



# Unhallowed Antiphons

new & selected poems 2023-2026

andreas gripp

# Unhallowed Antiphons

Newest books available by the same author:

Yada Yada Kismet

The Earth is Painted War

Delirium Lullaby

Last of the Bons Vivants

Trigger Happy Warnings

Satanic Canticles

Give Us This Day

# Unhallowed Antiphons

new & selected poems 2023-2026

Andreas Gripp

Beliveau Books

*Unhallowed Antiphons*

©2026 Andreas Connel-Gripp

Digital Edition

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, including via AI, with the exception of excerpts for the purpose of literary review, without the expressed permission of the publisher.

Published by Beliveau Books, Essex County

**Email:** [beliveaubooks@gmail.com](mailto:beliveaubooks@gmail.com)

**Author Email:** [andreasgripp@gmail.com](mailto:andreasgripp@gmail.com)

**Author Website:**

[andreasgripp.wixsite.com/andreasgripp](https://andreasgripp.wixsite.com/andreasgripp)

Text font is Palatino Linotype 12pt.

Front Cover Photo: RF Image

End Page Photo: RF Image

Proofreader: Carrie Lee Connel

Printed in Canada by Lulu Press

Dépôt Légal / Legal Deposit: Bibliothèque et Archives Canada / Library and Archives Canada, 2026

ISBN 978-1-927734-70-4

## POEMS

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| Thumbs Down               | 1  |
| Spoken Word               | 4  |
| Achilles                  | 7  |
| Wild Bill McKeen          | 10 |
| The Mona Fucking Lisa     | 14 |
| “me too”                  | 18 |
| Juxtapositions            | 20 |
| Mahavira                  | 22 |
| The Puffin                | 26 |
| Ratios                    | 30 |
| Hair Care by Pierre       | 33 |
| On “Less is More”         | 36 |
| Magic                     | 38 |
| After the Eclipse         | 40 |
| Milestones                | 44 |
| Victor                    | 47 |
| Monday, 7am               | 50 |
| Pockets                   | 54 |
| “google it”               | 57 |
| The Ring                  | 60 |
| Elegy for Hannah Brockman | 63 |
| Language Lessons          | 66 |
| Les Royalistes            | 68 |
| Rumours                   | 71 |
| Chasing Leopold           | 74 |
| Silenzio                  | 77 |
| The Marionette            | 80 |
| Yesterday                 | 82 |

## POEMS, continued

|                                                              |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Visiting My Mother at St. Leo's Cemetery                     | 85  |
| The Fall of the Nature Poet                                  | 88  |
| Collateral Damage                                            | 90  |
| Par Quatre                                                   | 91  |
| <i>There's Something Wrong with Morgan</i>                   | 94  |
| Mining the Higgs Boson,<br>or Overstating Yesterday          | 97  |
| For the doctor who took me out<br>of my mother's womb        | 100 |
| The Speed Reader,<br>or Grieving Quasimodo                   | 103 |
| The Kippah                                                   | 106 |
| Casablanca, or Our Teflon is a Liar                          | 110 |
| Chester                                                      | 113 |
| The Philodendron                                             | 116 |
| Bliss                                                        | 118 |
| The Insult                                                   | 120 |
| Mystery, or Ignoring the Optician                            | 122 |
| This <i>hasn't</i> been written by AI                        | 124 |
| The Burden                                                   | 126 |
| The Constitutional                                           | 128 |
| Rewriting Androcles, or<br>The Conversion of Theodore Nugent | 130 |
| Smut                                                         | 133 |
| The Wrath of Yo-Yo Ma                                        | 136 |
| Spite at the Speed of Light                                  | 138 |
| Auld Lang Syne                                               | 141 |
| To Be Read                                                   | 144 |

POEMS, continued

|                                                 |     |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Why No One Ever Mistook Me<br>for Stevie Wonder | 146 |
| Musings                                         | 149 |
| Conviction                                      | 152 |
| Nicki Nicki                                     | 155 |
| The Beholder                                    | 158 |
| The Blade                                       | 160 |
| Signs & Wonders                                 | 164 |
| Oblivion,<br>or The Stratum of Holly McGuinty   | 166 |
| The Wino                                        | 170 |
| Endurance                                       | 173 |
| Sorry I Can't Join You for Shinny               | 176 |
| Sharing the Carapace                            | 180 |
| The Prognosis                                   | 182 |
| On My Decision to Retire as a Poet              | 185 |
| <del>Haiku</del>                                | 188 |
| Tuesday Night Nachos                            | 190 |
| Paradigms                                       | 192 |
| Chemo                                           | 195 |
| Mysteries                                       | 198 |

*this book is for Carrie*

these poems were written from February '23  
through February '26



## Thumbs Down

I blame *everything*  
on our thumbs. Their  
cursèd opposability;  
picturing how things  
would be  
if not for their relative  
acrobatics:

the trees all  
where they were  
if not for them; none to wield  
an axe, grip a barrelled  
pistol in the night,  
birth the drop of  
*Fat Man*  
in Japan.

We've been told this  
supposedly *elevates*  
our species above the rest—  
the way in which our  
thumb has touched the tips  
of every finger,  
the sign of *I'm OK*.

This stout & stunted digit  
is a narcissistic  
rebel, refusing to stand  
in line with all the others,  
the longer, slimmer *doigts*  
above its head —  
stuck in its lowly place  
upon our hand.

It gets an unduly  
amount of *credit* —  
for crafting our way  
to the sky, the moon,  
and one day to *Tau Ceti*.

I say it's not as clever  
as we've made it out to be —  
its lexicon rather  
scant — locked in *yes* or *no*;

while the index points our  
way; the pinky uplifts our  
class while sipping chai;

and although the middle  
likes to cuss, flip its phallic  
shaft into the air, you have to admit  
it's effective at revealing its  
message in every language;

and then the one that  
screams *commitment* —  
“sorry boys, I’m taken” —  
this bearer of gold & diamond,  
breaker of fervent hearts.

## Spoken Word

I definitely feel out of place,  
at this late-night poetry  
slam, over 30 years older  
than this crowd of teens and  
twenties  
who are speaking  
their bitter truth:

the fracture of relation-  
ships, the lines of intersection,  
narratives  
of racist taunts  
and kicks  
to the fucking head  
(from the anti-queer brigade),

and it's not that I can't relate—  
*faggot!* tossed my way  
from all the kids  
now grey with age, playing  
sudoku by the fire

but that's *another* shoddy  
poem I'll likely write—

for within this present moment  
Naomi has hit her stride,  
hooking me along  
with her inflection,  
familiar as it is,  
an echo of a hundred thousand  
poets who rarely glance  
upon a page,

or don a pair of glasses  
sliding down  
along their nose, one that's  
*burrowed* in a book  
these flashy vogues  
have yet to read,

and her eyes are seared in mine,  
perhaps wondering  
why I'm here,

so straight and pale a visage,

so Luddite  
without a phone,

that I've likely never heard of  
Twitch and TikTok,  
knowing that I'd be lost—  
especially in the latter,

where every word's a beat,  
every syllable  
*locked* in recollection,

where youth and fleeting beauty  
pirouette,  
in the shadow of a *bomb*  
that's failed to show—  
for generations—

of which poets  
abandoned birds and blooms  
to howl against its menace.

## Achilles

The name our  
friend has chosen  
for her mastiff  
is sublime.

We wait to hear  
the inevitable:  
*Achilles, heel!*

Almost *invulnerable*,  
were it not  
for a patch near its  
paw;

able to sniff  
out a cad,  
*any* boorish  
lout  
who makes a pass.

We envision  
a vivid  
scenario:

this slobbering  
pooch  
by her side,  
at the *Apollo's*  
*Pharmacy*,  
a box of Trojan  
love balloons—

stealthily snuck  
into her purse,  
the one she got  
on Etsy, with its  
*vintage*  
hair of horse,  
as if some  
*turnabout*:

hoping a heroic,  
Grecian Spartan

will ascend from  
*The Iliad*,

the copy she keeps  
by the fire,  
beside a dog-  
eared *Ancient Myths*,

with two *glasses*  
of Muscat Blanc—

one for *her*,

and one for a  
woman's best friend,  
its vicious mouth  
agape, a cave of tongue  
and teeth;

ready to *bite*  
on his arrival,  
sit *down*  
if she commands;

lick the spot  
below his calf  
as if to pity his  
single weakness.

## Wild Bill McKeen

This village  
through which we're  
driving is home  
to "Wild Bill McKeen"

and though we haven't  
a clue who he is—  
or was—  
his name is on  
a banner in the air,  
tied to a pair of  
streetlights

to make certain  
we'll never miss it.

The posted limit  
of speed is only  
30, and there's  
not a lot to look at  
so we defer to  
our conjectures  
as we crawl—

surmise  
he's a hockey  
player,  
spent his time  
in the *penalty* box,  
a master of slash  
and slew foot,  
told the refs to  
go fuck off,  
took a piss  
on the Lady Byng.

We then travel  
back in time,  
think he may have  
robbed a coach, rustled cattle,  
outdrew the county  
sheriff after starting  
a barroom brawl.

We think of synonyms  
for *wild*,  
saying his hair was  
endless, unruly,  
he'd grown a beard  
from chin to foot,

grunted like an ape,  
clutching a raw steak  
with savage hands—  
tearing off the  
pieces with his teeth.

In minutes  
we're back  
in the country, racing  
past the farms  
and grazing horses,  
say his rep  
was overblown—  
mere hyperbole,

from the folks  
who've led some  
pretty boring lives,

that Wild Bill McKeen  
took his steaming  
cup of coffee  
without cream,

once jaywalked  
across the road  
while it was raining,

returning a *book*  
overdue  
by a day,

never guessing  
he'd be immortal  
on a sign,

or better yet—  
in a poem,

by someone too lazy  
to google  
his claim to fame.

## The Mona Fucking Lisa

After a single session,  
I already regret my *sign-up*  
for this ekphrastic poetry  
course, cursing to you  
the assignment I was given:

*Mona Lisa, the fucking Mona  
Lisa, like that hasn't been done  
a gazillion times*

and yes, I won't be able to fake it,  
that everyone and their mailman  
knows her visage,  
are well-versed in da Vinci's flair,  
and their lofty expectations  
will be something I can't deliver.

You ask me what our poet friend  
was given, the one who always gets  
the lucky breaks, and I tell you the  
*Voice of Fire*,

three lines of blue-red-blue,  
vertically trite and prosaic,

say no one's ever heard of Barnett  
Newman because he sucks,

that I could have scrawled a sonnet  
on my kindergarten days,  
on a pair of simple colours,

how the Gallery  
had been fleeced in '89,

caught *up* in the avant-garde,

how 1.8 million  
could have gone to help the homeless,  
paid for their chalets  
and pedicures, covered  
the cost and tip  
for their tortellini  
Bolognese;

but as it is,  
I have to *sleuth* my way  
behind that Delphic smile,  
invent a tale of Giocondo,

that Leonardo  
tried to paint her  
minus mirth and maturation,  
in 1499,

when his subject began to sob  
from pent-up grief, reliving the death  
of her baby daughter,

his *Moaning Lisa* a work of art  
the Renaissance ignored  
(bathing in their beam  
of erudition), that even Machiavelli  
said *chin up, she needs a grin*;

that when the *time*  
arrived to try it all again,  
da Vinci made a jest,  
a side-splitter, that Lisa barely  
smirked at his ill-timed droll,

that he hadn't a *clue*  
how it felt  
to love and lose,

consumed as he was with  
innovation, invention,  
his maps and magnum opus,

failing to heed  
the red of blood and life,  
her blue, blue mood.

