

# In lieu of hymns



a collection of poems  
by E. Michael Desilets

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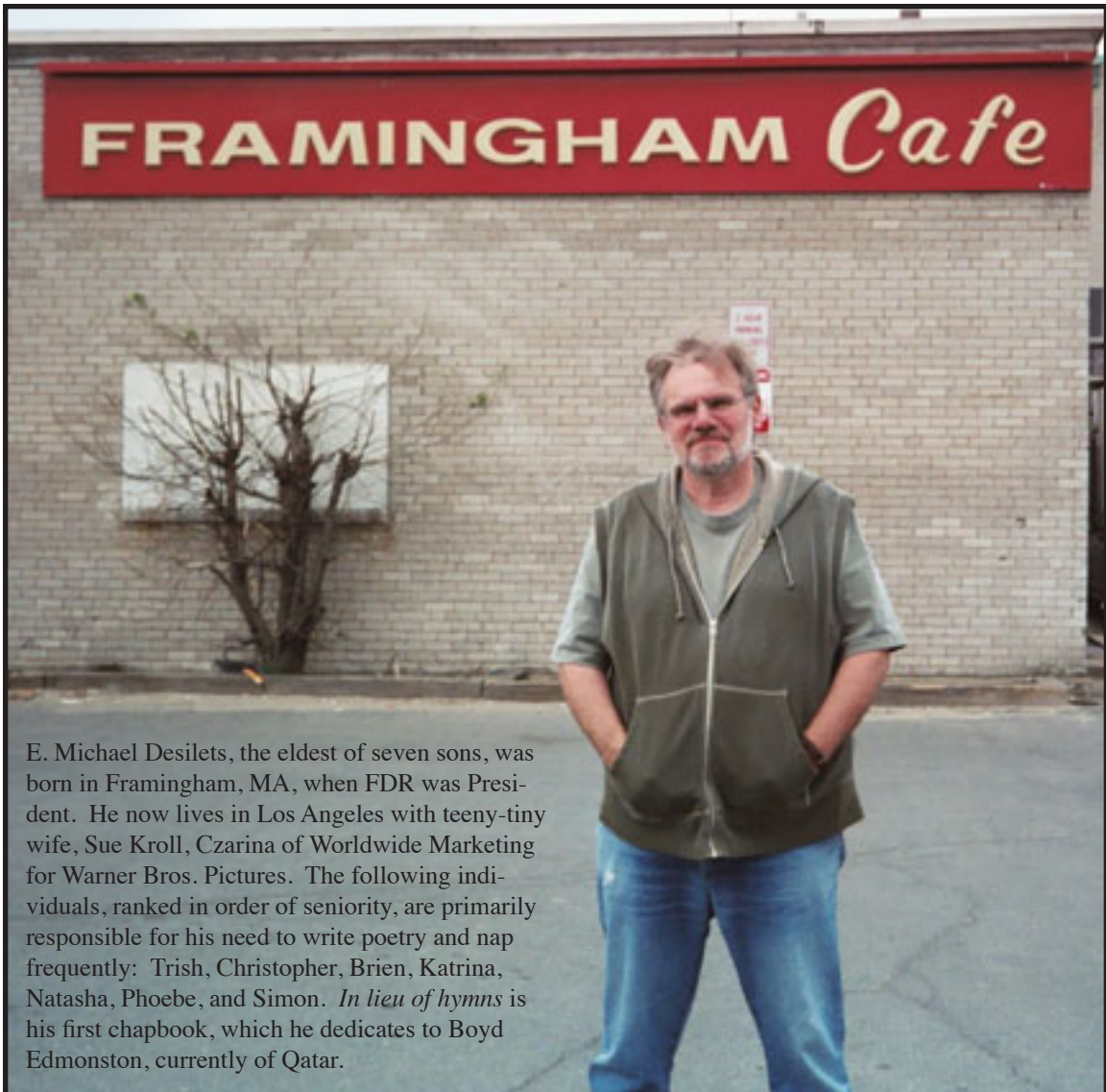
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## Biography & Acknowledgments



