

GRAVITY



DAVID GREENBERG

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poems

1994-2014

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Prologue

I don't have
a thought in my head
that's not about you
And you don't think
twice about me

Trap

It's a crime
to look too long
in some parts
pretty ones can turn
so suddenly—
a rodent
trapped in a corner
at any minute
is liable
to seethe back

delicate lips
camouflage fangs

Paper Moon

He sniffs the crystal meth.
Up his pink pug nose
Sucks on a cloudy
crack pipe
Or shoots some junk
into his delicate green veins

Tugging on his shirtsleeves
Impatiently awaiting a rush
He curiously inspects
The pieced skin

I've always been fascinated
With that little gap
Between bicep and forearm
The underside
well defined in tight boys
almost transparent
in slight ones

Now I'm drawn
To the tiny prick
In it—
The gentle blue wound

He pretends to live
an impoverished bohemian life
with his uncombed hair

and torn pants
asleep on the floor
in his parents'
Central Park West apartment

Blinds pulled
To shield his eyes
From the bright
And high-priced view

The Perfect Childhood

He was twelve
When his father died
Drunk on a motorcycle
Just outside Philly

He started smoking pot
Underneath the bleachers
After football practice
Got his first girl pregnant
And paid for the abortion
With money he stole
From the register at 7-11

He borrowed a car on acid
And they ain't seen him since

The old projector
In that run down movie house
Has been replaced by a Cineplex
The woods out back
Behind the neighbors' fence
A strip mall now

His Mom has kept his room
Exactly as she found it
The night she realized
He was never coming back

A Led Zeppelin poster
On the corkboard
And one of Jimi too
Dirty white briefs piled up
In the corner by the stereo

And tonight
As he fingers some old guy
In the Days Inn off Times Square
For enough cash to last
A half a day
There's a place set for him
At the table in a trailer park
Just outside Philly
As it has been every night
For the last two years

Jimmy

They locked him up
For two years on Rikers
But he's out now
A grown man in Manhattan

I saw him late last night
On Avenue A
Eyes bright with plans
To steal again
From older men
Some token thing

Leather boots
Heroin
Or a fist full of dollars

Trevor

arrives with a sunburned face
despondent droopy eyes
Sluggish feet in black high-tops
drag along a dusty concrete staircase
2 hours and 2 bags ago
the Central Park sun shone bright
on his slim junk flooded limbs
thighs against a fence
in the Sheep Meadow
pockets stuffed with tiny acid tabs
and dime bags

He reaches into his jeans
picking them off wooden floor planks
He grabs a left-over bag
opens the minute zip-lock plastic
Light creeps in slices
from the aluminum blinds

Brown pipe loaded
rumpled Oxford button-down
back on his fragile frame
he offers me a puff
The ritual to complete
another afternoon session

Don't expect more than an hour or so
every other week

He needs time to go up to Harlem
after school to score
Because he snorts and doesn't shoot
his arms remain unscarred and delicate
still belonging to a 17 year-old boy
despite all other circumstances

Trevor Take 2

Only calls when loaded

Fades out halfway into

"I really care about..."

Valium-drenched proclamation:

"I'll try to see you more."

Hash hazed plea:

"Don't leave me."

Seventeen year-olds are so

Unreliable

Especially when they're junkies

Impersonating prep school kids

Smack

Try as he might

The dazed and amused

Long haired teen is just

Not going to get hard

After two hits

Sal

He can't think
When he's not drunk
So he dreams
When he's sober

Gets himself arrested again

He says he wants
My love and respect
And loses my phone number
For the second time this week

I guess I miss him

Scott

Went back to Tucson
And it's too cold
In New York
With a pebble in my shoe
And an ache in my chest
This ain't no testimony
No butter on bread linguistics
A broken piece of candy
Whiskey and pizza crust
I'd rather be chewing
On someone

No valentine this year
You're just not here

New junkies line up
At the corner
Every afternoon
We lived in a dream
Across the street
Stopping in the snow
For canolies at midnight
Warming our feet
Under the sheets
And wrestling
For the blanket

Judith

“My first abortion
was in 1971
You could’ve been my son”