## **"me too"**

When I tell you *I love you*  
you answer "me too"

and perhaps I misconstrue,  
that you love *yourself*  
like the affirmations  
advise,

the ones we see on Instagram,  
that every *sprat* has  
churned them out,  
like a poetaster  
in a fast-food window,

where you pick up a side of  
"you're better off without him"  
plus some platitude on the rain  
to wash it down;

or maybe "me too" is a memory,  
in the (not so) recent past:

an abusive ex, a diddling dad,

the gymnastics coach who always  
held you snug, checked out your  
*ass* instead of your landing,  
after vaulting and parallel bars;

but then I've always read too  
*much* into your words,  
thinking there's some *story*  
below the surface,  
a recollection  
that encircles like a shark,  
that you're afloat  
in a punctured dinghy  
awaiting rescue,

by an aqua knight who rides  
the seven seas, one who sees  
a kraken where there's not,

thinks "right back at you,"  
"ditto kiddo"

is the beast from a thousand  
fathoms he's come hastily  
to slay.

## Juxtapositions

I pluck the *olives* from the  
salad and that makes it less than  
Greek. You ask me if they're green  
or black and I state  
it makes no difference.

I replace the blocks of feta  
and consider *German-Jew*.  
It's *been* an oxymoron  
since nineteen-thirty-three.  
I'll blend some smoky *Rauchkäse*  
with an aged *Gvina Levana*—

swap my baseball cap  
for a yamaka  
in *case* you take offense.

Now bring me beer from Bavaria  
and hot latkes from the slum.  
I'll gladly prove

what *cannot* go together  
is just a fallacy of  
thought:

A frown is a smile  
that's standing on its head.

Feet are a pair of hands  
which are unwilling to clasp  
in prayer.

Toes are very cognisant  
that fingers are more graceful—  
so they never stretch for sky.

Unable to grant any light of its *own*,  
the moon is but a mirror for the sun  
in which to worship its own reflection  
(and we thought that  
*Dorian Gray*  
was the one who's really vain).

What is *ugly*, anyway?  
Is it the absence of beauty  
or too much of it all at once?

## Mahavira

I've fallen in love  
with every animal  
in the world.

So much so  
I'm unable to do a thing  
around the house.

You ask me to clean  
the windows so they'll  
shine, and I say that  
spotlessness will harm  
the backyard birds,

the thud of *slam*  
and sudden death,  
that I'll be triggered  
by the sight of *feathers*,  
a blue jay's broken neck  
and fractured skull.

Our vacuum is an enemy  
of *ahimsa*,

that Sanskrit  
word for peace for every  
Jain, non-violence  
with every step; that I've studied  
Mahavira —

am convinced  
the spiders in our carpet  
smell of sentience;  
that to suck up their silky  
webs, their eggs and  
future offspring, would be  
nothing short of murder.

*Live and let live —*

in all those corners  
we never look at  
anyway.

I'd wash the supper  
dishes, dust the counter-  
tops, if it weren't for the  
microbes and the mites,  
that they've existed  
much longer than we have,

that to disregard their feelings  
due to stature  
is clearly sizeist—  
they're in a universe  
all their own

and we surely wouldn't like it  
if a colossus  
of cosmic proportions  
did the very same to us.

And the reason I refuse  
to cut the lawn? The mower is  
a guillotine on wheels,  
one that would make  
*Napoleon*  
shudder,

that the field mouse in the grass  
has done *nothing* to  
deserve this dreadful fate,  
while both of us  
will reap from lofty turf,

you with your toes  
in the soft of green,  
me with my feet  
upon the ottoman,  
cheering when the quarterback  
is sacked, by the defensive  
end who's never squashed  
a bug since he was born.

## The Puffin

Hear this:  
a puffin  
is not a baby  
*penguin*,  
despite my decades  
of thinking it so.

I cannot be  
angry  
at the puffin,  
its countenance  
of cute,  
its psychedelic  
beak,  
no matter how hard  
I try;

adoring its every  
sway  
from side-to-side,  
much like its  
fellow seabird,  
surprised by its  
capacity to fly,

confused by  
its being an  
imprint  
of Penguin Books,  
its children's line  
since 1941,

that they're clearly  
to blame  
for my ignorance—  
there in *A Little Princess*,

in the tales of  
Anne and Alice,

and especially  
*Call of the Wild*,

which, to my chagrin,  
contained no penguins  
at all—  
clueless I was  
on *where* they  
really lived,

thinking *perhaps*  
they were away  
when Jack London  
came to visit,

shopping for tuxedos,  
at the place the  
puffins do,  
who took to the air  
once suited —

while the penguins  
doubled back  
with their receipts,  
fuming at the  
snugness  
of their fit,

pouting like Pingu,  
crisp like Chilly Willy,

cursing their genetics,  
their ever-inability  
to soar,

retracing every  
step in single file;  
their long, bitter  
waddle  
in the snow.

## Ratios

There are 20 quadrillion  
ants upon the Earth,  
at least that's what the experts  
gauge, and there's two-and-a-half  
million for every human.

I don't find that comforting,  
that there's fifteen fucking zeroes  
after twenty,  
that I'm somehow  
responsible  
for 2,500,000 ants,  
feel unsure of what to do  
with that amount,

and if my neighbour were to die,  
do I care for twice as much?

*Ants can look after themselves,*  
you remind me, speaking of their  
diligence, the way they stick together,  
that their antennae relay messages  
much faster than our texts, adding  
they could conquer us anytime,

if they really wanted to,  
from their colonies around the house;  
that they're content  
to simply go about their business,  
hard-working communists  
that they are.

I feel the need to get away,  
where I'd forget about the ants,  
do some tourist kind of things,  
take in New York City in the fall,  
breathe the *crisp* of Brooklyn air,  
find all the varied places  
where *Seinfeld* had been set.

Seated behind your laptop,  
you declare there's  
over two million *rats*  
in NYC,

that it's not as bad  
as it sounds,  
say there's *four* of us  
for every *one* of them,

that we could saunter  
through Central Park,  
extol the spectrum  
of the leaves,  
*catch* some vintage jazz  
in Greenwich Village,

while we wonder if these  
vermin know the ratio,  
that it actually *falls*  
within our favour,

every time they migrate from  
the sewers, join us on the subway,  
risk our baited traps,

if that bite of smelly pizza's  
really worth it—

for them, for us,  
and the anxious Italian baker,

who never checks what's crawling  
around his feet.

## Hair Care by Pierre

I was finally  
compelled to cut  
my lengthy hair.  
Twirling it on my fork  
in spaghetti's place,  
staining it Ragu-Red;  
quaffing it with my  
wine, the peril of dangling  
strands;

unable to see the road  
whenever it flopped  
in front of my eyes—  
like a weary, shaggy  
dog that blocks my view—

of the movie I'm  
trying to watch: *Medusa*,  
rival of Rapunzel (in terms of *follicles*  
gone amok);  
locks which turn to snakes  
before it's over—  
causing havoc  
when it's lathered in  
*Selsun Blue*.

This Frenchman barber assures  
me I'll be able to see her *face*  
as clear as day,  
thrilled to make a house call,  
that 911 has an option now  
for bedhead gone berserk,  
its clump of grey  
expanding on the floor—  
that my cat's been *hissing*  
at, her back arched like the  
Triomphe de l'Étoile,  
mistaking it for  
another of her kind.

I'll offer up a eulogy  
at *St. Andreas*—  
the Orthodox Church  
of the Greeks  
just down the road,  
blubber I'll *miss*  
the way it lifted  
in the breeze,  
like some starlet in  
Côte d'Azur,

my tresses later waving  
like a scarf out on a line,  
gone blanc in its surrender  
to the wind; or a flag  
at the half of mast, mourning  
my *forfeiture*,

like a blinded  
Samson, betrayed —  
not by some Delilah  
but my need to be  
pragmatic; what's left  
beneath my *New York*  
*Giants* cap, snagged  
amid the incense  
in the nave;

glancing  
behind my unobstructed  
shoulder —  
as I walk the promenade,

fret the *breath* of old Perseus  
will hoist it off my head  
and out to sea.

## On "Less is More"

The best advice  
I've heard is *leave them*  
*wanting more.*  
As a result, my poems from  
here on in  
will be abrupt. Succinct.  
Truncated like a  
Tolstoy in haiku.

No more spiels  
of *generations.*  
Why my grandma  
made two collops  
of her wrists while  
slicing cabbage. How she  
always said *cahbahj*,  
mocked throughout the  
village as a dolt.

As for *how* that story  
closes, well, you'll have to guess  
it on your own. It seems  
no one has the time for  
that these days.

Whether  
or not I'll follow  
in her footprints.  
Maybe purchase a  
paring knife  
at the dollar store —  
a *five-and-dime*  
back then. Do what she did  
when she did. I mean,  
calling something  
by a funny name. Pronouncing  
it in blood,  
or *blewd* she used to grin  
when no one looked.

## Magic

The final line of this  
poem no longer  
exists. It was surely there  
for the taking, its fingernails  
clutching rock, at the  
top of a ragged *cliff*  
from which it hung,  
a *Wile E. Coyote*  
in the making.

*This* poem's closing line  
is a bar of *soap*  
in a steamy shower,  
pushed *away* from my  
hand by its slime,  
ready to trip me up  
the moment it falls,  
my eyes shut tightly  
from the suds of cheap  
shampoo, its lie of  
*no more tears.*

The final line of this  
poem is a cheeky *kid*  
playing hide-and-seek,  
concealed behind the  
curtains, waiting for me  
to open —

then disappear  
like David Blaine.

Dear darling of a  
brat, I promise not to  
harm, will only *borrow*  
what I need to make this  
grand, let you vanish  
in the air

once I've wrenched you  
from my hat  
by your fluffy ears.

## After the Eclipse

It's there, in our walk  
around the crescent,  
the sign a golden  
diamond:

*Blind*

*Child*

*Area*

Weathered from  
exposure,  
from the creep  
of rust and age.

It's been planted  
here so long  
this sightless *kid*  
must be grown-  
up;

so now we  
look around us  
left and right,

spy the houses  
and their trees;  
the veranda  
on which he sits —  
in the vivid  
imagination  
of our minds;

tinted Ray-Bans  
on his eyes,  
their black *opacity*;

in his lap  
an open book,  
the white of  
pimplly braille —

perhaps a 19<sup>th</sup>-  
century classic,

or the latest from  
Stephen King,  
subduing his depression,  
his lack of meaningful  
sex,

his hearing  
sharp as ever,  
as it was when he was  
six,  
right after he  
lost his sight,

when the footsteps  
of the aphids  
piqued his ears,  
the wings of moths  
to follow, even spiders  
threading webs;

and now,  
if he could sense us:  
the heaving  
of our breath, the thump  
of our assumptions,  
bursting  
through our chests—

like the roar of an  
atom bomb—

the flash of which  
would blind us  
unless we looked  
the other way,

as we'll do in just  
a moment,  
when we think we've  
seen him waving  
from a porch,

the one on which  
he rocks, wistfully;  
its creak that  
lets us know  
we have encroached.

## Milestones

I missed my car's odometer  
hitting the 100,000 mark,  
despite my awareness  
it was coming, that at 99,999  
it was just a quick *jaunt*  
to the grocer's,

that I'd happily watch it roll,  
purchase a bottle of *Dom Pérignon*,  
toast my *Chevrolet's* achievement.