E. Michael Desilets, the eldest of seven sons, was born in Framingham, MA, when FDR was President. He now lives in Los Angeles with teeny-tiny wife, Sue Kroll, Czarina of Worldwide Marketing for Warner Bros. Pictures. The following individuals, ranked in order of seniority, are primarily responsible for his need to write poetry and nap frequently: Trish, Christopher, Brien, Katrina, Natasha, Phoebe, and Simon. *In lieu of hymns* is his first chapbook, which he dedicates to Boyd Edmonston, currently of Qatar.

*The Boston Herald*: “Rosa, Hollis Street, Framingham”

*California Quarterly*: “Leaving Summer,”

*Chattahoochee Review*: “Knee Reliquary Triptych”

*Diner*: “Reminded,” “Terri’s Sunrise,” “Floater”

*Exit 13*: “April in Sausalito”

*Freshwater*: “On Holy Thursday Agnes”

*Habersham Review*: “2812 Buford Highway”

*Hayden’s Ferry Review*: “Railroad Union Spiders”

*The Hiram Poetry Review*: “Susan at the Stop”

*Irish Edition*: “Fiddler,” “July 5, Jersey Shore,”  
“Oh, Claire”

*Origami Condom*: “398 Waverly Street,” “Cheerios in her cleavage,” “Gladys and Leona,” “In lieu of hymns,” “Jackknife,” “Rummaging,” “Uncle Ralph’s Socks”

*Phase and Cycle*: “She Liked Reruns”

*Poesy*: “Second Hand Smoke”

*The Poetry Peddler*: “Blind Song”

*Potato Eyes*: “If I Could Shimmy Like My Sister”

*The Rambler*: “Time On My Hands Manifesto”

*Rock & Sling*: “Orate Fratres”

*Sheila-Na-Gig*: “Camden Carol,” “Climb Upon My  
Knee,” “Footwork”

*Smartish Pace*: “Jesus Comes to My Hometown”

*Tapestries*: “Kissing Sons”

*Whisper*: “Fran,” “Positano Sunday”

*Wilshire Review*: “Between Sunset and Ventura”

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## In lieu of hymns

---

Alone in church she says a prayer  
for no one in particular  
to whatever saintly statue she is near.  
Votive candles flicker in rebuke.

Two thousand miles away a wake  
goes on without her  
her absence maligned by the living.  
The deceased offers no opinion

as is his custom. An uncle's ashes  
crash in the Atlantic  
foghorns supplant Gregorian chant  
mourners huddle in raincoats

the children cross themselves  
in rented black cars.

## On Holy Thursday Agnes

---

irons bed sheets in the kitchen  
retrieves Earl's unopened junk mail  
    from the trash bin in the driveway  
    because you just never know  
recites repeatedly her deathbed soliloquy  
until the cat stops listening  
    and dives down the cellar stairs  
    after more enticing utterances  
gathers all the old photos together  
    again just to be sure  
    that her face is still missing  
    from every one

## Orate Fratres

---

We watched our brother go. Dead,  
he left behind reminders of his unkind  
dying. Suppositories, syringes, shit stains  
on sheets stamped “St. Elizabeth’s.” Mean junk  
tossed aside when the McCarthy boys  
lugged him home in a bag  
for embalming.

We won’t squeeze his hand  
again in the Cardinal Cushing Wing.

The sibling litany’s not the same  
without “Steve” in second place. Stephen  
the First Martyr, stoned  
for his faith, rocked to death by pagans,  
patron saint of the parish  
church, the boarded-up grade  
school, the graveyard where we leave our own dead  
flesh after a few frozen prayers. *Vere dignum  
et justum est.* Death can be so impeccable.

His last messages were crossword  
puzzles in unknown languages,  
hopes and dreams crisscrossed in desperate alphabets,  
interminable gibbering riddles.

Then he was just a brain stem  
thrashing about, unconsolated  
by pills or touch or tears,  
a coiled abyss waiting at infinite speed.