Much like her mother
She didn’t know
Who the father was

When in doubt
I say
Cut your own hair

I started when I was thirteen

Phillip

I don't want your money
Or a piece of the action
You'll never be happy
With or without me
Or your dreams
You'd rather die neglected
But I see the glint
In your eye
I'd say twinkle
But I'd be off

Just don't fall out of step
Stretch out and wait
As the song goes
A stale musky funk
Will keep you inside

Like I said
I see that look
In your eye

You want to be a master
You want to be a star
But you only got ten bucks
to your name

La Vieja Bruja Nod

My last five bucks bought
some stranger a drink
Acquaintances offer me
odd jobs to sweep
Their studio floors
or paint copper
sculpture pieces
I stop at a friend's
and ask for dinner
He offers me
cocaine instead

In Barcelona
five months ago
at least it was warm
The fruit & cheese cheap
If you go to the little markets
In the Barrio Gothic

Just follow an old woman
with a limp
who lugs plastic
grocery bags
balanced on arms

She's behind the cathedral
She'll lead you to it

2nd street to Avenue A

I followed

an elderly feminine voice

husky from cigarettes

to it's source

she's slumped at the corner

in a graffiti scarred doorway

a brown polyester sleeve

bunched

at her bicep

She's shooting up

Sanitarium

As last resort

Retreat to a rooftop

Soft hums & sunlight

Flickering in windows

Car horns radio blasts

Bus motors police sirens

Filtered through

a lonely windy prism

Our blue dome pricked

By a skyscraper tip

Wait for a familiar stranger

's telepathy

in B flat boys back

from basketball

Joyful screaming gulps

Muffled in pavement

Gremlin

His father beat him

His brother fucked him

His mother smothered him

And his sister...

He can't even remember her name

In juvie hall

He learned to enjoy

The visitors up inside

I found him

At midnight

Underneath that church

Near Avenue C

Contemplating

A tiny polluted lake

In a plastic bottle cap

Surrounded by rats

White T-Shirt And Blue Jeans

Hopeless and haunted
That's how I want to look
In the sunlight
In the mirror
Of your eyes
That's the bed I made
And never slept in with you

It's still last night
This morning
There's an infinite space
Between my thoughts
And your face

A simple pose
An oblivious gesture
Hair all a mess
Pale complexion

Hopeless and haunted
That's how I look
Twisted in these sheets
White T-shirt and blue jeans
Thrown on the floor
As I wait for your body
To slip out the door

Trucks

Pouty lower lip

skepticism in

squinting eyes

Head shaven

Black T-shirt

scrawled with some

senseless silkscreen

He rides by

on his board

slowing down

long enough

to return a look

without concern

left to bruise his face

Delirium

The goal has always been

To stop time

A kiss which never happens

Sloppy incantations

Missed in translation

Nervous sentiments and sweat

Empty bags and beer bottles

To debase the senses

With the appropriate substances

Going for broke

The pilgrimage

The transcendence

You just got to get high

Get off get wrecked

And take off your own pants

In the interest of speed

Look into a mirror

To see the face of God

Fall on the floor in vain

The flower that once bloomed

Now hangs upside down

Shriveled like a Jew

Nailed to a crucifix

But still you move

Closer to the light

A photosynthesis

Of sorts

So when you crash

You don't burn

You glow

After Rumi

I try to sleep
On an empty feeling

Face down
I stare at the ceiling

A pregnant pause
Stardust and television snow

I can't get enough of your face

The dumb grins
And senseless sentences
Confused thick lips
Steamy silhouettes
Against the shower curtains

All the particulars
Behind a white door

In the battle to see
Who cared less

I lost

The Virgins

I see you
on the screen
in little pictures
with your mates

I haven't heard
your voice
in quite a while

I used to have
a band too
Now I'm way
past my youth

What does it matter
how my heart
used to ache
I'm happy

for you
and your
latest
you

Earsnot

You must have realized
the kids from the crew
were all just playing
rehearsing their moves