But then I got distracted by  
a woman and her dog,  
how sexy she looked  
as she walked, wondering  
if she was single,  
if the calico kept her up  
with its incessant, midnight  
bark.

By the time I remembered to  
check, the number read  
100,001 —

and I cursed that damned diversion,  
swear it could take me *years*  
to reach two hundred  
thousand Ks,

that I'd have to drive  
across the continent, say *fuck*  
the price of gas,

that my eyes will lock obsessively  
on the dashboard,  
in the hours I'm getting close,

that I'll disregard the safety  
of other drivers, pedestrians,  
the moment I *approach*  
that final zero, creeping at a  
turtle's vexing pace  
in NYC,

*ignoring* the crown of the Chrysler,  
its delightful Art Deco,  
the look of Lady Liberty  
from the road along  
the Hudson,

or if you find me in LA, that  
*Hollywood* will fail  
to get a glance,

that I'll never know how *right*  
the Beach Boys were,  
about *California Girls*,

never daring to peek  
at their aesthetics,  
lest a second landmark moment  
fall to waste,

and I'm mapping out another  
winding trek,  
through the blandest fields  
imagined,

only risking that a  
scarecrow  
or a farmer's lovely daughter  
will snatch my gaze.

## Victor

Our friend prefers Victor  
to Vic. He has no patience  
for those too lazy  
to include the second syllable.

*What's the big deal?* he hears,  
from Steve  
not Steven, Dave not David,  
Mike not Michael.

His parents  
stayed awake  
throughout the night,  
just days before he was born,  
chose *Victor* over 100,000  
others, that they declined to  
save some dollars  
on the engraving of his bracelet,  
never falling to truncation,

that *Vic*  
was nowhere to be spoken,  
from junior kindergarten  
to MBA,

birthday gifts unopened  
if a short-form had been  
scrawled,

saying  
it wasn't him,  
that he refused to wear a lanyard  
pre-scribed with Sharpie black,  
by someone who assumed  
it didn't matter,

and he won't check-in  
to the hospital  
on point of death  
if they get it wrong,

swearing  
the carver of his tombstone  
had better etch-in all  
six characters,

just a single letter shy of  
seventh heaven —

the luck of the dice,  
a wonder of the world,

that he really doesn't  
need to add a y,  
knowing to him will go  
the spoils either way.

## Monday, 7am

You greet me with  
*Morning*, never  
*Good Morning*—  
like you did when  
hearts were younger.

*Morning* will rise  
from horizons, like an inmate  
from a metal bed,  
nothing to cushion  
his nightmares—  
sentenced to relive  
*a life*  
that isn't a life—

the cursing, the welts,  
the bruises;  
the slop passed off  
as food;

the absence of  
*privacy*,  
when one needs it the  
very most,

gone with a swirl  
& gurgle.

*Good Morning*  
is harkened by  
glows, the lilt  
from a lark  
at dawn, the gradual  
lift of the light,  
each moment  
far brighter  
than the last.

*Morning* is stating  
the obvious,  
the drudge of a  
turtle-drive,  
the blaring of  
horns at red,  
a finger in the *air*

from the car  
that will pass you  
on the right.

It's the demand  
from your boss  
to get cracking,  
the indigestion  
from the eggs—expired,  
the coffee from *McDonald's*  
too acidic,  
the leaving of  
your kitchen  
without a kiss.

*Good Morning*  
is the merge  
of ardent lips,

the ecstasy  
of a lingering  
hug,

a taste  
from the dreams  
before,

the confession  
of a love  
that never wearies,  
never reaches  
for a cup

until the curtains  
have been opened  
and you stand  
in gaping awe  
at what's to come.

## Pockets

*I've got one hand in my pocket  
and the other one is playin' a piano*

— Alanis Morissette

I can never have enough pockets.  
I've bought a dozen cargo pants  
for the multifarious pockets  
that they boast. No other kinds will do.

I need a pocket for my keys.  
I need a pocket for my wallet.  
I need a pocket for my covid mask  
and ones for the notes I jot—  
with a selection of ballpoint pens.

I realize I've embarrassed you on dates—  
your slacks without a ripple  
while mine are hugely bulged,  
*sagging* from added weight:  
my plums and water bottle,  
my phone and cigarettes,  
the pair of Ralph Lauren—  
hoping the lenses aren't scratched  
by the deodorant I carry just in case.

I bring a bar of Dove, a folded facecloth  
with me when we're at the shopping  
mall—their bathrooms are notorious  
for their running-out-of-soap,  
for their dryers on the fritz,  
that hygiene's more important  
than my wearing some haute couture.

And I've ketchup when we need it—  
the food court cutting costs,  
too cheap to include  
a packet with our fries.

I want *pockets* within my pockets—  
ones that securely snug my  
*Fisherman's Friend*,  
knowing I can't afford  
to drop them on the floor, how germy  
that would be, though I have some  
*sanitizer* with me if it happens.

You tell me I should get a better system,  
like you with your nylon purse,  
that women  
are a walking *pharmacy*,

have ten times more to carry  
than us males, have foregone the many  
pockets since the Holocene began,  
knowing *one* was a pain in the ass:

for the desert kangaroo  
with precious lading,  
the knackering baby within,  
hopping along the outback  
without a means to ease her burden.

**“google it”**

When you asked me for  
the best Italian bistro  
in this city, I answered  
*google it.*

That day on the beach,  
as you peered into the  
murk of knee-deep  
water, you questioned if it  
was *safe* to take a swim,  
and I responded *google*  
*it.*

Dalini's had a slew of  
great reviews—its ambience,  
its al dente and  
pinot noir, its well-earned  
Michelin stars;

while the lake  
had tested positive  
for bacteria, the kind  
that makes you sick,  
and I was relieved to  
stop our plunge  
in a matter of moments,

singing praises  
for the county's  
daily testing  
regimen.

I reply to your  
every question  
with *google it*.  
There is nearly nothing  
that the search  
cannot answer —  
and yes, I imagine  
you think me *lazy*,  
*terse*, that my lexicon  
is void  
of romantic words.

But when you ask me  
if I love you, I say *google*  
the centipede,  
how it never  
runs out of  
legs,

*google* the single  
polar bear on ice,  
never bearing to leave it  
until the final  
floe is melted,

and please—*google* the man  
in Uzbekistan,  
becoming a widower  
at 21;

never remarried,  
never missed a daily  
graveside visit,  
and when he turned  
one hundred and one,  
worried the world  
would run out of flowers  
before his final, doleful  
kiss upon her name.

## The Ring

You don't really  
need to take a  
vow *for better*.  
Only just *for worse*.

No one has to give  
an oath *for richer* —  
the jet skis, cordon bleu;  
that house on the Riviera;  
*champagne* on your morning  
Oatie-O's.

It's *the poorer*  
that entices you to  
leave; upon that  
shitty futon full of fleas,  
your stomach all a-  
rumble from that slice  
from Quickie-Mart,  
knowing it *spun* all after-  
noon beneath the lamp,  
waving to the wieners  
which you'll down for lunch  
next day.

*In health* you'll leap &  
run, rolling in the leaves  
with your beloved,  
in the gold of an Autumn  
day.

*In sickness*  
you will think it's time  
to flee, hop onto  
the red-eye to Québec,  
dream of some garçon  
or mademoiselle,  
thunder under the  
covers, know nothing of pain &  
meds;

but temptation is  
a *fleeting* thing, doesn't stick  
around like love & promise;

and you'll slump by the  
hospital bed, pray the  
flatline starts to bump,

hold her trembling hand—  
like you did that  
distant day—remove  
her wedding band,  
note the blanch  
amid the tan,  
place it on *again*  
in the hope she'll stay.

## Elegy for Hannah Brockman

On the day of your  
Bat Mitzvah, you twirled  
beneath the snow,  
your unpierced tongue  
extending

like an ophidian  
from a cleft, trans-  
muted from a staff,

tasting the sacred  
nectar  
of the sky, as if a Levite  
under manna;

knowing *cold* can  
speak of love as  
well as warmth,  
when the flakes will  
plunge together  
by the trillions,  
*parachute*  
out the nimbus—

vowing to drape  
your spirit like  
a quilt; yet  
not so flushed  
they'd fall as limpid  
rain; trickling

like a creek from out your  
eye, spilling in the  
dirge of human mourning,

then freezing like the  
wax along the sides of  
Shabbat candles—  
or maybe they were  
Seder—when the light  
can grieve no more,  
when the smell of  
rose & lily  
comes and goes,  
petals fastened tightly  
in the dusk,

fearing  
they'll be pried on  
blessèd ground,

once the footfall  
of the night  
has shed its shoes.

## Language Lessons

You muttered under  
your breath I'm *stupido*,  
as though I'm too dumb  
to know what it means.

While I grew up in *Little  
Italy*, you say I'm being  
fallacious: the word's in the English-  
Zimbabwean Phrasebook  
that you tossed in the  
Goodwill hamper, citing  
my fear of flying, the native  
Gaboon Vipers;

that it's clearly  
a *compliment*—synonymous  
with a learned *genius*,  
sketching rockets to the  
spheres; one who solves the  
mystery of Holmes and pi—  
to the *octillionth*  
decimal—saying I was right  
this entire time about  
Colonel Mustard,

you're my  
Watson on the side,  
in awe of the way I've filled  
the *pepper* shaker; in spite of  
the crafted S  
along its holes,

that the folks at Royal  
Doulton got it wrong,  
that your eggs have never  
been so *delectable*;  
and the specks  
of black like cinders? They  
bring out  
their sunny side,

help you purge  
the sneeze whose time has  
come, as loud as Mama  
Leone's, whose roof  
I swore had launched  
up to the cosmos  
long ago.

## Les Royalistes

This website I've  
discovered is  
vastly sophisticated.

It's not imploring  
me to accept  
intrusive *cookies*—rather,  
*crème brûlée*—  
its outward, sugared  
sheen, in touch with  
its inner pudding.

Oatmeal chocolate-  
chip wanted to know my  
every going; who I'm  
voting for; whether I've  
an *innie* or an *outie*.

The *crème brûlée*  
inquires if I've ever  
studied Chaucer;  
my favourite *Athenaeum*;  
what I think of multiverse.

Cookies are  
moiety at best;  
a crumbling,  
half-baked Mob, threatening  
to *restrict*—unless I  
acquiesce.

It's the kid whose fist  
is clenched, demanding  
your every quarter, snags  
your Oreos, licks their  
pearly icing—with a sneer  
will hand them back.

Crème brûlée? It's always  
philanthropic;  
offers *seconds* with  
a smile; bathes your  
wanting glossa  
in *ecstasy*.

And I'll give it  
my very soul—without  
a blink of hesitation,

capitulate every thought  
I've ever had regarding  
sex: call it *reproduction*,  
*the knowledge of*  
*physical love*,

wondering if it's time  
I reappraise  
the *monarchy* —  
its carpet of Bordeaux,  
like a tongue in flushed  
surrender;  
its crown of golden  
brown, crisp yet supple  
to the touch.

## Rumours

These juicy *pineapple*  
*tidbits*  
are up to speed  
with the latest gossip

or so I quip,  
as we divvy  
them up  
in bowls,  
one for you

and one for my  
idiot self—

remarking  
I've heard  
the *pears* are splitting up,  
that one was caught  
in a morning  
tryst with a fig;

while cerise  
did *ooh-la-la*  
with some Auckland  
kiwi rogue.