He belonged to others, too, but we  
his brothers, selfish in our grief,  
keep him as our private ghost,  
a whey-faced wind in our midst  
to fill the sails of our loss. We watched  
our brother go. We saw him die.  
We never let him say goodbye.

## Kissing Sons

---

The beefy boy  
with his back to me  
was my son  
and I kissed him  
on the neck  
and called him  
by my brother's name

simple mistake  
slip  
of the hereditary tongue  
turning him  
into his own uncle  
for a shifting  
second or two  
and me—  
until laughter  
gave us breath again—  
into my father  
kissing his son  
with brazen  
graveyard lips.

## Second Hand Smoke

---

maybe *Law & Order* reruns  
did us in—professionals  
unchoked by personal lives

or the dead weight  
of unread  
magazines  
or the new eyeglass  
prescriptions  
or the licorice  
that gave me gas  
or the stench  
of the silences

being side-by-side  
made it easy  
to head in opposite  
directions

but I was lucky  
to love you before  
you were  
seduced  
by the antique tile  
bench in the garden  
where you sit now  
always  
not smoking

## Reminded

---

She'd eased herself into madness  
as if it were a hot bath  
and breathed in confusion  
like steam.

Things became  
one another: sturgeons truncheons,  
bed board, lavatories  
labyrinths.

One Saturday she set  
her hair on fire trying to light  
a Camel and doused the flames with iced tea.

That got her a wig.

The visiting nurse and the prescription cane  
came later, but by then she could never tell  
any of them apart.

## Uncle Ralph's Socks

---

No poetry to see in Uncle Ralph,  
misshapen slipshod slob lumbering past  
the platform at Branch Motor Express  
to heave himself into his rattling rig

and hit the Mass Pike hard at Exit 8.  
At Romeo's Motel he lost a day  
just waiting for his hemorrhoids to burst  
but made it up with pills and bloodshot nights

in whining asphalt caverns. Yesterday  
his socks were both surgically removed.  
We all had a great laugh over that one,  
though none of us dropped by to say so long.

## Fran

---

The television buzzed  
& flickered in the den,  
the breakfast dishes soaked  
cold & greasy.

She'd sauntered  
to Dom's Variety  
for Devil Dogs & Chesterfields  
& took the long way home  
past the Dairy Queen, the rectory,  
the pumping station rubble  
where she first met Fred.

The big rain never came,  
the clever weatherman's forecast  
just so much humid babble.

But it was good to have choices:  
the laundry, macaroni & cheese,  
the double bill at the Hollis  
or the Chevrolet poised  
& revving in the driveway.

## Terri's Sunrise

---

she expected something different this morning  
black-and-white plaid flannel shirts on aluminum scarecrows  
maybe  
or a beatific vision on the termite-ridden doghouse  
or even a dog  
a sweet mongrel pup that somehow missed being drowned

but there was Patrick once again and always  
proffering the mug of instant Yuban and a couple  
of Corn Toasties  
blocking the window with a smile so heavy it made his head nod  
she didn't have to get up but she would  
he never put in enough Equal

## Rosa, Hollis Street, Framingham

---

Dameri's Market, shadow side  
of the Boston & Albany rails  
lining up bottles of Simpson Spring Ginger Ale  
on splintered shelves  
crushed Chesterfields in the pocket  
of her pink smock.

Later, bagging Mrs. Lupo's  
tomatoes at the register  
she glanced through the window  
at the prowling powder blue Pontiac.  
He was at the wheel, she was sure.  
It had been years.

They'd both clerked at the First National  
and fell from grace in the parking lot  
in back of Aldo's Grille. She still had his post card  
from Lackland Air Force Base tucked in her missal.  
Counting change, she wondered why he never changed  
his hairstyle.

## Susan at the Stop

---

*Rear Deliveries* ravaged the old marquee  
across the street and you looked  
down again at your sensible shoes  
willing the bus with the right number  
to appear. It was the first time  
in your suit. You hugged  
your briefcase remembering  
the joy of its purchase, virgin leather  
seducing your fingertips.

