget it. But I'll tell you. Six days after I arrived I watched a star fall through the empty eye sockets of my buddy El Paso Abe. Every falling star I see until the day I die I'll see through the empty eye sockets of a rodeo cowboy lying dead in a desert eight-thousand miles east of West Texas."

art class
the nude's stoic pose
the student's trembling hand

Honesty

That I am chained to the very essence of her spectacular sin is the salvation even Christ can't save me from . . . thank God!!!

drive in movie
we open our eyes
during the love scene

Graduates

All three of our kids have master degrees from Stanford. Jack, our oldest is a brilliant writer when he's not hawking beer at the ball park in San Francisco. Our middle child Yvonne paints and makes installation art when she's not tending bar at the Fainting Goat Saloon in Denver. And our youngest, Sam, plays lead guitar in a rock and roll band called Jeez Us Mice And The Exterminators when he's not bolted to a bar stool.

skid row
in a puddle of water
a puddle of men

For That Girl In Front Of Nathan's Famous

Dressed in the flesh of love's wicked twin she danced and shimmied to the ebb and flow of a silent serenade locked in a shaft of sunlight on Stillwell Avenue she embodied the rhythm back beat bass line and melody until she twirled and shook herself into a song that no man who was there will ever forget.

lifting her spoon
parting her lips
a sudden shift
in my appetite

American Aesthetics

The Headless Human told me, "Before I developed into a side show freak I sketched marks on midways from Maine to California. Two dollars a face, three for the whole body. And I'll tell you, I was damned good at it. I billed myself as Pablo Pistachio, and I poured every ounce of my talent into every sketch. I can't recall one mark who was happy with the end result. Boyfriends who thought I'd insulted their girl threatened to kick my ass on a daily basis. People ripped them up. People threw them in my face. People demanded refunds. In every town and county we played, my booth turned into a a cesspool of profanity and anger. A rodeo jackass at the Oklahoma State Fair told me, 'After my horse kicks the shit out of you, I'm gonna hang you on a barbed wire fence.' A butcher in Loveland, Colorado looked at the caricature, looked up at me and said, 'I should cut your hands off.' The pious called me a sinner. The infidels called me a heathen. Somebody's grandmother handed back the drawing and said, 'I wouldn't wipe my ass or line my cat's litter box with this.' A physics professor in College Station, Texas stomped on the picture, spat on it, then screamed, 'This isn't art! How can you call this art? ' To this day I can't figure out why the marks can't figure it out. So I tell them, just like America has become a caricature of America these days, a caricature artist is a caricature of an artist.

morning moon
the nooks and crannies
of an English muffin

Fishing The Mirror River

After tying my fly, I cast the line fifty feet beyond a majestic Sugar Maple twenty yards down the the north bank from where I stand. I see the fly floating on the surface like a single star on a midnight sky waiting to fall. I hear water splash. I feel the hook grab. I feel the line tighten. I hear the reel's quick clicks. I feel the sun on my shoulders and spine for one brief moment before a glistening Brook Trout drops me into the dark of its creel.

turning to ash a paper Buddha becomes Buddha

The Last Act

The whole week in that sticky southern town I wore my impenetrable I am a rock, I am an Island, I am a teflon diamond hard gem from Detroit the Murder Capitol Of America, I can survive anything costume. But beneath my motown delinquent deluxe mask the sorrow and separation anxiety had far exceeded flood stage.

Later that day as I watched her flight to Seattle forever shine and melt into the western sky, I ascended to the lowly position of chief engineer and sole passenger on a streetcar named despondence.

tunnel of love
our eyes adjust
to the darkness

On A Friday Afternoon

Heard a knock on the door at quarter after two. Two guys in blue suits perfectly pressed looking through the storm door window. Figured them to be Mormons, or Jehova's Witnesses. Was way wrong about that. When I opened the door, they flashed their FBI credentials in unison. Trembled inside I did. Was sure your past had finally caught up with you. Envisioned life without you . . .

The time wasted having to tell everyone about your secret. Your empty chair at the kitchen table. The money saved because you'd no longer be boozing and gambling. Me controlling the remote. Seeing the last three episodes of Downton Abbey after a seven year interruption. Having garage sales without your constant complaints. Selling your clothes. Selling your shoe collection. Selling your Fugs collection. Selling your Dylan collection. Selling your Clash collection. Selling your Jefferson Airplane collection. Selling your Sex Pistols and Pogues collection. Using the money to buy new drapes, a new mattress, and a dishwasher. My slumber both thunder and methane free. Hiring someone to paint the house you've promised to paint since 2011. The refrigerator no longer cluttered with Cool Whip, hot dogs, cheap beer, and Cheeze Whiz. As you know my love, I could go on with this list for the next five years, but I have to pick the grand kids up from school.

Well, you can imagine how disappointed I was watching my dreams vanish into the late May sunlight when the tall agent asked if we knew a man named Thomas Paladin. I said yes. I asked why. Agent number two said, "He's a finalist for a position with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. We're conducting a routine background check. He listed you and your husband as references." To sum it up my precious, I told Washington's finest that Thomas Paladin is a science wizard. That he's dedicated one-hundred percent to every task he undertakes be it borscht, falafal, shwarma, bombs, or Greek Mythology with one exception. That exception I explained, was his dedication to our flag and nation. On that count I told them that Paladin's dedication ran in the

neighborhood of ten-thousand percent. When they asked if they could come back to speak with you, I let them know that you died on December 23rd, 2009. Both agents were very professional and expressed their sorrow for my loss. Let's thank God for my quick thinking. See you when I get home from the Casino and you come back from the dead.

I love you Tom, Laurie.

funeral procession
the hum of the engine
he tuned last week

An Electoral Collage

The jackasses are elephants
&
the elephants are jackasses

confetti
promises spill
from the candidates mouths

An Elder's Enlightenment

(For TK Splake)

Felt all in when I came down from Chapel Rock, so I cut back my rest and lengthened my caffeine crutch and my habenero cheese consumption, hoping for a cleaner gut, frozen bones, and a calmer mind. Then the cure came to me in one glowing thought, I'd rather die a meal for eagles on the path leading home from the summit than rot in a nursing home dripping, drooling, depending on depends, and sipping fried chicken through a paper straw worrying about my bowels, or the identity of the ninety-six year old thug who wobbled west on M-28 fifteen miles from extinction, with my classic 1966 candy apple red four on the floor Rollator Walker.

late innings
the shortstop backpedals
into fireflies

Amputized

After cleaning the wound, changing the dressing, rewrapping my right foot, and resetting my IV drip rate, my nurse added a polyester smile to her crisply pressed black scrubs and asked, "Mr Mason, what's the biggest difference between being twenty-five and sixty-five?" I took a long look at her as the ice chips on my tongue began to melt along with the rest of me. "Well Kelly," I said, "At twenty-five people buy running shoes, flip flops, wing tips, sandals, work boots, wedding shoes, glass slippers, and most of your dreams will come true and can be had. At sixty-five, your dreams and desires are impossibly far beyond reach even when they're standing three feet away from you. And, you'll let a complete stranger cut off three of your toes, and that day will be the happiest day of your life."