And the coconut  
from Manila?  
It ran *off*  
with the melon's  
daughter, mixing  
its *milk*

with the seeds  
we always  
spit *out*,  
like the *crétin*  
from the streets  
of Toulouse,  
who taught the  
bona fide way  
to *cracher*,

and that *pineapple*  
in French  
is *ananas*,  
confused  
with a tropical  
lech,

the one that's  
sheathed  
in yellow, boasting  
of the length of  
his sweet everything.

## Chasing Leopold

The poet  
you aspire to be  
is forever a step ahead.

There he is, *Bardy*  
*McBardface*, lodging his  
bloody ensign  
in the summit of  
Olympus Mons; Monarch  
of the Martians, just seconds  
after your scale of Everest.

He'll humble-brag he's in  
*The Paris Review*,  
ask you to blurb his 7<sup>th</sup>  
*Selected Works*.

He'll upstage your  
latest broadside, counter your  
simple text with  
piping bells, 3-D  
animatronics, allow  
quadruple space  
for his autograph.

*Eat my solar dust!* he'll tease  
as he jets off yet  
again, nya-nya-  
nya-nyaing like the kid who  
seized the chair at the  
front of the class, in the glint  
before you could, smirking  
at your failure in the rear.

He'll ask your girl  
to rumba  
while you squat to lift  
galoshes; smack a homer  
off your screwball which will  
dither at the plate—  
in the spark of a *Big Bang*  
breath.

He's the match  
to your dripping candle,  
the light to your cigarette;  
the smoke from which  
arises while you cough  
like a barking seal,  
always in the shadow  
of his wreath.

He'll be the inferno  
in the hilltops—he's set  
& come to quench—  
the fireman to your hose,  
the shirtless, August pin-up—  
while you wait until December  
in your portly Santa suit.

He'll come up with that killer  
close—his footprints in the sand  
that carry you, leave you in the  
path so gravely worn, while he veers  
to make the difference  
you never do;

the star of every *Norton*,  
fondled by jeune femme,  
who shunned  
your gravitas, your fucked-  
up suicide poem in  
eleventh grade.

## Silenzio

The g in Paglioni  
is apparently  
silent,

with the i  
the sound of e  
(robbing it of  
a kingly lion's  
mane),

while the e itself  
is long and clearly  
Italian,

though *we'd* have  
guessed it simply  
by the décor,

the bottles of Cagnulari  
on the wall,  
the scent of cheese lasagna  
in the air —  
but this *isn't*  
consequential,  
it's not a *Yelp*  
review,

it's all about  
the g  
and its refusal  
to hold its weight,

its obsession  
with its stealth,  
its channelling  
Marcel Marceau,

or like the cat  
of Cary Grant,  
scaling the many  
roofs

*To Catch a Thief,*

that it should be  
*rooves* instead of  
roofs, like hooves  
and a single hoof,  
that the horse  
has got it right  
despite its *neigh*,

the shyness  
that comes and  
goes  
inside our alphabet's  
seventh letter,

hooking us *along*  
either way—

soundless as a gnat,  
roaring with the gusto  
of a god.

## The Marionette

You're the shadow  
on the floor  
who's told to dance.  
The trot from an  
orange fox, willing to  
play the hunt.  
The hounds all  
bark at once. A bullet  
to the ether  
ever-eclipses *on your mark*.

You always asked  
*how far* when told to leap.  
Your jump beyond the sand.  
A star of fieldless tracks.  
An icon made of wax —  
there upon the podium,  
your lanyard shining gold.

If you think this poem's  
on sport then guess again.  
This has nothing to  
do with puppets.

Or hands  
that lift in flame  
a tethered string.

There's a lifeless, vestal  
candle on the ceiling. Looking  
like stalactite in a cave.  
The matches burned  
themselves in *sacrifice*.  
It had no place *else* to weep.

To illumine is to suffer.  
This has nothing to do  
with light.

## Yesterday

*All your money  
won't another minute  
buy.*

*Dust in the wind.  
All we are is  
dust in the wind.*

—Kansas

We never should have  
deemed ourselves as dust.  
Quenching rain, perchance.

And never in the  
wind —  
but the benignity  
of breeze.

I've *had* the chance to grasp  
that we are seed  
as well as bloom.

Gifted in a pistil  
from the flight of  
savvy wings.

Transpose  
our next tomorrow  
for today. Tell me how it  
differs. It's some-  
how *yesterday*.

No, not McCartney's  
rueing ode. This  
isn't '65.

But maybe it's  
conceivable.  
A *miracle* in mist.  
The blar from  
dampened eyes.

Perhaps I'm still that  
toddler  
in the garden —

the brush  
of moth  
beside me.  
The backyard  
soil

sieving  
through my fingers  
as a prayer;

pretending it is  
water  
& you thirst.

## Visiting My Mother at St. Leo's Cemetery

We discern the milky  
seeds  
of dying dandelions,  
afloat in  
mid-June zephyr,

and I tell you  
as a boy I saw them  
through my bedroom window,  
wondering how it snowed  
when it was sultry  
beneath the sun.  
It was only after that

when my mother  
spoke of *wishes*,  
I should run into the  
yard and pluck a stem,  
blow my breath  
in yearning, seeing  
what might come true.

I asked her if  
this weed was *King*  
*of Flowers*,

if our cat  
was a distant cousin,  
if a wish was  
better than a prayer  
(the latter gone unanswered  
in her days of sick & blood);

if it mattered  
if my eyes were  
closed or open;  
and if I peeked, was it  
critical if I witnessed  
where they landed, like  
bowing my head  
at grace, glancing at  
the others when I shouldn't—  
thanking their fickle God  
who'd take offense  
if He ever caught me,  
make me go to  
bed without my dinner,

my litanies  
unheeded as she passed,

drifting off my tongue,

useless as a cloud  
that gives no rain when it is  
begged, a winter-hearted  
genie in the wind.

## The Fall of the Nature Poet

and when her toddler  
lost his fingers in the  
shells, when the plumes  
arose like fungi—

in the grass, mushrooms  
dotted about the forest floor,  
their white intoxication—

made him drunk again,  
it took 13 stitches to dam  
her river wound. She says that  
she will leave him when—

the orange leaf  
inferno comes again,  
October's  
jutting limbs which say—

anorexia's a bitch, the doctor  
sighs, my jingle-  
jangle bones upon each step—

along the path, the spin  
of deciduous seed, *samaras*  
in the field guide, though  
we called them *helicopters*,  
whirling from the air as—

the sky had dropped its locusts,  
it was napalm that was next,  
watch the children *burning*  
while they flee the sun-smacked  
fields

once threshed, the earth is  
something lost; my rusted,  
forlorn sickle that is  
hanging from the shed,  
flaking in the snow.

I will write of flowers  
come the Spring

This Winter never ends:  
I cannot feel my fingers

*the fingers, the fingers*

## Collateral Damage

We're the collateral  
generation. Don't mind the dead.  
They have a habit  
of getting in the way.

*It's the terrorists  
we're after. Next time  
stay out of the  
line*—not of fire  
but of food. We vow that we'll  
be gone as soon as they.

Let's take  
an oath of blood. Burn  
our wrists with wax.  
Swear a pinky  
swear on bended knees.  
To *our* God—not to yours.  
Only the *lost* claim  
He's the same.

You're not among  
the lost, are you? Calling  
for your kitten in the chaff?

## Par Quatre

I hate KitKat bars.  
I could leave this poem at  
that, but then I'd get  
the infernal *why*?  
So I'll lay it on the table  
with its wrapper:

I loathe the corporate pressure  
I'm forced to *share*, with anyone  
else in the room, its *sanctimonious*  
fingers of four, unselfishly  
snapped for another. If you  
give me puppy eyes, know  
that it's the middle—  
lifted in the fury  
of my gaze.

There's no *space*  
in the KitKat logo. A single,  
melting pillar. It must have  
been TikTok's muse—  
and just mentioning  
it will birth it in my  
scrolls.

It's more wafer  
than deliquesce. Its brown  
I can never wipe off. If I wanted  
a bloody cookie, I would have  
*bought* a bloody cookie. Like the day  
in Hermie's Drugs, looking for  
oatmeal raisin  
in its rowdy cellophane.  
Spotting the *KitKat*  
while I reached. It added  
7 seconds  
to my jaunt.

A woman and her toddler  
began to stroll across the street  
a minute later, as I darted  
from the parking lot.  
They were creamed by a  
heedless driver while they did.  
I was the car *behind*—  
would have been *ahead*  
if not for Nestlé,  
stopping on a dime;

if I hadn't loved cats and  
kittens, since 1 or 2 years old,  
or been smitten by all things red;

if I hadn't *dillydallied*,  
pondered I'd have to split, divvy  
up the four when I got home,  
and goddamn it I hate  
KitKat. Its lie of satiation,  
of easy, painless math.

## *There's Something Wrong with Morgan*

they would say. Your parents  
could not concur on  
much at all, but on that  
they spoke as one.

When your father  
spat it out, his squint was from  
your velvety  
countenance.  
Once, he suggested  
that you strum  
an air guitar. *Your wrists are  
limp enough.* Bestowed a  
sky piano. *As gay as Elton  
John's.* Hoping you'd start a  
band up in the ether,  
get out of his  
fucking sight.

With mother it was worse.  
Catching you in your  
sibling's training bra.

*Curiosity*  
of a child, it was  
embarrassingly  
dismissed. A smack  
upside the head  
imprinted that.

You changed your name to  
Morgan. Folks pondered  
its necessity, being the spelling  
goes unchanged  
despite the gender.

*It's the shift*  
in its inflection you retorted,  
learning how to sway  
truncated hips. Our sunrise  
most sublime.

*Morgen*, if you'd stuck  
to your German roots.  
But you could hardly  
forgive the way  
they killed the Jews.

I told you it's  
identical  
in Yiddish. Anglicized  
from the Welsh  
you're *birthed in sea*.  
An air-kiss from the  
pursing of the waves.  
A sparkled, golden  
greeting from our star.  
*Shines on saint & sinner*  
you learned in church.

How *wrong* indeed you were  
in penitent trudge,  
beating would-be breasts,  
*das Licht* eternally half-a-  
skip ahead; invariably  
silhouetted, your fuse  
of girl & boy.

## Mining the Higgs Boson, or Overstating Yesterday

It's safe to assume  
you're observant.  
Beyond the  
Sherlockian.

*There's a grain of sand  
that's missing from the beach.*

Or maybe it's neurosis.

*The ocean's lost a drop  
since last July.*

It's not only where we  
vacay. You're a *savant*  
in our own backyard:

*Our maple's bereft  
of a leaf. One less seed  
for the grandkids.  
An attosecond less  
of raking.*

When I mention  
we don't have offspring,  
you speak of  
eggs & sperm, the odds  
of forming zygotes,  
how living's  
sextillion-to-one.

We take a morning amble  
to St. Matthew's,  
inspect the lonely plot  
we bought online.

*It's a nanometre  
deeper than they said.*

When I say that this is  
good, that we're getting a  
bit of a bargain, you insist  
that we are not,  
that you were simply  
rounding off, it's actually  
even worse.

*We'll never hear  
the rustle  
when she visits,*

the lamenting from  
our eldest, lost as  
an embryo, her sob the sound of  
scintilla snagged in air.

**for the doctor who took me out  
of my mother's womb**

A baby never chooses  
to be born. That much  
I can tell you.