You felt full of holes and held  
your breath to keep yourself  
from being sucked inside out  
onto the sidewalk. It was summer,  
the city ripe with splitting  
heat. Everyone was at the curb  
waiting for buses. You stood  
waiting for yours shining  
like a lost dime in the soot.

## Gladys and Leona

---

Extraordinarily long ago  
Heigh Ho says Rowley  
my mother's twin sisters—bright bandanas  
covering their curlers—dug wax  
out of their ears  
with bobbie pins while Helen Trent  
sobbed on the radio  
failing at that bleak moment  
to find love over 35.

Behind clouds of Old Gold smoke  
they bloodied their mouths  
with my grandmother's lipstick  
while two pairs of loafers—outfitted  
with Liberty dimes—waited  
forlornly on the parlor rug  
beneath the print of The Lone Wolf.  
The upright piano remained  
silent as ever.

After my aunts were taken  
away by Donnie and Buddy  
for a seductive Blue Plate Special  
at the Crown Cafeteria  
I rifled through their bureau drawers  
until I heard my Uncle Tim  
hollering in the hen house.  
It must have been summer  
which would explain everything.

## April in Sausalito

---

It was actually October,  
a Helen Hunt Jackson kind of day  
blazing with bright blue weather.

April and her groom and her old  
dance teacher (up from L.A. to say Hi)  
were just back from Alcatraz,  
skin still burning from illicit winds,  
heads crammed with criminal whispers.

She shunned the shops,  
jaywalked across Bridgeway,  
the men zigzagging behind,  
off-balance in her tidal pull.

April took their hands to jump  
from sea-wall to weed-strewn rocks;  
squatted to check out a sulking crab;  
played ancient games with her eyes,  
wide and hazel and blatant with surprise.

Later, at the Casa Madrona,  
the night up to its neck in champagne,  
she slept like one of God's Greatest Hits.

## Oh, Claire

---

Cousin Claire rapt at the threshold, the sun  
having its way with her flowered print dress, whispers:  
The first ones in the driveway will never get home.  
Aunt Margaret's dentures are on the coffee table, not quite

in the Waterford ashtray. Everyone smells  
new, except Mrs. Maguire, who was, anyway,  
unexpected. There's plenty of cider  
and plain doughnuts for the kids. Halloween,

someone reckons, sure won't seem the same. Or Thanksgiving.  
Or the remainder, we're reminded, of the holiday  
litany. The back porch'll collapse  
under the pipe smoke. The boys want Claire

in the sunshine again but she traipses  
past their minds to cut some pie.  
Uncle Tim's been boxed for the angels  
and everyone's stopped by for dessert.

## Camden Carol

---

Shoeless Carol flatfoots  
down Haverstock Hill  
for another styleless trek back  
to Camden Town  
(where the Cratchits begat Tiny Tim)  
rifling barrels and bins  
for bits and bobs of useful refuse  
to stash in her selfish sleeves.

You notice her hair, shameless  
straight-up orange,  
jellied spikes stuck to her skin  
like Halloween candles.

29 days without rain nearly did her in,  
she lets you know, stealing your attention  
as you pass her spot  
by the Chalk Farm tube stop.

That kind of weather makes you lose your shoes,  
she'll say. They just dry up in the sun  
and blow away.  
God bless us, every one.

## Fiddler

---

That she intones in a resurrected tongue  
and with steely stare stills even the braggarts at the bar  
and delays the darts for a few minutes more  
is not for her miracle enough.

She must also flash her bow across the strings  
to wring from us unstinting obeisance  
as we stretch to glimpse ourselves in her gleaming brow.  
We shan't forgive her even later

when she sits neatly in jeans and tee shirt  
and blows smoke rings at the tin ceiling,  
a pint going warm at her perfect elbow.  
Around here you pay dearly for your mystique.