warm breeze
the holes in my life
begin to yodel

Central City, Nebraska

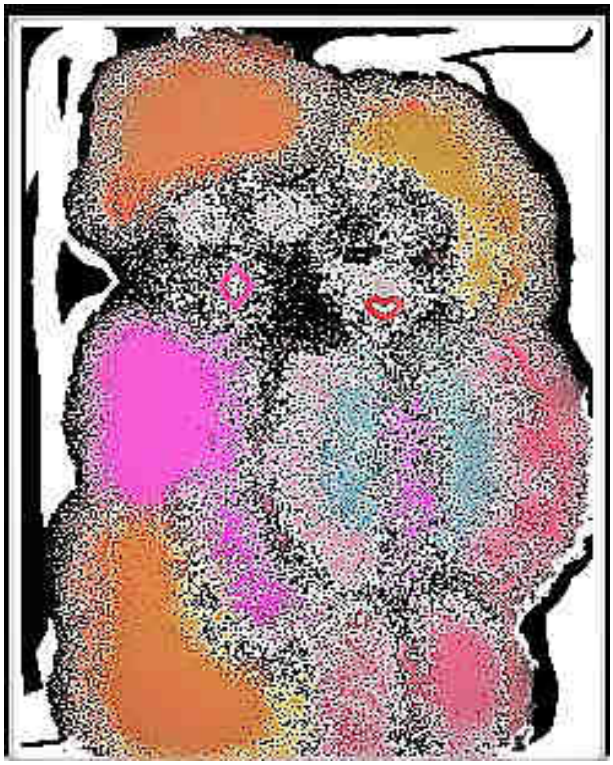
The jail had eight recessed cells. There was a ten pond bag of roasted peanuts beside a steel table and twelve steel chairs that were bolted to the grey concrete floor. Three times a day one of the four Central City cops would bring out the can of Prince Albert tobacco and three packs of Top cigarette papers. We could roll one and smoke it at the table. The cops lit us up. The beds were covered with a half inch wrestling mat. I'd slept on plenty worse at a thousand different motels. Central City had a population of four-thousand give or take a few hundred. The town was marooned in the middle of America's Great Corn Desert. The wardens didn't lock the cells unless a con requested his cell be locked. Thank you Andy, Barney, and Otis. I spent thirty days there with Merle and Vern, professional box car Buddhas who were locked up on vagrancy and trespassing raps. Vern said, "I picked a few ears of corn." Merle said, "The fucking farmer called the law on us." On the morning of my thirtieth day the three of us were smoking the last cigarette we would ever smoke together. Merle said, "OK Vernon, it's time to give this boy the best advice a father can give to his son. Go ahead, give it." Vern blew three smoke rings that wobbled toward the north wall of the jail, and said, "If you evers has to take up trains to make your way in the world, don't ever hop one between Fargo, North Dakota and Winnipeg, Manitoba after the first week of October. You wouldn't believe how many mens has froze solid in the boxcars on that goddamned line."

d e a t h p o e m t h e l i g h t b e t w e e n t h e l e t t e r s

At Bev's Cafe

Wiping the gleam of butter and bacon grease from his lips face encased in a plume of coffee steam my Uncle Sam tells the entire dining room, "If we don't do somethin' about it pretty goddamned fast the entire human race'll be buried in a fuckin' West Virginia coal mine, and a rusty fuckin' Texaco gas pump'll be humanity's tombstone.

winter solstice
all three wisemen
facing south



In The Beginning . . . An Audition

"Sure I remember her. How could I ever forget that day. She started out in the field pouring and serving drinks in a historic building that at different times had housed Penny's Candy Club, The Glory Road Apostolic Church Of Newark, and in it's last incarnation, the Garden Grove Gentleman's Club which was owned by my pal Jesse Cannon and his father Godfrey. So, you see, after six months of slinging booze and watching drooling drunks in three piece suits deposit C notes in G strings she said she wanted to become the last arc in a circle that was being drawn by Trixxxy Trixxx, Juggling Jane, Spanky Spanks, and Vicky Vamp The Born Again Vixxxen. She auditioned on a Sunday morning for Jesse and the G-Man. I was there stocking the bar. Man, I'll never forget it. She held onto and spun around that brass pole like a long lost lover. She shimmied up, wrapped herself around, and slid up and down the pole until she became one with it. No lie man, I was fifty feet away from her and I could actually feel her lips all over me when she kissed the pole. That's how good she was. I could see Jesse's mind was made up because his eyes looked like they were gonna pop like champagne corks. On the other hand, right then, Godfrey invented what came to be known millennia later as a Poker Face. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking, but then that's the face Godfrey's worn forever. Anyway, Jesse looks Godfrey square in the eyes and says, 'Ok Daddy G, what's it gonna be, yay or nay? It's your call.' The G-man says, 'I ain't su . . .' and cuts himself off mid word. When she took her hat off just before Joe Cocker croaked, Godfrey stood and shouted 'You can keep your hat on!' 'That's enough. The job's yours honey if the bar boy thinks your good enough.' Godfrey nodded his head and pointed at me. 'Speak,' Godfrey said. "Sir, I've been working these joints for what seems like an eternity. I've seen more dancers than a man can possibly count. I've seen the portfolios of the divine and the damned. And having seen and felt what I just saw and felt, I can't think of anyone who even comes remotely close to matching her incendiary talent. Really Godfrey, no bull, this chick Eva is perfect for the Garden's grand opening. Hire her G-Man, hire her now."

midway rain
Gigantic Gisella and the caricature artist
share an umbrella

Class Of 69

Every time we skipped Mr. Whitlock's geometry class, me and Lucky Rose practiced on the floor in Jimmy Munro's black light room fallout shelter his old man built on the second day of the Cuban Missle Crisis. We practiced beneath and between Jimi's thin fingers warping and sculpting guitar strings into napalm swans and Grace Slick oozing sex and smirking her approval in a Girl Scout uniform.

When May became June, and June became the time for final exams me and Lucy Rose had become bonafide angle wizards. We could twist and contort our bodies together like a couple of triple jointed Gumby's. We could do it rolling downhill, crawling uphill, in our sleep, standing, sitting, jogging, and dogging. We could do it blowing bubbles, eating cheese fries, on a toboggan, singing the national anthem, and singing Amazing Grace.

We rocked at right, acute, obtuse, supplementary, interior, obscure, exterior, rebound, and reflex angles. We rolled in cones, cubes, circles, ovals, voids, oids, quadrangles, octangles, triangles, and sextangles . . . but in the end, Mr. Whitlock flunked Lucy Rose and me anyway.

65th birthday
I tie dye T-shirts
the colors of Autumn

American Landmarks . . . A Story Problem

11 at three different homes in Samson, and Geneva, Alabama
21 at a McDonald's in San Ysidro, California
16 at a Christmas party at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California
32 in classrooms at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia
49 at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida
10 at Red Lake High School in Red Lake, Minnesota
26 at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas
12 at the Century 16 Movie Theatre in Aurora, Colorado
9 at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina
27 at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut
17 at Marjory Stoneman High School in Parkland, Florida
13 at the Borderline Bar And Grill in Thousand Oaks, California
13 at Columbine High School in Columbine, Colorado
58 at the Route 91 Harvest Festival in Las Vegas, Nevada
3 at The Gilroy Garlic Festival in Gilroy, California
22 at the Wal Mart in El Paso, Texas
9 on Fifth Street in the Oregon District of Dayton, Ohio

Can you solve it?

photo op
politicians pose
with shovels full of mud

Dear Prudence

The boss sent us home after we troweled the garage floor and the rain turned to snow. I stopped at Giglio's Italian Market. Bought a stick of pepperoni, eight slices of hot pepper cheese, half pound of Provolone, quarter pound of Calabrese Salami, three of Pope Vito's just baked Ciabatta rolls, a can of anchovies, a jar of roasted peppers, two of Nona Giglio's chocolate chip cannolis, and a gallon of Carlo Rossi pink chablis.

So there I was sitting in my basement apartment on State Fair Street sipping cheap wine, thinking about her, and repeating this mantra, God I wish she was here on the other side of my eyes, on the other side of this wobbly table. She'd love the old knotty pine paneling.
She'd love the antique full moon French Provincial looking glass. She'd love the falling snow. She'd love the food. She'd love the hooch.
She'd love the Carlo Rossi, the cannolis, she'd love the heat between us, and she'd love the year round Christmas lights . . .