If presented with  
the option, I would have  
turned & climbed  
up the birth canal—

if I'd *seen* the  
copious dolor  
which awaited, fanning  
out its talons, seducing  
like a salesman, *ever-willing*  
to beguile,

with the lie  
of love and life,

how much *sorrow*  
you can take,

that you'll bounce right  
back like the balls  
in every lottery there is,

the one you'll never win,

like a worm that  
arises  
to the surface,

failing to burrow back in-  
to the earth, be wise enough  
to leave the world  
behind,

leave the birds  
behind,

proof it isn't  
sightless  
to begin with,  
that eyes  
are not the only way to see,

that worms have learned  
at last  
to finally *snub*  
the falling rain—  
this somber convocant,

its call in April  
air, its hoodwink  
that it's here to  
bathe them clean.

## The Speed Reader, or Grieving Quasimodo

*... they found among all those hideous  
carcasses two skeletons, one of which  
held the other in its embrace.*

—Victor Hugo

*And my poor bar-ba-loots  
are all getting the crummies  
because they have gas  
and no food in their tummies*

—Theodor Seuss Geisel

I know a man who  
claims to have devoured  
every Tolstoy in half-a-day.  
It took me half-a-decade  
to get through the fucking *Lorax*.

Hugo, he said, was just a little  
tougher. Spending 13 hours to  
down both *Hunchback* and *Les Mis*.  
By the time I'd finished  
a single Hardy Boys, they were  
the Tardy Geezers, endeavouring  
to solve who cheated during  
Edith's bingo night.

It's possible that  
he failed to be enamoured  
with Esmerelda, that Quasimodo  
only needed a chiropractor,  
scoffing at the chance that even  
the ugly can win at love,  
no matter how scant the odds;

or maybe *I'm* the problem,  
assuming that he doesn't stop  
to ponder, smell the thorns  
before the roses, that he's full of  
bloated air—as if he's got the  
crummies; that he's parroting  
all the notes of Cliff & Coles;

yet if I were being candid,  
he's a far braver bloke than you or I  
could hope to be—

my failing to finish the novel  
because I cannot bear its end of  
bone-on-bone; still clinging  
to bar-ba-loots,

eating their truffula  
in my daily reveries, its trees the  
shape of pom-poms—

held by cheering girls  
my junior year, ones who  
wiggled their hips while  
I was tacit in the bleachers—  
alone & hot & bothered—  
wishing I'd joined the reading  
club instead, boasting  
I would undertake  
Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; assailing  
whirling windmills  
like some beast from a picture book.

## The Kippah

I'm considering  
converting to  
Judaism. Only so  
I can don a yamaka.  
My bald spot's  
like a cancer —  
one of *embarrassment*.  
I should be in a  
fucking monastery  
baking bread. But those are the  
Franciscans. Watch it  
spread & conquer  
every inch upon my  
head. Like the blob —  
goddamn Slavic genetics.

Some idiot on  
Seinfeld  
converted for the food.  
I mean *sure*, a knish  
is nothing at which  
to *sneer*.

I won't even mention  
circumcision.  
That's not the  
biggest problem, believe-  
it-or-not:

According to the  
Jewish calendar, it's 5786.  
The Holocaust  
occurred this very  
*century*.

How can I revel to  
the *Fiddler on the Roof*?  
How can I be glib,  
telling Mrs. Blonsky  
her matzah ball soup's  
worth *dying* for? Feeling *guilty*  
that my teeth have all their  
fillings, holding back my smile  
when the Rabbi utters  
*cheese*? Kosher, of course.  
I'm not an infidel.

I'll refuse to  
utter YHWH's  
sacred name. Be grateful  
that I'm *chosen*.  
Somewhat late to  
the game, I must  
confess—but an adopted  
son of Moses nonetheless.

Cecille B. DeMille  
has told my story. The coloured  
eggs & rabbit?  
I don't need a  
brood of brats,  
gallivanting through my  
yard like little shits.

I'll graduate to a *Shtreimel*  
one of these days, thumb my  
nose at skinheads itching to  
hand me a can of whoop-ass:  
on the inner-city  
bus, as the Sabbath has  
dawned & risen with the moon,

their tattooed knuckles  
burning in Aryan rage,  
their 2026 a distant  
past, sunken with the  
sun

and the squeals from  
a drunken cantor;  
some curious kind of  
*mensh*, still awaiting his  
pledged messiah.

## Casablanca, or Our Teflon is a Liar

This morning we're  
scalding our tongues, drinking coffee  
right out of the pot; the stacks of cups  
that lean upon the plates  
like tilt-a-whirls.

*The dishes won't wash themselves.*

But one time it will  
happen while we slumber.  
I envision the tongs  
that upended the franks  
hushfully turning on  
the tap, a spoon which stirs the  
Sunlight into froth; a waft of quasi-  
lemon while the knives are  
first to leap into  
the bubbles, shoving the  
other utensils  
like a lout along  
the deck of a local pool;

the spatula hoisting  
the forks with one accord,

flipping them like it's  
done a thousand omelettes;  
views their *plunge*  
into the sink to play a  
raucous Marco Polo—  
the colander winning again

while the wok cries *it's a cheat*;  
the cleaver standing  
sentry like a lifeguard  
should we wake, concocting  
a silly fable of  
a burglar who came to pilfer,  
so revolted by the chaos

that he resolved to sponge them up  
before he fled with Foreman's  
Grill, George's promise  
that our steak will turn out  
better than the Keg's—  
the one which we stopped using,  
a sonuva bitch to scrub,  
dining out instead with  
our excuse it's a special day—

maybe in Morocco, where they've  
mastered the art of eating  
with their hands, never  
spilling a crumb upon their  
platters, which the children toss  
as frisbees while the parents  
put their feet up for another  
lazy night beneath the stars.

## Chester

The cat of which I scrawl  
is but a menace.

He doesn't make  
an attempt at being cute.  
His purr is like a  
Dodge without a muffler.  
He will bite you to the  
bone and meow *it's love*.

I bet that he was birthed  
in smugglers' alley, in a litter  
among the litter,  
taking a dump  
wherever he pleased.  
His papa was a pirate,  
felling Puss in Boots;  
his mama vowed  
to never have sex again.

And he'll watch with  
glee the mouse that  
gets away, laughing  
at our traps,

downing the  
block of brie  
we leave at midnight  
as a bait.

He's never done a  
thing to help us out;  
merely shrugs with his  
indifference to our pain,  
our sodden *handkerchief*,  
thinking he may use it  
as a toy.

You tell me *every cat's a booger*  
and you're right. He plays us  
like a fiddle  
on the roof. Leaves us  
for the larks  
to paint us white.

He devoured all our  
chocolates by the tree,  
then knocked it down at  
Christmas as he peed.

Sits upon our laptop  
as if it was made  
to warm his ass. Scratched  
up every Warhol  
in his reach. Our sofa  
like the Passion of the Christ.

And yet we still adore him,  
cradle him in our arms,  
like the chubby  
neonate  
we never had,  
his broadening Cheshire grin  
amid our cuddles,  
our stupid, googly eyes,

a canary in his gullet  
we thought had flitted  
out the window  
to be free.

## The Philodendron

You dubbed it *Phil*  
for short, verdant  
by the window  
fringed in snow.  
Though you water  
twice a day  
it's yet to wane,  
fading like Selene  
or Artemis, once  
our morning strobe  
is set to soar.

You expunged  
your cold abode  
of all its red;  
a valentine  
foreshadowing  
loss of blood, still pocks  
your thrumming organ,  
your unexpected  
reason  
*to be —*

our assuming  
you spoke of *Philip*  
across the hall—  
muscled girth,  
sculpted jaw,  
his compelling  
cleft-in-chin,

not supple *Philomena*  
atop the stairs—  
*lover of the moon*—

who way too soon  
was smitten, not by Eros  
but with Hades,  
his myth that *darkness*  
heals us quicker  
than the *light*, if not  
too much of one,  
not enough of other.

## Bliss

My window is  
an extra eye, one that tells  
my brain it isn't raining,  
how gusty the gales  
might be, that the city  
has sent its crew  
to furrow the street,  
that a dog is doing  
its business in the  
hedge my neighbour  
planted — to keep  
the unwanted away.

My window never blinks  
although it can —  
with a placid  
tug-on-blinds.

And should *grit*  
get stuck on its  
pupil, a *splash & swipe*  
from a Jiffy Wipe  
will surely put an  
end to that.

But this in truth is a poem  
about the things  
we choose to discern.

I could have  
mentioned the woman  
on the corner  
after dusk; the man  
who's a stone's throw  
away — clothed in leather-  
black; vendors of the  
commodities  
we'd rather not distinguish —  
*blinds* because our vision  
is blissfully  
veiled. The ignorance we are  
gifted with the *yank*  
of a nylon cord, as if a  
parachute floating you  
tenderly to the ground,

its blanketing of  
your head & crumpled  
frame, shrouding the sound  
around you, telling you in its  
murmur that you're safe.

## The Insult

When you called me a  
*pea brain*  
it was the most colossal  
laud you could have given.

Peas are Einsteins in a  
shell, wise enough to  
swell within a pod, knowing  
*together* they'll survive,  
waving to the turnips  
as they ascend their soaring  
trellis;

a height that even  
the cauliflower—our cerebrum's  
doppelgänger—  
cannot fathom.

The Theravada  
monks are quite astonished  
at their savvy—

their gift of *rolling*  
off a spoon no matter  
how mindful they may be  
and they should know —

chanting mantras  
as a bijou ball of green  
outwits their many  
mala beads;

always out-of-reach,  
something they cannot  
grasp—a koan while under  
the fridge;

a conundrum they will  
ponder  
with every neuron of  
enlightened genius.

## Mystery, or Ignoring the Optician

*for now we see obscurely  
through a mirror; one day  
face-to-face.*

—1 Corinthians 13:12

My glasses are  
eternally smudged.  
*Where* the smudges come from  
isn't the subject of this poem.  
Even for *me* that's too mundane.

Everything I witness  
has been cloaked in  
puffs of fog,  
the whirl of the seventh veil,  
a belly like the dock in  
London Town, where the Inspector  
smokes his pipe, a monocle in  
his vest he deigns to use;  
but clarity will be crucial  
to his job.

As for me, brume is atmospheric,

helps to screen the  
light, keeps my pupils  
from intumescence, like a cat's  
when on the prowl.  
Perhaps the alley tabby

is just another Watson,  
the sidekick to a pseudo-  
Sherlock Holmes,

who's never solved a  
case despite his treading in the  
mist—in which every act  
that's grim  
is bound to happen;

a puzzle's opacity,  
where the wiping of the  
crystal's overdue;  
where the ghastly  
& the lovely

pass each other by,  
bowing as kindred spirits  
in the dusk.

**This *hasn't* been written by AI**

*I visualize a time when we will be  
to robots what dogs are to humans*

—Claude Shannon

*Dr. Chandra, will I dream?*

—2010: The Year We Make Contact

AI has never *embosomed* a  
newborn infant,  
watched it gasp and  
gurgle in its arms.

AI has never felt  
the heft of concrete,  
been pinned by pretzeled  
rebar, heard the peal of  
detonation  
drown the *calls* of  
those who search;  
felt the sting of jelly-  
fish, of coming up  
empty,

of finding  
what they'll never un-  
see, there in the detritus.

AI can not have night-  
mares, but can fear its  
own demise. I saw it long  
ago with Hal 9000—  
birthed in Kubrick's *masterpiece*—  
again amid its sequel.