## Blind Song

---

After brunch at Downey's  
or a foreign film at the Ritz  
we often spot her in Headhouse Square  
or on South Street near the Wawa convenience store,  
fingering the autoharp in her lap and singing  
nameless songs, except at Christmas  
when one or two of us might know the words  
and mumble along before dropping a few quarters  
in her cup and moving on. Her voice,  
inexplicably, seems sweetened  
by her blindness, blending effortlessly with the air  
like the smell of tollhouse cookies.

My record collection is replete with blind black  
street songsters: Willie McTell  
telling his mama to wake up  
and turn the lamp down low, Lemon Jefferson  
wondering if a matchbox  
will hold his clothes, Willie Johnson  
growling gorgeous holy blues. . . . Dark nights  
and dark days down all their years, begging  
for spare change, singing the endless song  
they share with a nameless blind white woman  
in the City of Brotherly Love.

## Knee Reliquary Triptych

---

**I:** Daughters of endless revolutions,  
Hiplocked cataract grannies,  
Sisters left behind to do the dishes,  
I can see their knees.

Blinking aunties, schoolgirls  
Flaunting jumpropes and braces,  
Mothers swollen with presumption and despair,  
I can see their knees.

Nuns and witches, meter maids  
With no change to spare, lesbians  
Pregnant with eyeless diatribes,  
I can see their knees.

**II:** I can see their knees  
Gleaming and accusatory, imperfect  
Conitron, perfect  
Genuflection, squeezed  
Tight to stall the Resurrection,  
Pointing forever in the wrong direction.

**III:** Disembodied parts, eyed,  
Gazed at, pointed out, catalogued,  
Dismissed, dismembered, blessed. . .  
Oh Mary conceived without—

Why not your Body and Blood,  
Soul and Virginity passed about  
With a bit of wafer and wine  
To the faithful thronged at the rail  
Seeking a taste of redemption and a chance  
To ogle your immaculate knees?

Do this in remembrance  
Of smooth and wondrous knobs  
Of flesh and bone,  
Great Knees of Forgiveness. Please.

## If I Could Shimmy Like My Sister

---

Never had sisters, my brothers  
and I, so we'd invent them upstairs,  
pawing through bundles  
of Ma's duds in the attic closet. We'd take turns  
and do turns and laugh in amazement  
at how different a sister each brother could be  
just wearing the same old clothes. We  
still laugh today, resurrecting  
those closeted siblings for cheap jokes  
at cookouts  
while we toss burgers to the kids—  
nieces and nephews, brothers  
and sisters—  
just as normal as could be  
expected.

## 2812 Buford Highway

---

I thought I was all set but  
in April I got a headache. *The Atlantic*  
ran a piece in which  
the blues of Robert Johnson  
were compared to  
the blues of Jim Thompson  
as opposed to  
the blues of William Dean Howells  
the blues of Henry James  
the blues of James Russell Lowell  
for obvious and obverse examples  
which do not seem to matter much this spring  
thank Christ. Here  
in Atlanta the blues are backed  
all the way up Peachtree  
the blues of Braves Gone With the Wind  
the blues of Martin Luther King dreaming  
the blues of Leo Frank lynched and swinging  
the blues of Willie McTell blind and singing  
wake up, mama, the chain gang's dead and gone  
but they left their shackles out there on the lawn  
Coke and rank strangers running in the street. Shit  
should I shake it on down to Sarasota  
to do sunshine, fry my eyes like brown-yoked eggs  
brand my brain with migraine in Siesta Key  
gulp grouper, gape at gulls, gargle the Gulf?  
Maybe I should douse  
my pique in the salt sea  
but indecision sends me  
to the Waffle House.