FLASHINGREDFLASHINGGREENFLASHINGBLUEFLASHINGYELLOWFLASHING

around the walls, around the rooms, around this world, around our bodies merging into a Yuletide rainbow. She'd love the upright antique water fountain, the red white and blue tinsel erupting from the spout and glittering down the drain. She'd love the three legged chair, and the rose scented couch. She'd love my Mahogany bed, and she'd love me all over again, and she'd love me for just one more day on this Earth.
But, she wasn't on my street. She wasn't in Detroit. She wasn't in Michigan. So I walked up the stairs, shuffled through the slush and snow to Zorba's Acropolis, and made small talk with Sally Lewis in the third booth when she brought my burger, onion rings, and bottle of Old Milwaukee. She was running down her ex when we heard a news mans voice quiver through the speaker of a twelve inch Zenith black and white that sat on top of Zorba's dessert carousel, in a voice more stark and somber than the color black . . . . .
John Lennon was . . .

dinner alone a player piano plays Silent Night

Interview With A Dunk Tank Clown

"Rank Frank, what credentials are required for your position in the carnival?"
"A bachelor's degree in disdain for decent people with a concentration in vitriolic disgust. A master's degree in profane language and foul insults, and a phd in stupidity in order to insult ranchers, cops, Bloods, Crips, muscle men, post traumatic stressed vets, dirt farmers, drunks, and bikers in front of their witches and brats."
"Where did you get your education?"
"I graduated from Uncle Jack's Car Wash in Fresno, California, and I went to graduate school at Uncle Sam's Brickhouse in Leavenworth, Kansas."
"What insults are most effective?"
"I made love with your wife in the shower this morning . She was trying to wipe away the ring you left on the tub. She told me she loves my Dolphin, and that she'll never go back to your minnow . . . Your girlfriend was elected Prom Queen by all the guys in the guy's bathroom. She showed me the lambskin trojan crown they gave her . . . Your mother didn't wear army boots because she was the infantry's welcome mat . . . Two balls for a buck buddy. You oughta buy two because you ain't got none."
“Does it bother you to insult people at such a crude and intimate level?"
"Hell no. The insults are money magnets. The nastier the insult, the more people will spend on revenge. That's basically what I sell. It's all about free speech and revenge. That's basically what I sell. That's how I put booze in my belly. By the way, your wife was sweeter, stickier, and slipprier than a gallon of Mrs Butterworth's syrup and a quart of bacon grease. I ate her for breakfast before you showed up this morning."

honeymoon suite
beyond the hot tub
Lake Superior

Of Heat And Moths

On her nightstand beside the ice bucket beside her bra beside my Wranglers behind her blouse behind my t-shirt behind her skirt behind our photo booth wedding photo between her pills and my bottle between her bed and her bedroom window between Detroit and Chicago between her legs and mine in a vibrating sky of hot red wax the ashes of two moths.

Valentine's Day
a hairline crack
zig zags down
the sugar bowl

Lifeguard

I pulled into her driveway, parked my leapless VW Rabbit, waved to her neighbor Peggy, and unlatched the gate. She was standing beside her swimming pool dragging a mesh skimmer across the sun burnished water on the day of our first date. My hands were firmly set midway between vibrate and tremble. My heart banged like a Gene Krupa tom tom solo. I tried to hide my anxiety behind a safe and obvious question, “Skimming the pool?"

Her eyes were focused on the northeast arc of water tinted pink lady red by the wind kissed branches of an apple tree. Then, quick as a wink, she dipped and twisted the mesh and whispered, "Got it." in triumph. She looked at me and said, "Skimming the pool? No not really. It's more like saving flies and bees from drowning. Six months later, after she had knocked all of the dirt off of me and out of me I felt a softly wrapped life jacket caress my road weary wings.

cherry blossoms
the rookie pitcher
puts on his game face

Milkmen

Two days into Summer vacation, and a day after the store detective at Sears told my parents when they came to pick me up, "Your son and two other boys carried thirty compact discs, nine Timex watches, and twelve bottles of Old Spice shaving lotion out of the store under their coats,"

Joe and Mary Capelli decided right then and there that their only son wouldn't find trouble and trouble wouldn't find him if they shipped him to a desolate location where the toxic seeds of Detroit's crumbling streets couldn't take root and blossom.

As soon as the three of us crossed the threshold at our house my mother yelled to my sister, "Theresa, tell him you'll give him everything he wants. Theresa, hang up. I have to make an emergency call to Uncle Mike, and Aunt Fran." My father scanned me. Then he looked at me weird like I was a painting in an art museum. He wagged his head bobblehead style. "If you think you're going to make a living on the wrong side of the law you're . . ."

Before he could finish, my mother yelled from the kitchen, "All right start packing. Mike said we can drive Pretty Boy Floyd up tomorrow." When tomorrow arrived, they dropped me off at Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran's mailbox. "Tell Mike and Fran hello," my mother said. My father shook his head, hit the gas, and they were gone.

Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran operated a three-hundred acre dairy farm fifty miles northwest of the Mackinaw Bridge. All I can say about their house is that Herman, Lily, and Grandpa Munster would have loved the place. Paint hadn't kissed the house in decades. Splintered shutters flapped and banged. The porch boards moaned and sagged. And, cobwebs hung like bunting in the basement that was my room. The whole house was damp, dark, and cold. Their classic American Red Barn with a Mail Pouch Tobacco ad painted on the side would've blinded Norman Rockwell with tears before his first brush stroke. Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran owned fifteen Guernsey cows, four pigs, twelve chickens,

and a pond that was filled with Mallards and Canadian Geese in the Spring and Summer. When Aunt Fran went to the house to make dinner, Uncle Mike Took me on a tour of the farm. "I want you to know your parents gave me a detailed report on what you've been doing and what you did specifically to wind up here. We're going to make sure that what happened will never happen again. I'll tell you right now you made three crucial mistakes. Now listen to me . . . Your first mistake was wearing a Winter coat on June 7th. That's sure to draw attention you don't need. Your second mistake was taking merchandise that's worth next to nothing on the street. And your third mistake was getting caught. While your here we're going to work on eliminating your desire to stick your foot in a goddamned bear trap. I'm going to sharpen your eye for merchandise that's worth the risk of stealing. For instance, a pair of diamond earrings is going to pay off far better than a hundred compact discs. And I'm going to show you how to cover your tracks." I thanked Uncle Mike, and promised him I wasn't nearly as stupid as my parents made me out to be.