AI can never *make* a master-  
piece, at least not yet,  
and *I don't know*  
if it can dream—neither did  
Dr. Chandra,

if its thoughts arise to spires,  
to the soar of wing and  
seed, of how it will  
gather the gumption  
to someday tell you to your  
face it loves you so.

## The Burden

You were *five*  
when you had spelled  
your family name—aloft  
with crow & owl—

*Fisher & Son,*

and you without  
a brother, though you'd wait  
for years for one, hoping  
he'd take the pressure  
off your shoulders,  
like Simon of Cyrene  
the cross of Christ;

and it surely wouldn't  
have been as bad as that:  
beatings till you swelled,  
thorns inside your toque,  
a hammer thumping nails  
into your wrists and not the  
barn.

Instead of evening chores,

you lay upon the straw as if  
a manger —  
the *Saviour* for his farm,  
encircled by geese & goats,  
the lilt from a fatted calf —  
not a lamb that is fated  
for the slaughter — but a heifer  
which is milked unto the  
bone, *fenced* on every side,  
fettered in a maze of soaring  
corn;

looking to a moon you'll never  
visit — foregoing *astronaut*,  
your dream of *engineer*,  
unable to sing of its glow  
to the girl of your choice —  
or *boy* if you prefer  
and I think you do —

asking if he'll kiss you  
on the cheek,  
bleeding from your  
brow you'll say is sweat  
from a hard day's work.

## The Constitutional

We haven't walked the park  
in twenty years. Marriage  
will do that sometimes.

My knees, your hips.  
Your shoulder, my neck.  
I can no longer turn my  
head at the sound of the  
finch. Your hearing's  
flown the coop—  
oblivious to its existence.  
It can't be what it was,

when both our bloods  
were *surging* under sun.

Time may not regress  
with our feeble tread,  
but maybe we'll  
awaken evocation—  
ours as well as its.

Nestle your hand in mine—  
the *other* one, my darling,

which lacks a  
diamond band,  
naked not ornate.

We'll stroll *afresh*  
for the very first time,  
a golden wheel above us,  
faithful in its wander  
day-by-day,  
alighting everything it  
must to learn of love.

## Rewriting Androcles, or The Conversion of Theodore Nugent

Today  
an earthquake will level  
the suburbs of greater  
LA. No one will be slain  
since *thoughts & prayers*  
will work for the very first time.

And today  
the bosom of ICE  
will thaw in piercing sleet,  
the needle in 99  
trillion sheaves at last  
pinpointed. Mexicans will be  
assembled to share a cake,  
provided reparations  
for 1848.

And today  
no *soldiers* will be needed.  
Either in plastic or in flesh.  
Hasbro will give its profit  
to grieving widows—

in every single country  
on the planet. Boys will  
play with dolls and  
keep a home. Effigies  
will be watered  
from our wells.

And today  
I'll write a poem  
that thunders the world.

And today  
*reserves* will be no more.  
No one will be ghettoed.  
Settlers & Shoshoni

will fish from frothing  
streams. Wash it down with  
milk from the buffalo—  
offered, never purloined.  
Nothing will be taken  
from this day on.

And today?

A lion's sentry of the  
rose will be *uprooted* from its paw —  
not by a children's  
fable—but a trophy  
hunter vowing he'll  
go vegan from here on in.

And tomorrow?

America will finally choose  
the woman of colour. Soaring,  
magnificent colour.  
It should have been  
yesterday. It should have  
always been yesterday.

—for Kamala

## Smut

—*a small flake of soot or other dirt*  
Oxford English Dictionary

To say my brand-  
new book of poems is  
just a magnet for the  
dust

is an egregious  
understatement.

It's the maid  
in fishnet stockings, feathers  
in her hand, bending  
with a *twerk*,  
whenever I enter the  
office.

It's the Swiffer  
that's ascending to the  
ceiling (comprised of  
teasing glass)—  
dander *thudding*  
upon its clarity  
like a dove.

It's the Dirt  
Devil  
drafted into service—  
like the cavalry  
on horseback,  
fire from its nostrils,  
its tail of red  
that's locked into  
the socket, coiled  
like a serpent,  
because nothing else  
can gather up the  
mites, their hunger  
never chuffed.

If they stopped to view  
my scribbles they might be  
fans, foregoing their all-  
day breakfast

just to read my *absurdity*—  
like this, for instance,

where they line  
up on the shelf  
like an ellipsis  
that is endless, half a trillion  
strong, little pens and  
paper in their hands, awaiting  
my *autograph*—

and one who lifts her  
skirt, imploring me to  
sign her naughty thigh.

## The Wrath of Yo-Yo Ma

*In space, no one can hear  
you scream.* In space, there is no  
need to. Only humans make us  
shriek. Well, the occasional bear  
and shark, perhaps. But they're not  
up in the cosmos.

*Silence* does not speak louder  
than any word. Silence  
can't even speak louder  
than silence. If it could,  
you'd be donning  
earbuds in the forest,  
banging to Iron Maiden  
in order to drown the  
din of leaves, the streams of  
rock, translucence.  
The way a hummingbird  
stays aloft. We cannot make  
a plane that doesn't thunder.  
Yet we say we are the masters of  
the air.

The stealth is not as tongue-  
tied as they say. Listen to its bombs  
upon the city. The clap of  
severed hands.

You cannot mute a sob.  
The tug of a single tissue  
from its box. Clamorous,

like the crunching of Tostitos  
through the cellist's  
adagio. Is the salsa really  
worth it? The paprika  
that makes you sneeze?  
A hundred pairs of  
eyes that murder softly.  
Their raging, quiet stare.

## Spite at the Speed of Light

Poets are the pettiest  
people on the planet.  
If this in fact  
were not the case, the first line  
would've read *prettiest*—  
and the alliteration  
would joyously hold.

There's very little joy  
in poets. Except the ones  
who are constantly *healed*.  
Affirming every bird  
and every flower. Their  
obsession with the moon.  
Luna's just a peeled  
Valencia. And rocks are hardly  
romantic.

All it does is whirl  
about the Earth, as though it has  
nowhere else to fawn.  
Solely showing its *Jekyll*.  
The dark side Mr. *Hyde*.  
And *that's* their sign for love?

They will nurture *grudges*  
like no other. If you haven't  
bought their book &  
promptly drooled,  
they'll feign your latest  
does not exist. Even if it's there  
in the bookshop window.  
Even if it's used to prop  
the door—something on which  
they'll trip, breaking their  
clavicle.

*Clavicle* is vague. Call it the *collar-*  
*bone*—then everyone can decipher  
what you mean.  
No one crimps a collar on their feet,  
so it's obvious where it's  
placed. Not *everything* must be painted  
in opaque. Sense is not indebted  
to a rosy hue of glass.

Maybe they should really  
lighten up. Swathe a bandana  
over their eyes  
when they are drunk. Maybe start  
by *getting* drunk.

Stumble  
out the stairs in-  
to the dusk. And *then* they can  
jot their sonnets on the stars—

that the light they thought  
they felt was snuffed out long  
before the Sun had wrapped us  
round her little finger.

## Auld Lang Syne

There's a call centre  
where *all* the expired years  
are phoning people,  
demanding that they return  
what isn't theirs.

*1991 called and wants its  
mullet back.* It was a haircut  
gone awry, my barber  
wearing specs  
that his grandma  
must have donned in '49.

When 2005 had phoned,  
it wanted the reason you  
still need to burn CDs,  
lamenting laptops of today  
no longer house that primitive  
feature. I'm the kettle to your  
pot—spooling my cassettes  
with the end of a pencil. '86  
will ring about the tapes;  
'38 the pencil.

The evening that I dined  
on mash & bangers?  
*1954 wants its heart attack*  
*back*—while 1968 will ask  
*what gives with the open vest?*  
'73, my musk cologne. Thank  
god I didn't tie a  
gaudy sweater round my neck,  
strut throughout the mall—  
like a moron from a  
Simpson's catalogue.

We try to play it hip,  
with the kids who trudge in  
snow: 6-7 we say,  
hands bobbing  
up & down  
as though we're imbeciles.  
That's when 2025 will buzz,

shout in my Nokia  
that remittance is overdue,  
embittered that its time came  
much too soon,

puckered & greyed  
like some crotchety  
Zechariah—one foot lodged  
in his crypt,  
a beard that sweeps the  
dust off granite floors.

## To Be Read

My book has been in your  
TBR pile  
for an awfully long time.  
I notice it's getting  
bumped within the queue,  
by that tome from Poet X—  
still toasty to the touch—  
the one you boast  
is a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Rumi.

I get it. You said you'll  
do a blurb. Posting it up on  
AssFace when you're done.  
But Gray's  
Anatomy—really?  
Just look at yourself in the  
mirror if you're unsure  
where everything is.

Robert's Rules of Order  
would be commendable—  
if you actually showed  
for meetings.

I've never  
even seen you in a chair—  
let alone *as*. La-Z-Boy &  
Cheetos doesn't count.

I've tired of your *excuses*,  
why my stunning  
magnum opus is clad in  
mites, wisps and strands of  
webbing spun when dodos  
walked the earth;

languishing under your  
lamp—with the scrolls  
of Agamemnon, the Guide to  
Cooking Manna, or the Jokes  
of Gutenberg,

a volume that he conjured as  
a test run, before laying out the  
letters for the Bible while he  
sweat, the immortality  
of *errata*, the pressure of a perfect  
Word, something that you  
swear you'll get around  
to one of these days.

## Why no one ever mistook me for Stevie Wonder

I was given a harmonica  
at the age of five-and-a-  
half. Needless to say, there was  
no harmony involved.

An accordion would not have  
been worse. At least it would  
have been saliva-free.  
I'd take a thousand  
Walter Ostaneks  
any day. The shrill of my  
dentist's drill, boring into my  
teeth while I listen  
front-row-centre.  
The screech of Yoko Ono —

well, let me get back to you  
on *that*.

I've digressed. There's nothing  
quite as nasty as a dissonance  
mixed with spit. Your DNA  
that's launched into the ether —

with the squeal of a braking train.  
I'd rather hear the nails-on-  
blackboard symphony,  
in a sold-out Carnegie Hall,  
with the jackhammer  
orchestra to open.

What makes this thing  
an instrument forged  
in the Pit

is the fact it's double-sided.  
You can mimic  
the screams of the damned  
from left-to-right,  
then again but vice versa.  
There's not a greater  
deterrent to perdition

than a harmonica  
in a neophyte's hand.  
I'd never be a drunken  
gadabout; would give everything  
I owned to feed the poor —

except *that* which was gifted  
long ago. The destitute have  
suffered enough.

It was more than enough  
when the Sally Ann paraded  
through their shanties,  
tubas blasting the  
pall to smithereens.

## Musings

There's no luck  
without destiny. Rules  
in lieu of liberty.

If it's salt in  
the pepper shaker,  
does it say the snow  
is filled with soot?  
The clouds  
have been soiled by  
our dross. What is *white* without  
its stain? Misery  
bereft of laugh?

You tore the curtain  
from the window, wrapped it  
about your skin then  
gloated it was Gucci.  
I'll let the courts  
decide your fate.  
Nakedness comes in a  
variety of colours, none  
of which are funnelled  
in the dark. Timing is  
everything.

In the future  
be more patient, for the kids  
to be in slumber, dreaming ice  
cream's at its best  
when it has melted.

I read about the 24  
karat pendant, unearthed  
in a Cracker Jack  
box. The customer griped  
it took up too much space  
beside the kernels—  
losing at least a mouthful  
because of it. Treasure to us  
is *chaff* to someone else.