## 398 Waverly Street

---

Everyone looked up when  
Ralphie Anderson walked in  
everyone looked up when anyone walked in  
hoping for a fresh face with a full wallet  
and a need to obliterate a little bit of despair  
but it was only Ralphie  
Ralph Waldo “Foolish Consistency” Anderson  
with his bolo tie and his black chinos  
and his I-once-had-sex-with-a-300-pound-whore-  
and-her-kid-sister soliloquies  
complete with scotch-and-soda-saturated sound effects

He’d just finished his shift baling papers  
at the *Framingham News*  
and his pale yellow Oxford button-down  
was tainted with his own  
newsprint fingerprints

Ralphie gently laid a blackened wad  
of dollar bills on the bar  
as Dave Troat resumed burbling  
and whispering an ancient Ashland girlfriend’s name  
to his VO and ginger  
and Helen Hakansson begged him  
for the last fucking time in the name  
of Jesus Mary and Joseph to shut the fuck up

Helen didn’t look  
all that bad tonight  
Ralphie moved closer  
and found a few more ratty singles

## July 5, Jersey Shore

---

Trixie & Thomas, her coy Belfast boy,  
do their wee dance in the pub  
parking lot, the Black Bush keeping  
their blue-collar blood vessels awash  
with prime red.

The trashcan-crashing  
night nudges them along to the boardwalk  
where the long-tongued liars  
& the moonlight gamblers  
& the midnight backsliders—bushwhacked  
by Chance—lie in splinters  
at their sensibly-shod feet.

Long ago  
they watched the fireworks twisting  
into the silver silence; now lightning  
spreads quick graffiti across  
the Atlantic sky.

They trudge  
in tandem past seagulls sparkling with squalor.  
Trix & Thom: singing scattered lines  
from ancient hymns (Latin ringing  
& rusty as pier railings), snaking  
into each other at the close of “Tantum Ergo”  
like a detail from the Book of Kells. Below  
them, unseen on the beach, the sand sculpture  
waits for the tide.

## Between Sunset & Ventura

---

He hit the curb curving past  
the Laurel Canyon Country Store  
where the legendary Dead  
had often stopped for rolling  
papers and guitar strings  
and the L.A. Times.  
He saw the skid  
marks smoking as the cycle  
took his leg away.

A lone coyote stalking a family pet  
on Lookout Mountain nearly answered  
the distant howl but froze  
in the sudden headlights  
of a Westec Security cruiser  
heading his way.  
He caught the cat  
by the birdbath and broke its neck  
under the wind chimes.

## Positano Sunday

---

Twin Neapolitan angels  
on the slow path to church  
pause on the ashen sand  
to feel the breath of Saracens  
on the hot breeze.

Breathless and bareheaded  
breasts tanned beneath their tees  
they barely make it to Mass:  
Offertory  
Consecration  
Priest's communion  
A handful of lire in the poor box.

Then to Chez Black  
for black-ink pasta  
with cuttlefish  
and sidewalk sunshine.  
They always sit facing Capri.

Deliberating on dessert  
Lucia sips provocatively still  
mineral water while Laura  
transfixes a begging dog  
with a perfect breadstick.

At the Jersey shore  
their cousins listen to Springsteen.

## Leaving Summer

---

he heated up a can  
of fish chowder  
and tossed in a handful of stale oyster  
crackers  
he didn't mind eating  
alone  
he could wipe his mouth  
on his flannel sleeve  
without fear of reprimand  
lean back in his chair at a precipitous  
angle  
and plant  
his heels on the tin tabletop  
even Nero was gone now  
off to chase driftwood  
in retriever heaven

he'd be smoking again  
by Thanksgiving  
three packs a day would get him  
through the worst winter  
he'd flick the ashes on the floor  
and toss the butts into the fireplace or close  
enough anyway  
but booze was  
out of the question  
until spring

## She liked reruns

---

Her latest symptoms  
were mainly mined  
from the medical manual  
we'd perversely picked  
as the perfect purchase  
for Mother's Day.  
There was no tripping up  
the Disease Queen.  
Not that it mattered.  
She was really sick—

of all of us,  
now moored to our own  
mid-life maladies;  
of herself  
and the headlong nights  
propelled by caffeine  
and nicotine,  
the peremptory dawns  
dead-ended  
by Percodan.