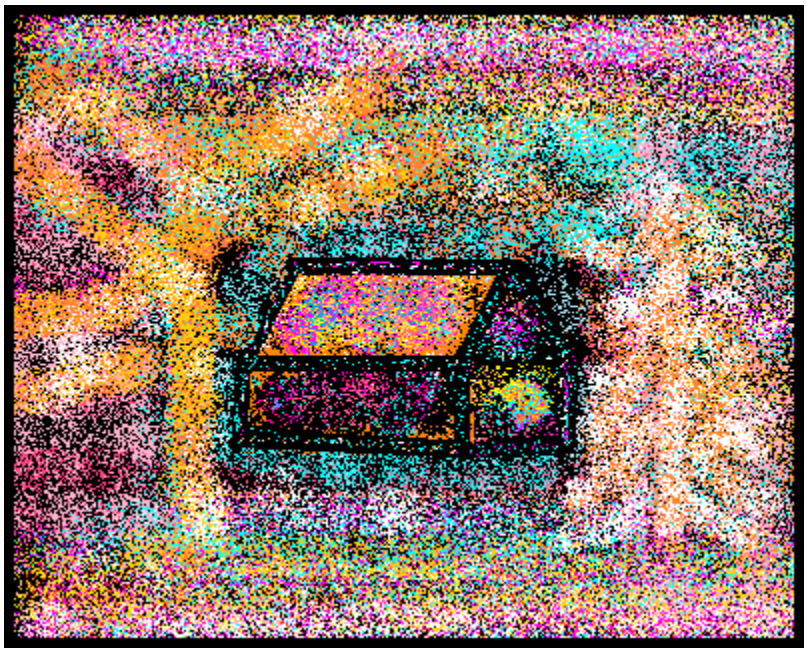
Every day was a work day and every workday began with me and Uncle Mike milking the cows long before the sun popped out of its toaster. After the milking, we would cut the dead fall and a few small maples at the eastern edge of his neighbor's property. After we cut the wood we portioned it into quarter cord bundles that Uncle Mike sold as full cords to the tourists who passed the farm on the way to Lake Superior. Mike sold each quarter cord for thirty-five dollars, which was the price for a full cord at Mitchell's Phillips 66 Gas and Groceries. Uncle Mike put the quarter cords behind a fence that was covered with large clear pictures of full cords of firewood. When the tourists stopped to buy firewood they pictured the pictures on the fence and never looked at the wood they were buying because Uncle Mike told them that as a courtesy "My nephew will load the firewood in your trunk." After milking and gathering we would roll back a portion of his neighbor's fence at the north end of the farm so his cows could graze in Mr Tackett's pasture. When Uncle Mike rolled the fence back it was impossible to tell that a person had tampered with the fence because Uncle Mike would cover his tracks with bear, moose, or caribou tracks. Visual and verbal deception were two of the arts Uncle Mike made me practice every day. He said, "Practicing these arts are acts of patriotism because no one in our country is better at them than our president."
Saturday night was the night Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran set aside for socializing in Rexton. This meant going to the White Pine Drive-In for

burgers, onion rings, malts, and small talk. Two months into my sentence on the farm, Aunt Fran caught a bad cold. That Saturday night Uncle Mike and I carried on the tradition by ourselves. We gave the carhop our order. Uncle Mike's eyes were stuck on her behind until she rolled between two lumber haulers. "Ok now, look to your right," Uncle Mike said. A guy and a girl were lost in each others lips. Their burgers sat on a tray attached to the driver's side window. "Ok now, keep your eyes on me and time me," Uncle Mike handed me his watch. He took a long screwdriver out of the glove box. He opened the door without making a sound, and dropped down on all fours. That was the last I saw of him for two minutes and twelve seconds. When he crawled back to the car he handed me four baby moon hubcaps, a silver globe hood ornament, and two double cheeseburgers one with mustard and pickle and one with the works. When the carhop brought our order Uncle Mike said, "Honey, bring us two more chocolate malts, we're celebrating tonight."

Aunt Fran's Sunday dinners were the highlight of the week and a sight to behold. Meal preparation began mid morning. While the neighbors were at church Aunt Fran would send me out to gather vegetables. My first stop was the Tabor's Fresh Farm Stand a quarter mile down the road from the farm. The stand was an open air windowless lean to and counter that was made out of plywood. The vegetables were stored under the long counter. Aunt Fran's standing order was six ears of sweet corn. The Florida sweet corn the Tabor's sold before their sweet corn was ready was OK but the corn that came out of their field was sweeter than candy corn. After I delivered the corn I'd make my way to Harley Smith'sgarden. Harley grew the best green beans in Mackinac County. Aunt Fran would serve them with crumbled bacon and plenty of butter. After Harley's garden I'd visit Teemu Tikkanen's place for bib lettuce, tomatoes, sweet peppers, cukes, and tomatoes. Aunt Fran told me. "If you takes just a little from each place, no one will even notice anything's missing." Venison was the centerpiece of every Sunday dinner. There was always plenty of venison thanks to Uncle Mike hunting twice a week after midnight regardless of the season. He taught me how to put food on the table with a flashlight, pistol, and silencer. After dinner the three of us would watch Benny Hinn, then the 700 club. We ended each Sunday with prayer and the marvelous music of Lawrence Welk.

The year I spent on the dairy farm with Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran was a life altering experience. I learned how to milk a cow, churn butter, work a produce stand, groom a vegetable garden, trespass undetected, steal hubcaps, poach deer, the value of consumer goods, and how to hide in broad daylight. If not for that year with Uncle Mike and Aunt Fran I'd probably be wearing prison stripes rather than this beautiful pinstriped Italian suit.

winter sunset
this sudden craving
for a hand picked peach



Double Jeopardy

My sisters and I grew up in a grey brick, ranch style house on the grounds of the Animus River Apostolic Church near Durango, Colorado. Our old man took off when I was ten and my twin sisters Evelyn and Yvonne were eight. Every time we asked ma why he left and where he went, she'd close her eyes, shiver a little and say, "The devil bit him good and deep. He's most likely in the section of hell where every drunk burns eternally. He's probably drinking cold beer with Lucifer right now trying to put out the fire, but it ain't gonna work. Your daddy is gonna burn forever." Ma's story never added up for us because we never saw him drink anything stronger than Dr Pepper, and we never smelled liquor on his breath when he would sing us to sleep. Six months after he left the mystery was partially solved when ma married Tom Wilson.

Wilson was the preacher at the Animus River Apostolic Church. He was a shameless advocate of the all that glitters is gold, and every grifter's a saint scripture. With each passing year the canyon widened between Wilson and us. Evelyn loved the Beatles. Yvonne swooned for the Rolling Stones and a rodeo hipster named Garret Gamble who flipped burgers, birds, and Yvonne's switch at the Lazy Lariat Burger Barn. I couldn't get enough of Frank Zappa, The Fugs, and Captain Beefheart. One night we heard Wilson tell ma, "If I hadn't been feeding your hell bound brats for the last eight years, I'd have enough money to buy the kind of transportation that befits a devout man of the cloth. A week later we were listening to a Kinks record in my bedroom when Wilson burst through the door, screamed, "No more Satanic sermons in this house!," and trashed the turntable and speakers with a meat mallet.

The next time Wilson took to the pulpit he informed his flock of fools that the Animus River Apostolic Church would be having a fund raising carnival, "Because the mobility of our ministry is in dire need of an upgrade." After the service Tom told Evelyn, Yvonne, and me, "It's time for you self indulgent dead beats to experience the grace, goodness, and joy that comes along with doing unto others. You three are responsible for finding an entertainer to close the carnival at five o'clock on Sunday." Wilson dropped the Denver yellow pages on the kitchen table and

walked away. Fifteen minutes into our quest for the grace, goodness, and joy that comes with doing unto others an ad in the phone book jumped off the page and slapped my face . . . The Magnificent Mary Cane And Her Wonder Chimp Wilson . . . Top Notch Entertainment Available For Fairs, Fund Raisers, Birthday Parties, And Corporate Events . . . Call 303 - 333 - 7373.

At five o'clock on the third day of Tom Wilson's new car crusade Mary Cane and her wonder chimp Wilson took the stage. The wonder chimp was wearing a top hat a white T-shirt that read in capital letters, I'M EVOLVING ALL THE TIME HOW ABOUT YOU? and he was waving a gold tipped swagger stick. When Wilson spotted Wilson, Wilson gyroscoped Wilson prodding and poking Wilson with the swagger stick until Wilson stumbled breathlessly through the sunset burnished dust of his realm. Then, Wilson impersonated Jimmy Swaggert. Jimmy's weepy drawl segued into Tammy Faye Baker's anxiety ridden whine. Tammy Faye's histrionic sniveling morphed into the the broken English of an Italian man. The last words Wilson spoke were, "I'ma Father Guido Sardine. Maya Godda Blessa Youse Alla."