I suppose
I will always
remember you
skating away
down Eastern Parkway

with your triumphs
and graffiti infamy
behind you even then

The Brooklyn sun
illuminated
your sweet face

You threw down your board
and stumbled a bit

Patiently
you're still waiting
for true fame

Which surely
will grow

recklessly
and free

one day
Kunle

Trouble

I was trouble
When I was with you
So I doubled back
and moved away

Gave up
Surrendered
To a little place in the suburbs
Bounded by adequate trees
And fake lakes

No phone calls
Or e-mails
For years you kept
Popping up in my dreams

I was trouble
When I was with you
Now I'm just bored

Love Song

I was nothing
Before I met you
An acquired attitude
Cold beer
And warm cigarettes

The solo

An eternity of yeah yeah yeahs
An annotated teenage fantasy

Variations on the same theme
Waiting for the phone to never ring

Or the right moment
To give up

Me and Your Shadow

You shoplifted my heart

A sweet-tooth

And a tiny fucked-up face

in negative space

It was never mine to take

“Love is that feeling you get

Right before you vomit”

You once said

The silent song

And diaphragm

Of a drowning man

Sure to break

For dancing apes

At masquerades

Filled with hollow grams

Mirrors and magnets

Oceans of Mylar

I'm the kindest kind of smile

You could ever devise

Now I'm overdrawn

I'm undercooked

Unsung

Done

Roll out

Roll back the old songs

In the Woe Is Me Hotel

The hush puppy lobby

With a coat check bell boy

Who waits in an ivory stroller

Decked out in plaid

The way out way my man

"He's in the wood"

That neighborhood

Is a whole lot of hand jive

And a little bit of thought

I'd like to check out

Your inner adult

More than that new club

And you would've liked me

To have been a pretty girl

But frankly I don't remember

What was in your best interest baby

When your ghost tried to catch a cab

For a headless tribute on a vending machine

It was a granite list memorial

A witty cellular stone

You were such a kidder

I was such a mystic

Can you handle that

Miss Amazing

Ly disconnected

Strum

Your family name

Ended with you

Another cycle

Another moon

pulls me into

who?

I see your lips

Lodged in the velvet sky

I've stock piled some stars

In this majestic roof

Fretted with golden dreams

For you

A night complicated by windshields

Voices lead me

But I'm too frustrated to explain

The pain

We tried to skip rocks

Box set lists

Trap hub cap

Congregations

With our matchbook bluff

We juggled the dirty looks

We lived life the way it should be

Empty

Constituents

situate your selves

On water

And watch

You'll suffer the short wave sea sickness

With a trademarked tweak

He had goose bumps on his bicep

I didn't expect him to reciprocate

Head beam billons

A belief in spacecraft flutters

Like butter

Four directions

Misperceptions

baptism in sweat

beneath wingless angels

wrapped in sheets

oscillating constantly

everywhere

a sharp point

pop in the perfect tempo

on the downtime

backbeat

I called

And hung up

On your machine

I used to send those hugs

Across miles

I've never been able

Or agile enough

To pull it off

For real

Candy skin jam

Homespun scars

Chapter rape

Boyish litter

Alien gold shards

Shipwreck

That's my moody boy

That's my bee bop stance

I drowned in me

The sooner you rise

The sooner you fall

In love

The sooner you try

The sooner you know

It's too deep to feel shallow

It's just me and your shadow

From bed to futon to bathroom floor

A little bit of teenage smut

We never melted we simply cracked

Bear your back side treat

From forth the fatal loins

Or so it goes

And so it went

The same chords

With a different grimace

Roughed up and ragged

We accentuate the comedy

Pensive and plaintive

Sensuous in the universe

The last fare

Paid in full

And painted

In retrospective red

Ah yes

He was an angel

He was a petty thief

He was a junky

A saint

He was my best friend

He was a liar

A poet

Drummer

A complete stranger

He was a kid

I'm chained to these statements

They keep me down

In disbelief

The fine truth I've blurred

And obscured

So don't believe a word I utter

A private school

A public hanging

Just a touch

He was on the nod

When he offered

That stray endearment

A lone viola plays in the subway

Forget the movie

Just listen to the soundtrack

I wasn't his lover

I was his enabler

Do you know what corpses say:

“Lost envelopes--

Road kill blood”

Call my bluff

I’m not capable of religious belief

I was young once too you know

Burn a hole in my pocket

A sarcastic burden

I’m a weak link

I’ll sever mine for old time’s sake

But if I had held my breath

Waiting for him to kick his habit

I would’ve been

6 feet under too

5 years ago

4 drinks later

3 bags since

2 hits after

1 last time

the sooner you rise

the sooner you fall

in love

the sooner you try

the sooner you know

it's too deep to feel shallow

hey it's just

Me and your shadow

Another broken promise

Another frozen tear

The morning sun is golden

But it's cold when you're not here

Have you ever

Have you ever

Ever heard

The sooner you rise

The sooner you fall

(In Memory of Mario Mezzacappa)

Happy Ending

A light bulb blows out

The phone doesn't ring

I've got my suspicions

And you had your fists

I'm feeling creepy

I'm feeling blessed

I want to kiss you

Regardless the risk

Darkness stretches

Across your cheek

An incomplete sentence

Or something obsolete

Let me begin again

A narrative

In first person

With the last chapter

Missing in action

Where did our happy ending go?

Where did our once upon a time lead?

To afterhours bars

And new spots to cop

Empty parks

And public bathrooms

Times Square

Astor Place

Or those exotic stops

The bodega At Third & C

It's the same old scene

Cigarettes and scary dreams

Midnight sidewalks

And eyes of green

I hear you whisper

When I scream

I feel you breathing

Next to me

A suitcase of memory

Get this picture down

White underwear

An empty glass

A door without a keyhole

I'm half a word away

And I'm not sorry

A shift in weight

That took a thousand years

To properly name

Contra pasto

Seen in Rome

On a Vespa

Or in New York

On a skateboard

But no one's got

A good idea

To paint on a ceiling

Anymore

Insomnia

I can't sleep

When you're not here

To keep me wide awake

Snap Shot

I can't talk my way

Out of this picture

The light's all wrong

Only shadows in negative space

I can't quite make out

The face

But I know

It's there

The opposite of everything is love

I love you

It's all I can do

I can't fight my way

Out of this plastic bag

From fire to ash

To blister

I put your cigarette out

Before the afterglow

On my arm

I never quit smoking

Because I never started

I was just thinking

About you

It's never the right thing to do

I borrowed your best excuse

Some magic dust

An incantation

And poof

You disappeared

Into the pollution

Of the moment

I never bought you flowers

But I ripped one out

Of the ground

Outside your apartment

And stuck it

In a shot glass

It all gets a little fuzzy

I think I fell asleep

The opposite of everything is love

8 by 10

35 millimeter

Or a digital print

Poison

You sucked up to divinity

And bought a pair of jeans

Fix the stereo

Be patient

And present

I stole this from a thief

I hustled the hustler

To the sound

Of one hand

Slapping your face

I left out the part

About love

Now that pronouns

Can represent

Ambiguous groans

Glasses clink

Hotel doors swing open

Frankly it's a mess

Let's order in

Subway light

And broken fingers

The game goes un-named

Belief in me

It's all we ever had

Subway

Escalator eyes

Hands on rubber rails

Chrome straps

Gargoyled faces

Pinned against plexiglass

Reflections

And plastic seats

It's raining

On the old rain

But only damp underneath

A transfer

And you're lost

I've been writing

This same thing

For years

Thinking it for longer

Speaking up

Frequently

I never get it down right

The turnstile

The skinny card

The lost token

Thoughts forever thought

broken

Right

I've been here before

With my face on the floor

And I'm always coming back for more

I've been bad for too long

Now it's time to get gone

And face the place where I fear to belong

You're right

You're always alright

And you've always got something to say

Your face makes me dream

Of the places I've been

But it all starts to seem too obscene

The things we could do

If I could make you my boo

But will you still love me tomorrow too

I need to embrace you

To seek truth within you

I need to confess to the mess that I guess

I always was with or without you

I need to undress you

To press through to see the best in you

But how can I impress you

And still bless you

When you're always right

And you've always got something to say

True

There's so much lying

Involved in telling

The truth

I was hungry

But not starving

When I first met you

Any reason will do

In my soul

There's no soul

But in my heart there must be love

I'm digging my own grave

As war rages on

We all need some soul

To lower the highs

And raise the lows

One of the Great Daddies

Holding up a mirror

The old man grimaced

Take a look into this

And you will see

the face of God

I was young

And so I played along

Never mastering

the game

All but for a chance

to pen a song

Now he is long gone

One of the great daddies

Of his generation

But his Spirit

runs through me

Endlessly

Like a river

to a sea

(In memory of Gregory Corso)