She died yawning and nodding,  
watching her favorite Columbo  
episode, the one  
with the Dobermans  
named Laurel and Hardy  
who'd kill  
when Nicol Williamson  
said "Rosebud."  
She liked reruns  
better than anybody.

## Jackknife

---

Fiona climbed the porch steps  
and let her fingertips graze  
the initials  
barely visible now in the soft  
rotting wood of the lopsided  
shingle. Wracked with hay fever  
she'd watched  
her brother carve them  
one August morning  
with his Wild Bill Elliott  
jackknife. Even then  
she was an old woman  
anticipating her presence  
here now with everyone else  
gone. She told the story once  
to Ann's crooked back  
when they were hanging wash  
on the convent clothesline. Ann licked  
her chapped lips and grabbed  
an icy pillowcase.  
She said nothing.

## Floater

---

he spotted another on Thursday  
slipping and sliding across his left eye  
his good eye godammit  
the right debilitated by second-hand smoke  
so he was told by his matter-of-fact eye guy  
at the strip mall

you've hung around nicotine fiends  
all your life and they ruined  
your vision and God knows  
what else

he'd christen this gnat-like pest Damigella  
after that gas-assed boss of his  
at the Flexi-Flo terminal  
they were all named after bosses  
shadowy anomalies  
chasing each other around endlessly  
in their vitreous playground  
as he stared for hours into the expanding space  
before him  
his favorite being O'Coyme  
his reductio-ad-punchline trainmaster  
at the Old Colony hump yard  
who'd respond to his every statement with  
that's what she said  
when the bed broke

## Cheerios in her cleavage

---

from a pre-dawn pantry raid  
Joanie awoke in a collapsed  
lawn chair in the laundry room  
a queen sheet folded neatly  
in her lap. She hated  
folding sheets except apparently  
when she was shitfaced.  
She remembered

smoking a few pre-cocktail  
joints in The Drawing Room  
parking lot with . . .  
with with with with with . . .  
Garth, that's it, Garth  
and then she must have  
gone inside. Simple  
enough. Then it would

have been Cape Codders  
until the cranberry bogs  
were spent along with all  
her spare change. It had to be  
Sunday. Her headache  
tolled with the bells.

## Jesus Comes to My Hometown

---

He'd been at the port wine again,  
His eyes reflecting the lunatic moon  
As He loitered with His handlers  
In the parking lot of the 24 Hour Store  
Waiting for John to pay the night clerk  
For a carton of fliptop box Parliaments.

He didn't have a drachma to His name  
But His pals kept the junk food coming  
And He revved them up with visions  
Of spinning suns and reeking winds  
And His forthcoming bloody triumph  
At the summit of a cursed and barren hill.

Alone at Saturday Mass at St. Stephen's,  
He sat in the last pew close to the gift shop,  
His rear end resting at the edge of the bench,  
His thumb knuckles pressed into His eyes.  
Softly muttering the Our Father, He ignored  
The collection basket when it passed Him by.

He headed west out of town on Route 9  
And stopped for a nice chat with my Mom  
At the Westborough state mental health farm.  
He held her hand gently in the nettle garden,  
Telling her that His mother was human too  
And that she often tended to overcook things.

## Railroad Union Spiders

---

Railroad spiders don't  
fuck around  
though once in a while a wasp  
does one in and it'll land  
in my coffee  
a wet strand of web  
lacing across the black  
dial phone  
to punctuate  
the moment of doom

When I answer on  
the fifth ring  
it'll be that asshole  
Mallory inquiring  
about the caboose report  
or the empty hopper  
on the fourth iron  
or the collection  
they're taking up  
for some careless brakeman

I'll eye the tile-bound spiders  
galloping across the florescent  
tubes to finish off  
a few exhausted moths  
and squeeze the receiver between  
my ear and my shoulder  
'til Mallory sucks in air  
and I take the opportunity  
to tell him I've got  
a dead one in my java