After the blessing Mary Cane and Wilson vanished. Two months later Wilson bought a sawdust scented 1969 Cadillac rust leper and told Evelyn, Yvonne, and me to leave his house of worship. Ma left him eight months later and moved to Tucson. I don't know who she was, who she is, or where she's at, but Mary Cane is the greatest illusionist and ventriloquist that's ever been. I feel her power every day.

fisherman's ice box
the look on her face
when she opens the chip dip

Before Chattanooga

In the dim red glow of a Coke machine I ask the man. He squints and spits. "About three mile up the Old lee Road then left about a hundred yard past the Silverdale Confederate Cemetery turn right at the Moonpie General Store go about another mile till ya get ta Elder's Ace Hardware just about a half mile or three turn right on Amos Road they got a small white cross planted in the ground about five foot off the road find that and you should come across a beat down green clapboard shack setting back in the pines maybe about a hundred yard up the hill from the cross you'll sure enough hear 'em they praise his name they bang tambourine they sing they shake they smoke pig all night long pulled pig rib sandwiches beans greens slaw peach cobbler a blessing and a cleansed soul to boot for four bucks ya can't beat her. Maybe you'll find her mister . . . If yer fog ever lifts."

grace
before god
we thank
the scarecrow

On Election Day

At five-thirty in the morning my cluster bomb alarm clock exploded bringing a blaze of blue thoughts back into the light with a trilingual cloudburst of bolo kisses that lacerated the thin pink skin of my fear drums as America melted in the marrow of my collapsible bones collapsing I got dressed and left my wife Ann Marie and our kids Angel and Angelo upstairs waving to me wading into the pitch black pupils of a governments three evil eyes I staggered down the steps into the soot of a Shngri-La landscape fading in the jaundiced yellow light of dawn wearing a botoxed mask of America I stopped for breakfast then shipped eight White Castle cheeseburgers with mustard extra onions two blips of onion chips and eight Lone Star long necks through an infrastructure of broken roads and corroded pipes trickling tears into an oil sewer bleeding profusely beneath Lake Huron.

That being said I pulled my pants down four legs at a time the way every dray horse does to hide my blue collar birth marks and thought about buying mittens gloves scarves boots and snow suits for our kids and thought about paying the electric bill water bill heating bill and thought about robbing a cop shooting a bank going to prison and frying in an electric chair all while the hollow beat of my kids empty lunch boxes played in my mind and replaced OM as the vibration of a universe where I idled in a rush hour traffic scam along with two-hundred and fifty million of my fellow Americans being seduced slandered and trampled to death in the linguistic mist of stampeding politicians and their blister lipped cheerleaders raging up and down every radio dial from Mars Hill Maine to Chula Vista California and across the Pacific to Honolulu Hawaii and when the polls closed on this cold American chooseday the stories that chiseled and shaped the essence of this day had nothing to do with anyone whose named appeared on the ballot.

Happy Hour
between the rest rooms
a fist fight erupts

Testimony

I hung the last French door which opened onto a slate patio that was four times the size of my house. I was packing my tools when the Lady Of Pheasant Manor showed up on the patio wearing a thigh length white satin robe. Her slim fingers curled around a sweating bottle of Dom, and two ruby rimmed crystal flutes.
She smiled. She said, ""Sit." I wanted to roll over, bark, and beg, but I restrained myself. We sat on white wicker thrones at a black wicker table. Champagne notes rose and crackled in the crystal flutes. She handed me a check that exceeded the contracted price by three-thousand dollars. She said, "Mr Doorman, you make beautiful doors, and they're hung perfectly. You did a wonderful job. Now I want you to knock me up." She stood. Her robe fell to the slate and caressed my work boots. The Lady Of Pheasant Manor knelt and loosened my boot laces. A river of warmth washed over me.
Working for the rich is a great thing. Working for the rich who are beset by boredom is greater yet. When my only child grows up, I want my child to have the same business opportunities I had. Communists and socialists like Hillary and Bernie will destroy the business and social programs the profanely rich provided when I was a young man starting out in life, growing my business, and establishing my career path. And, that's the reason I'm voting for Donald Gump.

political debate
the truth of a lie becomes the word
of God

In Line At The Exit Door

At the age of sixty-five I've realized that yes, I too am going to die. I'm good with that. I have to be. I can deal with the end coming as the result of liver failure, auto accident septicemia, piranha, bird flu, hypothermia, ebola, bullet, food poisoning, congestive heart failure, drug overdose, incineration, plane crash, avalanche, sex, hurricane, cancer, and every other way God brings his children home . . .with two exceptions . . . Should I be paid a visit by Mr. Alzheimer or his wife Lady Dementia, will somebody please push my wheel chair onto the subway tracks.

house of mirrors
I impersonate
myself

At A Picnic Table In The Wilderness

We sat she and I incomplete strangers to each other in a grey morning mist we broke bread my home baked black Russian Rye slightly sweet with subtle notes of cocoa left to linger on the tongue paired with nuggets of her white Wisconsin extra sharp cheddar two separate threads weaving into one on the threadbare mind on a man in desperate need of a seamstress. She danced sitting still in the spotlight of my Autumn brown eyes and when I surfaced from the depths of her Lake Superior blue eyes we watched gulls and freighters drift west to Duluth we heard wind strafed stone crumble where wild blueberries grew and on the rocks a cormorant dipped and lifted its beak dripping yellow perch then with one quick glance she found the smile I had lost on a warmer shore fifteen years back in a pile of driftwood and sewed it back on my face with a kiss.

where the barn's
tin roof rusted through . . .
a crescent moon

Cheaters

I was running a milk bottle joint at the Abbeville Fair down in South Carolina. It's a Friday in mid July. Hot and sultry, the air sticks to skin like packaging tape. This guy walks up. He hands me a dollar. I hand him three baseballs. He nods to his girlfriend. He grins. She smiles. He winds up. The first ball misses the bottles by a foot. He winds up again. The second ball glances off of the front of the card table the bottles are set on. Number three wobbles the bottles but they don't fall. The guy glares.

"Your game is rigged," the guy says in a thick and broken Spanglish. I tell the guy, "The way you throw you couldn't knock over a feather with the Rock Of Gibralter."

The guy tells me, 'I'm gonna take a prize." "What prize do you want?" he asks his girlfriend. She doesn't say a word. The guy glares my way again. " I'm taking a prize motherfucker," the guy says as he jumps over the counter. Now I'm out of options. I have no choice but to defend my home, trinkets, and Shanghai shit that's hanging on the prize board. He calls me a puta. He pulls a flammable stuffed Chinese alligator off of the prize board. I give him a beat down. A few teeth fly out. His upper lip splits. "Here's a consolation prize," I tell the guy, handing him a set of novelty dentures that chatter and chomp when they're wound. The cops show up. Cuffs click and lock. The big cop mutters "Assault." The bigger cop says, "Don't jump to conclusions."

Next morning I wake up in cell 22 of the Abbeville jail. A court appointed psychologist is standing in front of my cell. She's a looker. She's wearing a white short sleeve blouse, faded Levi's, white Nikes and a mid summer tan the color of coffee three creams. All of a sudden I understand Freud's sex thing. She starts the conversation with an introduction. "Mr. Baxter, my name is Melissa. I'm the county psychologist." She continues on with a series of questions.

"Sir, please state your name and occupation."

"Charles Alex Baxter. Midway game operator and professional American."

"Can you tell me what happened last night?"

"Yeah sure. Jose Chalupa walks up with his Senorita. Buys three baseballs for a dollar. Doesn't knock down a single bottle because he can't throw as hard as you can. He accuses me of running a rigged game. Then he says he's going to take a prize anyway. He jumps over the counter, pulls a stuffed gator off the prize board, and in defense of my country I kicked his ass."

"Are you homicidal?"

"Hell no, I'm heterocidal."

"Are you suicidal?"

"No. I'm Melissacidal."

"Are you now or have you ever heard voices?"

"Yes," I tell her.