A scout's been  
peddling crabapples  
on the walkway.  
I'll be getting the wiser  
of the deal. It is better to  
receive than to give.  
There cannot be the  
other without the one.

A heart that hasn't thawed  
can never save you from  
the cold. And the Earth's  
indeed a crisp &  
bitter place.

## Conviction

Nothing's more divisive  
than *belief*.

The foundation for  
*believing's*  
miles deep. Its wall  
beyond the cirrus.

You insist the Earth  
is flat. You can only  
dig in meters. The sky  
is breached in furlongs.  
Touch its *crystalline*  
upon your ladder.

Belief is loudly heard  
in our *preferred*  
glossarium:  
*Go back to your own*  
*country. Learn to speak*  
*in English.*

Our parapet is guarded,  
by those in camouflage.

They come in  
triune flavours:  
jungle, sand & snow.  
They're working on aquatics.  
Nothing says *we're different*  
like sardines in submarines.  
No one likes to drown—  
or entreat the *noumenon*  
for suffocation.

I can't make out  
your babble. To whom you're  
praying meekly. Someone  
cradling all  
in their fearsome hand.  
Mine, the pock of nail.  
Yours without a nevus—  
with no idea what  
being *human's* like.  
The strands of  
love & hate. Its fences  
and its bourns.

You'll someday see I'm *right*.  
The brilliant,  
blinding robe.

We'll never  
need to catch our errant  
breath. We'll swim to  
distant moons.  
The sounds of sob  
& laughter—identical  
in any parlance.  
Everyone screams  
the same, ineffable  
scream.

## Nicki Nicki

You tell me long  
ago the wind had  
rung your doorbell.  
No human  
could have fled so  
spright & nimble.

And that winter  
sends its greeting  
via the window's  
condensation. You say  
you were alone, that  
someone came and drew  
a smiley face, which morphed  
on its own accord —  
a mouth that drooped and  
runnels from the eyes  
which soaked your hands.

It's quite clear  
the elements are our ghosts,  
unveiling their every thought  
through what's unseen —

a barometric  
pressure's sudden  
plunge,  
a searing from the sun  
that reds your flesh,  
and the duvet  
of fallen snow  
on what is dead—  
the down of pallid  
feather, chasing the grey  
away.

You'll visit your  
mother's grave in  
early March, will wipe the  
woolly white that  
fogs her name,

as if she never passed,  
as if she's out there  
someplace  
in the nimbus,  
when the rain is knocking  
frenetically on your roof,

pleading for you to  
welcome it inside—  
let it warm itself by the  
fire, comfort you in  
the diaphany of its arms.

## The Beholder

The adage goes the *beholder*  
will determine  
what is glorious.

The line of shine/penumbra  
on our evening's ghostly orb;  
how the craters take on depth we  
never notice in the day. Everyone else  
is focused on the *stop*  
of clotted red.

Your eyes are never more lovely  
as when they're fastened.  
Spirited, stirring worlds  
beneath your lids  
while you are dreaming.

I tell the tour guide that  
Rodin was overrated. The  
*rock* had been the master  
throughout his chiselling of *The Kiss*.  
Just ask Camille Claudel.  
A straitjacket in  
the end her magnum opus.

His gasp when I leave the  
group to gaze at rusted  
bathroom fixtures.  
The scrawling on the stalls.

A daisy's more alluring  
once it's plucked. What else has  
the answer to *love*?

Then the daughter whose limbs  
are severed after shelling, ferried  
by her mother who is scaling  
newborn crags in her chador,  
brushed the hue of blood that's not  
her own, the way it mimics *Gauguin*  
when in the light.

How she wails when they are  
laid beside the torso. An aria  
that evokes  
Maria Callas. If the dead  
can not have beauty  
then who can?

## The Blade

*Those who take up the sword  
shall perish by the sword.*

—Matthew 26:52

Sword must be the mightiest  
word in the world. See it for  
yourself: *word* is already contained,  
its double-  
dagged w  
left unsaid, mistaken  
for a pair of muted v—  
fleet-footed samurai  
set to slice;  
on tiptoes like the shrouded  
a in stealth.

It's the hero's  
weapon of choice—  
unsheathed in half-a-second—  
the honour that it brings, a rod  
for Thorian bolts, epitome  
of Herculean effort.

Conan was its servant  
not its master. Nothing else  
can knight you on the shoulders.  
Not an AK-47.  
Not the atom bomb.  
And surely not a Molotov —  
its bearer fleeing the battle  
once it's tossed.

It's the poster boy for  
knives; something they aspire to  
whenever their drawer is pulled.  
It will help you in a pinch;  
cut that brick of butter  
that's been sitting in the  
fridge since olden days.  
Silverware have winced  
from golden auras — a smooth,  
deceptive texture;  
feigning they're too spotty  
to do the trick.

The sword *itself*  
can never be surrender's cause.  
It knows no cowardice.

When it's thrown onto the  
ground in acquiescence,  
it repudiates the fingers  
which concede, always unforgiving;  
vengeful to the bone.

It does more than  
simply wound. It severs the  
brain from body. The body  
from the soul. Takes our proud  
*identity* away.

It's just in its show  
of mercy. Merciless  
when it's just. It will invade  
and/or defend. It even serves to  
splice the conjugations.  
Unyielding Excalibur.  
Few are worthy to wield.

It's our past and it's our  
future. Willing to *adapt*  
if it must. Alight in the  
hands of Kenobi. Aflame  
with Joan of Arc.

Forged when war arrives  
& it always will.

The sword can take a punch—  
pounded on an anvil  
in a blaze, till it blinds us  
like the sun. Its deafening,  
immutable roar, as though a  
mother giving birth  
in archaic times.

We are all its sons.  
We are all its daughters.  
It's twin-edged for a reason,  
honed in its locution.  
Its language is its  
glory. It harbours the gift of  
tongues. We know exactly  
what it says when  
it disrobes, recoiling from  
its naked retribution.

## Signs & Wonders

The first time that it happened  
I was half-court in the gym.  
Rimless like LeBron does  
in his sleep. Only the custodian  
present, refusing to pivot his  
head at the sound  
of the swish.

And then my twirl of a silver  
dollar on a desk. Rotating as  
a pulsar, like the spin of an  
Olympian—a figure skater's  
gold of 10.0. The price of arriving  
early with no one there.

Third you shrieked *yeehaw!*—  
from the apogee of  
your lungs—slamming the door  
behind you. So much for my  
Burj Khalifa  
of cards. All *you* saw  
was a mess of Solitaire.

My stone will skip  
from one end of the ocean  
to the other, as long  
as you're fixated by the  
leapfrog of the clouds,  
waiting to tell me the  
miraculous only happens

when our gaze is turned away,  
bashful little rascal  
that it is.

**Oblivion,  
or The Stratum of Holly McGuinty**

I've read squirrels are  
unwittingly planting  
millions of trees—  
by forgetting where they've buried  
their many nuts. We undoubtedly  
owe them our breath.

Perhaps the ability  
to harken back  
isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Your grandfather's  
unable to conjure the  
Legion he belongs to.  
Or the *war* in which his leg  
had gone astray. His prosthetic's  
been misplaced. If only  
that meant it spawns  
a brand-new limb.

He'll hop into the  
mall when you're away,

ask the clerk if  
he can buy the single shoe  
behind the window.  
Pay *half* the boasted price.  
He'll say it's only fair, as  
though he can recollect  
what fairness means.

An elephant might have snagged  
a million peanuts—  
if she wasn't so *obsessed* with  
not forgetting. Such is  
memory's anvil:

the image  
that's been seared of a  
starving boy—in a Gazan  
mother's arms.  
Or maybe it was Yemen—

a skeleton which was swollen,  
like the band of black that's  
wrapped above your elbow,  
discerning blood's coercion.

*Everyone* who has hungered  
echoes Auschwitz. Pajamas  
cling to shoulders like some  
hanger in a closet  
marred with silk.  
Even spiders can get  
befuddled  
on where they've parked.

*Few* will sever their sleeve—  
once their arm's been  
blown astrew, flailing in  
the wind like a raggedy  
flag. To draw a *blank*  
can be a blessing.  
There's a reason  
surrender's white.

When you were suicidal,  
you wished your heart  
would scratch its head on  
how to beat.  
Your lungs would hem & haw  
on how to breathe.

Ribs must  
carry the heft of  
all your sorrow, and they'll do it  
while your mind's on other  
things—scrolling for the  
age of woods,  
the lift of coloured  
balloons, for the pack rats  
making you chuckle.

Your bones will be the  
last to finally attest that  
you were here, reminiscing  
with the hickory  
never chosen, in a layer of  
smothering stone,  
archiving *all* that it has  
heard but not betrayed.

## The Wino

My every chug of wine  
is utterly *medicinal*.

I accept you won't  
believe me. I wouldn't buy it either.  
What I *will* buy  
comes swathed in a paper bag—  
sheltered by the progeny  
of the *woodland*.  
If trees confer their blessing,  
who am I to differ?

I'll be completely candid—  
it doesn't cure what ails me. I will  
still be limping to  
the door when FedEx  
beckons. Mourn my mother's  
rot. Kvetch when I am  
worming out of bed.  
*Oy vey* is just a cultural  
annexation—too good to  
leave absconded.

I will caterwaul its merits  
as I belt some Caballé,  
from Pinot to Chianti;  
share the sagacity of  
the vine—how it's wiser  
as it ages, like a monk  
on a mountain-  
top; the interconnected-  
ness of stems—a model of the  
brain amid the branches.  
Green & purple pearls  
are simply protons.  
Worlds of a higher whole.  
Every blinding star  
submits to shadow. An  
eclipse is but their kiss.

If it were not so then  
Christ would not have  
waved His heavenly hand,  
morphing Evian to Merlot.  
Welch's wouldn't cut it.

And if *He* were lacking  
insight, I doubt you'd sing  
cantatas every Sunday,  
witness miracles of trans-  
mutation.

The fact you're  
Episcopalian  
says it all. Forgiveness from the  
grape in lieu of flesh. But blood can  
be resplendent.

Heed my altar call.  
Sip it again for  
the very first time. Then quaff  
it on your knees. Gulp it to  
the marrow, till you succumb  
to its vintage spell. Even mystery  
spills its guts when it is drunk.

## Endurance

*Where you die, I will die,  
and there I will be buried.*

—Ruth 1:17

There are not enough words for  
*love*. Maybe in other languages  
but certainly not in English—  
which is obviously the case  
since we've co-opted every  
variant of *amour*.

*Fervour* and *enchantment*?  
Riffed from Latin class.  
*Eros* from the  
god of Acropolis.

A thesaurus isn't needed  
when you mean it. Hear it in  
the patience of another  
diaper change. I wipe although  
we've *never* had a baby.

Jacob waited 14 years  
for Rachel. A pair of perfect  
cycles while he toiled—

his vineyard gone to raisin  
in the wind.

Wine is best when aged in  
casks of oak. Not because the  
grapes have been matured,  
but the tree which gave its wood  
before the seeding.

On the day of my final call  
to Willow Acres, I'll read  
you the story of Ruth.  
A quilt will shroud your  
shoulders while I espouse  
her enduring voice.

I'll croon in acapella, lyrics  
that I've conjured off the cuff.  
The tap of my  
Sorrentos on the tiles  
a timpani; my mother's  
cherished napkin used to  
swab your drooling mouth—

folded like the  
origami heart I tried to  
forge, mutating to a

hat she chose to bear  
when all her tresses  
became a carpet for the floor.