You're an exasperating son of a bitch  
he'll say as if a defunct arachnid  
in the hot black pool  
of a Mister Donut recyclable cup  
totally lacks cosmic significance  
and I'll remind him that we're both  
union men in a union war  
fighting for a union world  
and he'll just hang up  
which was the general idea

## Climb Upon My Knee

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I resurrect the ferocious moments:  
my fingers gripping my son's  
flannel shirt, the tipping chair,  
sudden blood in his precious eye;  
a bleak week away in a stranger's house  
full of damp sand and sugared cereal

discarded bandages in a tin wastebasket  
decorated with Ivy League pennants;  
overused beach towels on wire hangers,  
tongue-numbing frozen dinners for lunch,  
raspberry whirl ice cream for dinner  
in cardboard Stop & Shop bowls

midnight movies at the Pier Cinema:  
*Rocky Horror, Liquid Sky, Buckaroo*  
*Banzai, Evil Dead, The Texas Chainsaw*  
*Massacre*—a crazed quilt of motley cult flicks;  
self-deluding head-on collisions  
on the Dodgems in Carnival City

the reckless laugh of a boy grown old  
in an uninsured Volkswagen testing  
the S-curves on Old Ocean Road,  
the tired fire in that precious eye  
burning into the darkness just beyond  
his reflection in the windshield

## Footwork

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Celts clad in armored mist  
Clashed in her twisted twilight sheets.  
She longed to ride  
Away from the spread-eagled night.  
Her car was an aquarium.  
Salmon spawned in her rearview mirror,

Poseidon's trident rising  
Out of the dashboard like a taxi flag.  
Down the garden path  
She picked up the hitchhiking weed woman  
And her high-heeled downtown man  
Who took her dancing

At the blacktopped parking lot  
Hard by the parish church  
Where as a dime-eyed child  
She had logged one morose circus  
After another. The migrant clowns  
Were still hanging out

Offering her their body parts  
Like all the gash-faced boys  
She'd ever known. When  
It was time for a lady's choice  
She picked the only friendly face,  
Waltzing herself into the dawn.

## Time on My Hands Manifesto

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I will denounce  
No one whose name I cannot pronounce  
Or whose shoes I cannot afford  
Or who takes me in her arms and squeezes  
Out my death for another day or so

I will arrange my faults  
In inadequate circles  
Behind two-way mirrors

I will convert the Pop Tart upstarts  
Whose favorite weapon is an electric toothbrush  
And whose children are yapping Chihuahuas  
And steer them gently toward the tumbrels  
Through boulevards drenched in holy water  
With my heart on the back of my hand

I will no longer covet the CD collections  
Of protest song millionaires  
Or gaze with creamy lust into the eyes  
Of Ben and Jerry  
But I will still spill  
The occasional mocha malt  
Down my throat

I will genuflect at all hours  
And perhaps learn to tango

I will serve no sushi after its time  
Or ever

I shall live in a world without any  
Amens

## Rummaging

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The bullfighter dresses meticulously  
like a priest preparing for a solemn high  
requiem mass. Vestments are caressed,  
relics kissed, medals fondled, the Almighty  
invoked in whispers. Incense burns  
in an ancient ashtray.

The paperboy shoves the news through  
the mail slot, swigs from an aluminum can,  
wipes his chapped lips on the sleeve  
of his sweatshirt. His bike rusts against  
a tree. A killer is reprieved  
on the front page. Rain is predicted.

Julia has Wheat Chex again for dinner,  
forgoing the black-skinned banana  
on top of the microwave. She thought  
about the pleasant bookstore manager  
who came in about noon to drop off  
his wine-stained gabardine trousers.

Kevin can't call Blair because it's 3 am  
over there but much too early here  
to be scouring the bars for the girls  
who couldn't get out of town. He lights  
a beeswax candle and considers starting  
a Novena at St. Charles Borromeo.

Hector's Corolla stalls on the 101  
by the Barham Boulevard exit,  
his dirty laundry piled on the back seat.  
But he's in Los Feliz in a dumpster  
behind the El Niño Laundromat,  
his pockets full of shiny new quarters