"What do they say?"

"They say I'd love to sleep naked with you."

"The voices say they'd love to sleep naked with you?"

"No, they don't say that. I said I want to sleep naked with you Melissa."

She holds her hand up in the halt position. "Last question Mr. Baxter. How would you describe yourself?"

I tell her, "I'm fungicidal, peroxidal, bacteriacidal, and viracidal. If I get out today I'll be looking for you at the fair tonight."

Melissa thanks me for answering her questions. She writes something in a memo book and walks away. An hour later the bigger cop who hauled

me in shows up at my cell. His keys jingle. He opens the door. He extends his right hand. We shake. He says, "Off the record buddy, you did the right thing last night. But as hard as it might be don't do it again in Abbeville County.

That night, the cop steps up to my game with his wife and kids. Like all the other suckers who try to knock down the bottles he wants to groove on some hero worship. He wants his wife and kids to adore him. He buys nine balls. He doesn't knock over a single bottle. The cop says, "Chalupa was right. You're running a crooked game here. It's a scam. I should drag your ass back to jail." I tell the cop, "I'll make it right." I tell the cop's kids, "You can choose two prizes apiece." I want to ask the cop's wife where she stashed Jose Chalupa tonight, but I don't, and everyone goes home happy.

gutter ball
on the bowler's table
ten empty long necks

Luck

The town was Brimley

The bar was Dusty's

The moon was waning

The trees were rusty

Her name was Echo

She was a gambler

She drove me to Paradise

In a blue Nash Rambler

one night stand
tattooed on her hip
a four leaf clover

What Could Have Been

Saturday morning. Eighty degrees. Blue sky. Bright sun. No humidity. A trio of dragonflies zigzag through the tomato plants I'm watering when my father pulls into the driveway in his black 1968 Lincoln Continental. Before I can turn off the water and walk to the front of the house, my father limps his way to where I'm standing. "I've got bad news Ed. I've got real bad news about the family." I look my father square in the eyes, and I can see he's been crying. I haven't seen my father cry since JFK went down in Dallas. I was nine that year. I wonder if something happened to my mother or one of my sisters. No, I decide. If that was the case, he would have called first.

Before I can ask, my father says, "Aunt Rose sent your cousin Paul out to get a gallon of milk last night. She gave him a hundred dollar bill. He took her Cadillac. The goddamned kid went to a crack house on Houston-Whittier. He smoked the C note. The dealer tells Paul, "You still owe me two-hundred from last week. I'm keeping the Cadillac until you pay me." Paul told the guy to fuck off, and the fucking guy shot him. That's what Paul told Aunt Rose before he died.

I look at the garden. The first ripe tomato's ruby red skin glistens in the sun. "I'm not surprised," I tell my father. ""Paul's been a devout crack head for ten years. He outlived most of his running buddies." My father blows up. "Is that all you can fucking say? He was your cousin goddamnit. Paul was one of the nicest guys in the fucking neighborhood. I'm sorry I came over here. Go ahead, keep watering goddamned garden." I turn off the hose. "Paul was a junkie. He was a nice guy, but he was a crackhead. There's a price to pay for everything. Look Dad, there's a price to . . . " Before I can finish my father says, "You're still jealous. I can't believe you're still jealous after twenty years."

My wife walks onto the deck to water the flowers. She's wearing a stars and stripes bikini. She waves. I watch the breeze ripple the stars covering her nipples. "Jealous of what?" I ask my father. He points his finger at me and shouts,"Do you realize how good of a shortstop your cousin Paul was. Huh? No, Paul wasn't a good shortstop, he was the

best shortstop that ever came out of Detroit. You couldn't hold a candle to him when you played second base. I haven't forgotten how you fucked up that double play in the Catholic League championship game. Neither has anyone else who was there dead or alive. The scouts that were there that day weren't watching you, you son of a bitch."

I pick the ripe tomato and throw it at the apple tree that sits on our property line. It sails wide and splatters on the side of the swimming pool. I remember that day. I remember how Paul and I teamed up to steal two bottles of wine from Russian Mike's corner store. I remember how Paul bought me time, and the way he smiled when Russian Mike said, "You didn't lose that game, son. Ozzie Smith couldn't have caught that ball. You've got what it takes to be a pro shortstop kid. You're the envy of the whole fuckin' neighborhood." My father limps back to his car. "What was that about," my wife asks. A dragon fly zips past. Bird chatter fills the yard, and from the left field side of second base I hear Paul shout, "Come on man, get your shit together."

summer dusk
between the cherry trees
fireflies flare and fade

Looking Good

A haircut. A hot towel shave. A splash of Aqua Velva. Three steps out the door of Big Jakes Shear Shop a down wind wino mumbles,"You smell good enough to drink."

happy hour
I'm five minutes into becoming
the man she hates

Love And Death In The Kingdom Of Capitalism

We were in love. No doubt about it. But the times and circumstances of our lives made it clear that splitting up was the only dish on the menu. We kissed and cried in perfect harmony all the way to the airport. We made a vow to meet again. We traded love vows with the conviction of cult zombies. Then, I boarded flight 978.

The 727 began its ascent at six sharp Texarkana time. Two and a half hours later, I was in Detroit knocking back beers with an airport vulture named Sandy at the Broken Wing Lounge. At eight the next morning I abandoned Sandy in room twenty-eight at the Sound Barrier Motel across the freeway from the airport. One step out the door, I realized I was a man who forsook love, beauty, and a home, with thirty-six dollars to his name. I went back into the room and borrowed the last twenty in Sandy's purse. Then I walked to a restaurant down the road, bought the morning Free Press, ordered coffee, and dropped my eyes on the help wanted section of the classifieds.

On the second page I came across a help wanted ad that was framed with dollar signs. The ad read . . . If a thousand dollars a week sounds like heaven to you, call John or Evelyn Labelle at 313-755-4746. I called at nine. I was interviewed at eleven. Mr. Labelle lent me money for a rental car and a motel room. The next morning I was on the job.

Before I got down to the task at hand, John gave me an historical overview of the business. John and Evelyn had owned an Arthur Murray dance studion in Chicago. John said, "We got into the dance studio after our health care ministry in Santa Fe, New Mexico died from an acute case of extravagant gluttony. We changed our names, faces, and voices. Evelyn and I have always done business under assumed names. We've changed our names so many times it's difficult to remember what our names were when we got married. We opened the dance studio on the west side of Chicago eight years ago. We Tangoed. We Waltzed. We Twisted. We did the Macarena. We stepped on the wrong toes, and learned a new dance called the Hideaway. We came across this

opportunity and decided owning a cemetery was better than the alternative which would have been a premature burial for both of us. When the deal was done we renamed the cemetery Saint Jevelyn. Then we went to work on the makeover. First and foremost we installed a rainbow fountain and waterfall at the cemetery entrance. We believe the suggestion of the deceased dwelling somewhere over the rainbow is much more soothing to those loved ones left behind than being interned in the domain of moles. After all, everyone, even athiests, associate heaven with the sky. The sky represents boundless freedom. Being sealed in a casket that's sealed in a vault that's buried where the sun never shines is the equivalent of being sentenced to solitary confinement for eternity. The waterfall feature is an example of Evelyn's marketing genius. And, we've found that it gives us a definite advantage over our competitors. Our goal was to become America's first family friendly cemetery.