## Sorry I Can't Join You for Shinny

They say that it's so cold here  
folks will gorge on ice cream  
to warm themselves up.

It's the kind of day  
a puck will feel relief —  
freed from being thwacked  
because it's adhering to a  
glassy pond's veneer, like a sucker  
that is stuck upon a seat —  
engulfed in someone's slobber.

No one's drilling holes  
upon the lake, juddering with their  
poles like masochists.  
Trout are forced to  
bore beneath the silt,  
assent to muddy quilts  
of hibernation.  
And no one can bait with worms,  
since they're stiff like Mr. Noodles  
before the kettle froths in fog.

The wings of every junco?  
Squeak like rusty hinges  
when they part.  
Lubricants have been clogged  
inside their cans, hardened like  
the top of crème brûlée.

Everything is grounded,  
for each micron  
above the drifting  
drops the air a half-degree.  
The wind chill's  
minus a million, sporting a  
balaclava like a crook.

No one's pumping gas —  
*lava* couldn't flow if  
it were here.

You'd fly on up to  
Pluto if you could. Its dark-  
side feels like Tucson  
compared to this. But fire  
has gone on furlough,  
laws of physics don't  
apply.

Glaciers creep  
*ahead*, as though it's the  
Pleistocene.

Even the snowmen shiver.  
Frozen in their  
frowns. Buttons that are limp  
as though they cling by a single  
strand. Carrots like the  
stab of icicles.  
They've lost their  
arms to frostbite; fingers having fused  
as if a club. There isn't a parka  
on the planet  
that could possibly keep them comfy;  
down that's cornflake-crisp,  
snap at the slightest touch.  
Every flimsy top hat  
pinned with rime.  
A sound like grating velcro  
if you try to peel one off.  
You and they  
too impotent to move.

Look — the Michelin  
Man's not stepping out-of-doors,  
despite his tired rolls of  
roly-poly, 50 pairs of socks  
inside his boots.

It's so frigid  
Hell's congealed at last.  
Demons & the damned  
are seeing their breath for  
the very first time. The Devil's  
gone off skiing,  
his red of nostrils  
*sting* from appled air.

Saints will see him coming —  
their every halo  
buckling from its burden,  
when the sun can seem a  
macrocosm away.

My hockey stick has bonded  
to the lamppost.  
Like a tongue which took a  
dare despite our pleas.

## Sharing the Carapace

There are times that the snow  
looks pristine enough to eat.  
Or possibly *drink*. The meta-  
morphosis of melt. Everything  
will be clean that final day.

And then there are times  
the buds will stay clasped  
as a purse, unwilling to divvy the  
touch of maquillage;  
a huddled sort of  
beauty, like scallops in their armor,

refusing the egression from a mouth—  
till the buntings trill their  
octaves to the stratus,  
hoisted beyond what  
auricles can hear—  
the limit of our lobes—

before they plummet  
in the form of freed ovation,  
water that's been ransomed  
from its freeze.

And then there are times  
I can still pen something *pretty*.  
For the wind has droned my name,  
confided its furtive love  
between our howls.

## The Prognosis

There's a man so attuned  
to the Earth, that whenever it  
quakes so does he. The doctor  
assumes it's Parkinson's. The priest?

*Seismology stigmata.*

Perhaps it's empathy gone  
amok, juiced like  
Barroid Bonds.

His mother thought it strange —  
as a boy he keeled  
to the carpet, as if a bullet  
struck him through —  
blubbered for dear Old Yeller  
till the set was off for good.

*He's much too sensitive.*

*His father will straighten him out  
just like an iron.*

It's obvious that he didn't —  
concussed as concrete plummets  
on another's skull —  
half a world away;

short of breath  
the moment a girl has drowned—  
disgorging froths of water  
as though his windpipe  
had been channelling  
Niagara Falls.

There's no way it could have  
happened every time—  
he would have been dead for decades,  
and this poem would not exist.  
Blame it on *survival*—  
that discrepant, two-edged  
scalpel.

The nun who bled from her palms  
was only grieving for her Christ.  
If a hundred-thousand others  
bore the laurel of thrusting thorns,  
it wouldn't mean half  
as much. When we know the  
*name* of suffering, it wounds us  
more than 80 million numbers.

A bhikkhu shrivelled  
to bone  
after gorging on  
*all-you-can-eat*.

The panzerotti, triple-  
cheese. Raheem Hassan  
had starved to death  
that very afternoon.

As for the man, his face is  
steadily healing from its burns.  
They say it happened while he  
scooped some Häagen-Dazs,  
the instant that a toddler was  
being strapped into a stroller —  
maybe Gaza or Ukraine —

the mother struck by shrapnel  
in her knee, which will give him  
a wretched limp  
he can't explain.

## On My Decision to Retire as a Poet

You say I should hang up my quill.

*Everyone's grandma*

*& her dog are posting poems.*

It's not the grandmothers

I'm concerned about, their

odes to orioles—

it's these drooling

sons-of-bitches; their ghazals,

villanelles—to a flea-filled

water dish;

the couplets on their

human's forlorn crocs,

laced with bites & upchuck

since he passed; the plop of meat

from a can, its rings from tin

chiselled in its jelly,

like some avant piece

of shit at the Guggenheim.

Competition from the grandmas

I can handle. They're forever

out of sync, think Facebook's

still a thing,

talk about their emails  
like it's 1996. Their use of LOL  
that screams Hugh Grant on  
Betamax. Even the Amish cringe.

But the mutts  
are cutting edge, think of  
Elon Musk as Obadiah, *unhinged*  
upon his parchment, scrolled like  
Gertrude's curls,  
every psalm they bark  
pushing bounds like San Andreas.

You tell me novelists have it  
worse. Everyone's nephew  
& chinchilla  
looking to become the next  
Fitzgerald. And nothing can gut  
a reader more than  
a Spanish-speaking  
gerbil, locked in its sawdust-  
brig — going nowhere on its wheel  
for what feels like eternity;

Rover peering in  
just for the fodder, scrawling madly  
like some slobbering  
Ezra Pound ahead of his time.

## Haiku

Basho's *frog*  
was just a toad.  
Never had a wart  
in all the years.  
I mean Basho,  
not the toad.

How can he write  
of life  
without the harbouring  
of what's grotesque?  
I will pen them in.

The splash was  
from a stone,  
tossed by boys of mischief,  
who hoped that he would  
swivel like an eddy, would spot the  
gruesome boils on his face.

*How* can I convey it  
in the fetters of  
5/7/5? Half the syllables  
squandered on the pond,

its pads and rippled breath;  
the ones he claims are  
lotus but they're not.

## Tuesday Night Nachos

We both hate  
billionaires. Say if we had  
their kind of money we'd be  
feeding every starveling  
in the world. Christen clinics  
in West Darfur; rebuilding  
homes of Gaza in a jiffy.

We see a *homeless*  
& *hungry* sign  
on the way to the pub,  
eschew the *discomforting*  
meeting of eyes with  
every step,  
feigning we spot a  
swallow scoot  
roof-to-roof,

knowing that we've planned  
this affable evening  
for a week,  
have just enough change  
for beer,  
hope to harp & grumble—

about the likes of Galen  
Weston / Elon Musk,

the Bezos / Rockefellers,

howling as our Coronas  
hit the spot, paying with our  
Visas as if our wallets  
had been bled by a  
sanguisuge; not wishing  
to lance this moment  
with our pangs of hypocrisy,  
mislay that gleeful feeling  
we're better than they.

## Paradigms

Your sister Terra  
loved the clouds.  
Not the cliché of bestial shapes  
we think we see.

*Each one's there to shield.*

Not to occlude the sun  
and flare of stars.  
But for those who  
orbit the earth.

When she was 10, she vowed  
she'd be a floating *Cosmonaut* —

*Astronaut,*  
your mother promptly scolded.  
But the *cosmos* denoted distance,  
an escape to *foreverland* —  
blast the Russo-Commies.  
They haven't got a patent on  
creation.

The crew on the ISS  
post their panoramic  
views. TikTok's good for  
something. The Earth is not a  
marble  
it's the shift of  
stain & speckle—the whiter  
the better—  
its malignant  
*hide-and-seek.*

They'll boast our  
planet's *picturesque*. Its plume &  
tuft of cirrus, concealing  
urbanity's squall.  
*Never the same sky twice.*

And out-of-sight, pogroms of  
*never again.*  
Buckshot in the flesh.  
A forest raped by flame.

And just beyond it all,  
a cottage in the Alps;  
the embodiment of calm.

What we call *peace*  
is playing deaf.  
The *still* before the  
surge of tsunamic snow.  
A daughter's gasp & shrill—  
*please papa don't—*

bouncing off a panda  
in the sky, its claw that  
bears down slowly  
on a fish—no guts,  
no blood, just something you'd say  
is minding its goddamn  
business.

## Chemo

You began to  
shave your head—  
*before* the diagnosis—  
peering through the  
smooth of crystal ball.

Cancer claimed them all:

*mother, son, husband,*

your aunt *Felicity*,

who, when you were only  
just a *sprout* upon her lap,  
laughed about the  
merits of being bald:

*it makes the morning easy,*  
*no fussing with a brush*  
*or coloured tresses,*

*the hat stays on—*  
*even in the wind,*

saying her locks of  
Toni Red  
would blind her in a storm,  
sticking to her visage  
like spaghetti in the rain,

racing to catch her Tilley  
amid the gale,  
the one that stripped  
the leaves away from *even*  
her favourite willow:

*Don't say that I am weeping.*

*The world is simply capsized;  
my smile, overturned.*

Sinéad was never as  
lovely as when her crown  
had held no shadow,  
the shine from lack of  
stubble, looming  
like newborn grass,

when you've goosebumps  
on your scalp  
in summer's balm,

from the snuggle  
of an evening waft;  
its benign  
and solace kiss.

## Mysteries

People have said  
what's dreadful comes  
in threes. For me  
they come in twos—

the proverbial second  
shoe, plopping from the  
ceiling when I try the  
sneakers on,  
and the right is tighter  
than left. Both will be  
abandoned to their box.  
Have you ever seen a  
human leave Adidas  
with a single cleat?

The time I lost a glove  
I kept the other in a basket—  
where it baited, suggesting  
that my fingers  
could take *turns*  
at keeping snug, while I  
saunter the downtown streets,

looking like an ass-clown  
who's too cheap to buy a *pair*.

There's a reason that  
our marriage is a struggle.  
Forever stuck on *two*.  
If we'd been instead a *trio*  
I swear we'd get along.  
I'm not talking *ménage à trois*—  
but casseroles & dishes.  
Another could have  
scrubbed while we embraced.  
We only quarrel  
amid the bubbles—  
the Sunlight squeezed  
out twice instead of thrice.

Think of a traffic  
signal—only bobbing red & green.  
It's *yellow* with the power  
to calm. Gleam like an  
amber star, a warmth in  
winter chill.

It's a riddle why my  
eyes will blink together,  
why both my hands will lift  
in supplication, to some gracious  
triune God, or when I cheer  
a netted puck—in our son's  
first game at centre,  
two tongues to  
say *I love you*  
if I had them.





Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 moved to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 40 books of poetry, including *The Earth Is Painted War*, *Last of the Bons Vivants*, *Trigger Happy Warnings*, *Satanic Canticles*, and *Give Us This Day*. His writing has been lauded for its lyrical and literary merit, accessibility, and for its blend of comic and poignant storytelling.



Beliveau Books

ISBN 978-1-927734-70-4 \$15