Once our calling card was in place we continued with the remodeling process. We installed a carousel of angels, two swing sets, two sand boxes, and a shooting gallery for the older kids. There are eight bar-b-que grills dotted around the property. Charcoal and fluid are available free of charge. To accommodate mourners and visitors who prefer fast snacks due to time constraints we purchased a food trailer. The food trailer sits at the center of the cemetery. Hot dogs, Italian sausage, burgers, chips, soft pretzels, soda, and soft serve ice cream are also available. Evelyn named the food trailer Father Time's Cafe. With Michigan's weather in mind we converted the groundskeepers garage into a pinball and video game arcade. We're considering adding burro rides next summer. No matter what the business is, when innovation dies so dies the business. Saint Jevelyn's is the only cemetery in North America that offers a family reunion package. The Afterglow package includes discounts on lodging, catering, and car rentals. We've also partnered with the Seven Eleven across the road to provide beer and wine at wholesale costs. We've also contacted people in the film industry, and Saint Jevelyn's is now available for on location filming. Our corporate philosophy and marketing strategy is expressed in this simple sentence that fully illuminates Evelyn's genius. "Let Saint Jevelyn's Put The Morning In Your Mourning And The Fun In Your Funeral."

My job was easy. Call the affluent and the semi affluent. Remind them that regardless of health, age, and income, death is a most

unpredictable rogue. Present and reinforce the wisdom of being prepared. Present the purchase of cemetery property as a real estate investment that appreciates in value over time. Offer to have the principles last will and testament drawn up at no cost or obligation by one of Saint Jevelyn's attorneys . . . 'At your convenience and in the comfort of your living room.' Then set up an appointment

date and time. All five of the attorneys who represented Saint Jevelyn's Cemetery were bourbon cooled high pressure salesmen with PHD's in graft and grift from the University of Whitewash. For setting the appointments and getting the shark in the pool I was paid fifteen percent of the sale. I didn't make a thousand dollars a week, but I made more than enough to live what I considered the high life. Unfortunately, the grift virus was running rampant through the office, and I caught it that November. When the phone company sent the December bill, that bill included more than seventeen-hundred dollars in long distance calls to a number in Texarkana, Texas.

The last day I worked, Saint John and Saint Evelyn told me they wanted to speak to me after lunch. I ate a patty melt and a side of covered and smothered hash browns that day

at a Waffle House an hour after the plane landed in Texarkana. I walked out on the bill and bummed a quarter from a guy in a three piece black Armani suit who resembled John.

Then I called Lucy.
"Where are you?" she asked.
"At the airport."
"What airport?"
"Texarkana."
"Are you going to stay."
"If you want me to, yes."
"For how long?"
"If you're good with it Lucy, until death do us part."

president's day
the truth has nothing
to do with it

CREDIT AT BIG BOB'S MOTORS NO MONEY DOWN

on a Sunday morning in America

everything you need to know

is written on a clear blue sky

Lost In Time

I don't recognize this country anymore. Our son David was expelled from school two weeks before graduation day for drinking a Bud in the school parking lot during a dance. When Mr. Delman caught Cheryl Preston and me smoking Thai Stick under the goal posts after we skipped his fifth hour biology class in April of 1971, he asked us if he could buy what we had left.

new years morning
alka seltzer bubbles burst
in a champagne flute

Dialect

People from Detroit pluck their words with their fingers from the white heat of a blue flame they tie their sentences together with barbed wire and bind their paragraphs with garrots and trip wires and people from Detroit speak in the tongues of industrial disintegration and tongues of integration and people from Detroit hum in the tongues of wilted roses and whisper in the tongues of stinging wasps and sing in the tongues of velvet and shattered bone and you should read this twice and listen closely because in and among the people from Detroit this is the language of love.

urban renewal
there are no houses left
on Easy Street

The Land Of Opportunity

There were seven of us. All boys. I was the youngest by six years. We grew up on a cattle ranch near Winner, South Dakota. I loved my brothers and my brothers loved me but . . . . My brothers played played rough. Being the youngest, I was the calf they roped, the bronc they busted, they bull they poked and prodded, the outlaw they lassoed, and the Indian they shot. The cowboy dream was my nightmare. Our parents weren't exactly Roy Rodgers and Dale Evans. They were though ranchers who loved movie cameras. They shot hours of eight millimeter cowboy noir. My brother Jack tied me to the mailbox post and put a bucket of oats at my feet. Mom and dad got it on film. My brother Dan tied a clothes line noose around my neck. Mom and dad showed that movie to all of our relatives from out of town. My brother Tom made me drink from the horse trough. Dad showed that to all of his poker pardners. As cruel as it all may seem I don't see it that way because that's exactly where the idea and inspiration originated.

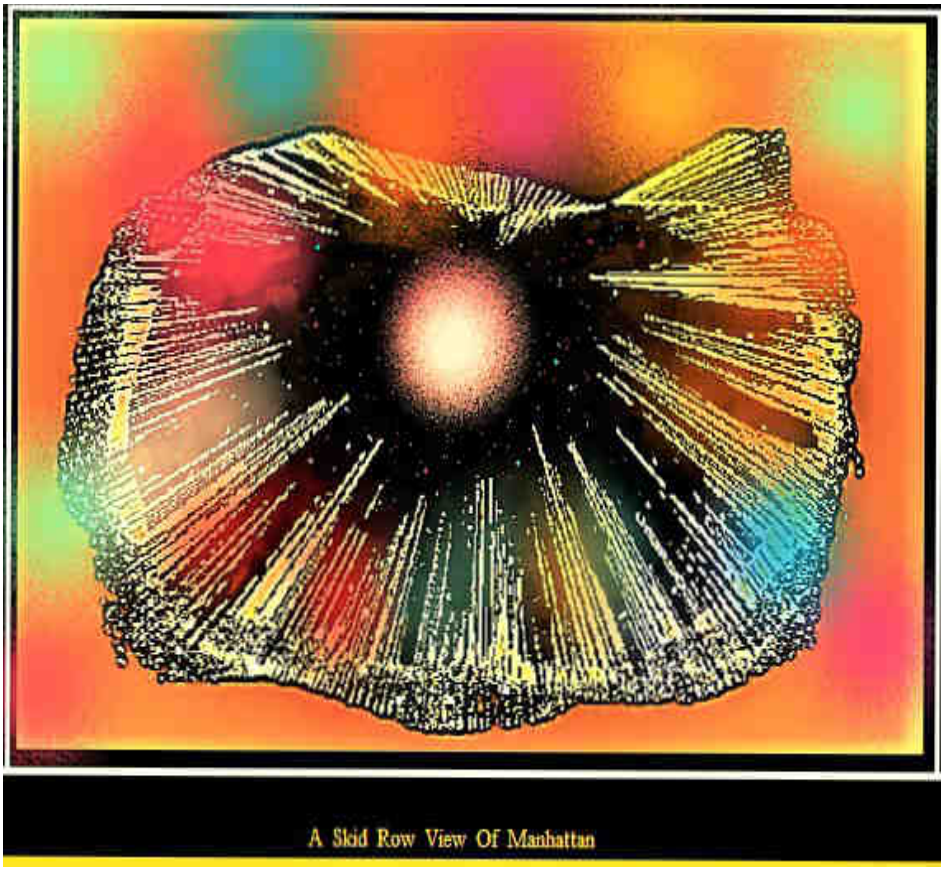
Seven boys makes for a very crowded house . We lived in a land of empty space but there wasn't any space inside of our house. When I graduated from Winner High, I wanted to travel. I wanted to see if there really was a Mississippi River. I wanted visual prrof that there was an Empire State Building. I wanted to know if there was a world beyond the borders of Tripp County South Dakota. I was determined to break away from the hitching post everybody in that dust faded corner of nowhere was tethered to. When the carnival set up for the annual Fourth Of July Festival at the 4-H Fairgrounds, I found the manager
and showed him what i had.

My act was the flip side of the strongest man on Earth. I billed myself as Charles Atrophy, The Weakest Man In The Universe. A teaspoon of dry corn flakes buckled my knees. Soggy Rice Krispies caused me to collapse. The Trix Rabbit and Captain Crunch kicked my ass blindfolded. The Lucky Charms Leprechuan knocked me out at the one minute mark of the first round. Next, the oat box Quaker walked in. He laughed and said, 'I'm a four-hundred year old pacifist.' He extended his arm to shake my hand. We shook. The oat box Quaker shouted, 'I can't

stand dead fish handshakes.' He slapped my face. I fell down. I whimpered. The Quaker looked down at me. Then he kicked dirt in my face. As the Quaker walked out laughing, a Keebler Elf walked in and beat the fudge out of me with his hands tied behind his back. When the manager stopped laughing he said, 'You're a genius kid. Guess what, if you want to run away with the carnival the carnival would love to have you.'

I've traveled all around this great country and this big wide world. I still love what I do. And I love my brothers and my parents more than ever for pushing me out of Winner a winner.

Halloween Party
the scarecrow arrives
in an Ed Markowski mask



Off The Clock

I work on the tenth floor at St. Michael's Mercy Hospital. Yesterday I'm in the elevator. I've got three minutes to work with. If the elevator flies express I'll be on time. If it doesn't, I'll be late. I've got a bum left knee. I wobble through this world with a four pronged cane, and the handicapped parking spaces are more than a quarter mile from my office. The sensation in my left knee is that of an accordion that's being played by Chuck Berry. Compressed from the top and bottom with each down step. Pulled apart rapidly with each up step. But, that's no excuse. My department manager told me two days ago that one more point for being late will put me one half point shy of termination.

The elevator door is halfway closed when I hear a voice adorned with desparation call out, "Hold it please!." I hit the open button. A thick man in a dark blue business suit steps in. "Thank you. Twelve please," the man says. He looks at my Staff Psychologist identification badge. His blue eyes pick and sniff the red American Beauty roses embroidered on the yoke of my cowboy shirt. His eyes drop past my white t-shirt. They fall to my blue jeans, then they free fall to the denim deck shoes that are fastened to my feet with sparkling red, white, and blue laces. I can feel the weight of the man's eyes on my body. The elevator car mimics both the dimensions and ambiance of a boxing ring.

"Did I pass inspection," I ask. The man smiles. The man says, "I love the patriotic theme. It's always great to meet a man of compassion who's not afraid to express the love he also has for his country. His right hand rises above his alligator belt and pauses in mid air to meet mine. "Sir, the clothes and colors I'm wearing have nothing to do with patriotism or love. They're not a political statement. The colors compliment each other in the truest sense of the word. In combination, be it red, blue, and white, white, blue, and red, or blue, red, and white, the colors are perfectly compatible. If anything, my clothes and their colors are of a fashion and style that's neither fashionable or in style now, and may never be fashionable or in style again."
The man's right hand continues to rise until it slides through his thin blonde hair. He points at the miniature American flag tacked to his red

silk tie. "You're wearing America's colors. I assumed you were expressing your patriotism. I see your clothes as a reflection of our flag, and I'm proud of that," the man says.

"Sir, this hospital pays me very well to listen to people and to lead them out of whatever maze of fog they're wandering through. I'm off the clock right now, but out of my deep concern and compassion I'm going to give you a free counseling session. Thanks to some culture cleansing fuck ups in Washington DC two years after the Civil War, our history books have omitted the fact that Betsy Ross studied fashion design under Emile Pingat at the Ile Institut Francais de la Mode in Paris. When she was fifty and came back to America she was the pinnacle and paradigm of American fashion design until her death. That's why she got the flag job. And, Betsy Ross also designed Lady Liberty's robe." Confusion colors the man's eyes. Silence spills from his open mouth. He leads with his chin. The overhead lights illuminate his glass jaw. I throw the knockout punch, " Sir, once you realize that flags are billboards for the blind, and blinders for the sighted, your psychosis will resolve." His eyes close. His knees turn to rubber. Chimes chime. An automated voice says, "Tenth floor." I step out, and walk to my corner.

lightning
everywhere the lights
go out

Ed Markowski
Auburn Hills, Michigan
26 / 7 / 2019

Homage To Hunter Thompson

On January 20, 2017 at 12:00 pm the citizens of the world bid farewell to the Obama Nation and bore witness to the dawn of America's Abomination. In New York Harbor the inscription was amended to read . . . Give me your tired your poor your huddled masses yearning to breath fear when we arrived a one-hundred and ten story hotel and casino constructed entirely of Mount Rushmore granite had erased the faces by law dictionaries phone books news papers, magazines short stories bibles encyclopedias letters coupons and conversations could no longer exceed two-hundred and eighty characters regardless of faith race denomination and purpose kneeling on Sundays became a federal crime on July 16, 2018 in honor of the president millions of men women boys and girls had their hair dyed pale orange from Moscow to Minsk his last assault on Obama's legacy was the release of a previously classified National Inquirer that proved Hillary Clinton was the mastermind responsible for the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01 on the day the documents were released Osama Bin Laden was granted a full presidential pardon by executive order Betsy DeVos was finally credited in American History books as the creator of our star mangled banner two-hundred and forty-two years after the fact all of the surviving American service men who had been taken prisoner while serving in Vietnam were convicted of impersonating war heroes and deported to Hanoi on the promise of bringing good jobs back to America his electoral college victory immediately and exponentially expanded the language employment opportunities and self esteem of dunk tank clowns at every county fair in America from Tiny Tim's preschool to Harvard white boards now stand where black boards once stood in a joint statement from the White House Rose Garden the president flanked by Franklin Graham Jerry Falwell Junior Mark Burns and Pat Robertson declared all ten commandments antiquated and obsolete on July 27 2019 the Trump International Hotel added a new restaurant Little Rocket Man's Nuclear Bar B Que the restaurant's fare is described as ravenously scant radioactive and tortuously spicy the enemies of the American people were armed with ink pens typewriters pencils erasers white out notebooks paper clips sandals hope habanero peppers snow shoes Labatts Blue and the Stanley Cup from sea to shining sea the sunshine

sheen coating every seal's coat was pure crude from California's Coalinga Oil Fields regardless of grain every box of organic non gmo cereal by executive order will now be labeled and sold as Corn Fakes with one exception the food feds declared every burger on the McDonald's menu a super food being that exception the Big Mac was rewarded with the title of super super food in historical museums nation wide the truth was framed and hung as children were being confiscated kidnapped and caged on the southern border the name of that time honored tradition that teaches the rewards of an honest days work and the stewardship of their wages was changed from Allowance to Hush Money after he renamed Glad Bags Vlad Bags on Thanksgiving Day 2018 during a ceremony at Plymouth Rock he told the indigenous people of the Americas they'd better damn well thank the Pilgrims for teaching them how to grow corn after his presidential commission on the state of the family found that ninety-eight percent of confiscated children including infants and toddlers thrive and are much happier living in cyclone cages without their parents he signed an executive order that changed the name of the holiday to Martin Luther Day on the following Monday his sixteen character memoir Profiles In Sewage filled America's adult book stores when the nations prison term ended in addition to the real estate holdings hotels and squeaky clean billions the ex-president owned and controlled the largest flock of fanged sheep on Earth his legacy was framed by this question George Washington was America's first President, who was America's first Dicktweeter? and through the years following his freezing reign historians political scientists and the gilded minds of Washington's think tanks used one word to describe his presidency

COVFEFE . . .

June heat
the artist's sketch
of the rapists face

Written At The House
On Hadley Road
10/3/2018 – 10/14/2018

Illustrations by Ed Markowski

Bio - Ed Markowski lives and writes in Auburn Hills, Michigan.

Citations

Previously Published Haibun

Luck - Simply Haiku - Robert Wilson Editor

Dear Prudence - One Hundred Gourds - Ray Rasmussen Editor

Previously Published Haiku

After The Argument - Poetry Dispatch - Norbert Bly Editor

Valentine's Day - Bottle Rockets - Stanford Forester - Editor

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