Streets

The stellar gray

urban decay

This is all to say

That I'm alive today

The haze that fades

The radio waves

I'm in the back of this cab

Heading back to play

In the snapshots

culled from heavenly

Patches of sunlight

pot smoke

last night's red light

lapsed memory mementos

a hip hop beat

a pause in the steam

the Puerto Rican girl's breath

is wafting

against the bodega

wall gently

this is all to say

that I'm alive today

still searching

for that sympathetic fix

a face half-formed

in the twilight

And still searching

for that perfect

picture

Swayed in a sexy sadness

Or was that madness

I'm glad at last

For a hint

soulful eyes

Distracted and sublime

I stay high all the time

I smoked the good shit

A hit and a slant rhyme

most times

Refined behind a line

I am what I am after hours

Divine

Plunge

into your mug

With my thug

Drugs

And money

Labor

Everybody

fucked

their mother

backwards

Empty Page

In hiatus from myself

It took a lot of denial

To get through

the biggest

Breakdown

I'm still feeling

The lull

And directionless

In a safe place

I tried to avoid

The topic of my situation

With an endless

Shiny patience

But it's an enviable space

To break free from the past

And start anew

As I stare at that blank page

Glowing white

And I'm not ready yet

To make the first

Crude mark

School of Dylan

Stoned baby blue

In Memphis

Just like a woman

You got to go

To school

Today

Tangled up

In the arms of love

And the hands of God

Looking at Jerusalem

White hat

Black coat

Red striped trousers

And sensible boots

Of leather

(A wide stance)

It's hard

I know

So

What did you see

Darling ones

Blind

And broken

Children

Twenty miles out of town

I thought

The answer to my prayer

Was you

It's just not as fun

As it used to be

Walking thru

Washington Square Park

On an asphalt

Wave of warmth

And fulfillment

We stopped a perfumed lady

Before we visited

An old friend of yours

On Bleecker Street

Now I'm on

Highway 61

Or did we just miss

Another road

Too hot to sleep

Not dark yet

But we're getting there

He was the

Best Mind

Of his little group of friends

Not the smartest

Or the most

Clever

But the kindest

And it's still not dark yet

But I'll get there

A ballad of a thinner man

Oh me

Oh you

Oh my

Oh mercy

A new one

Like a rolling

Stone

Good night

Donald

When you
were 15
in 1971
and my life
had just begun

you memorized
“Howl”
or so I heard
from someone
dear

who asked me
once
what I was to
you
and what you
were to me

(and after
all the years

I still don't know)

Lindsay

She was dead for years

Before any of her

So-called friends

had the balls

or even inclination

to inform me

And I loved her

Once—on Clinton

Street briefly when

we lived in a hazy

shade of bliss.

Too much wine

I told myself was

all it took to slip

into her body.

But I went in

head first with

no delusions

Unprotected for

the very first time.

I was naked as
the day I was cut.
And I went in deep
and she responded
sweetly.

Her friends and
her family
weren't exactly
like my friends and
family
and frankly Mister Banksy
stencils were blasé
blasé at the end of last
Century already...
Sorry I digressed.
Where was I...

Yes.

So after meeting
her mother
I knew it was all over.

And after greeting her
father, I couldn't fathom a future
with her or with-
out her
laughter.

Then came the storm
and it whitewashed the City
Cars abandoned by the cube
at Astor place
buried in snow
busses barely ran
subways shut down

We walked up Avenue A
down the center of the street
when she turned to me
and said:
"No matter how much
money you make
from your songs
you'll never earn
a fraction of what I am

going to inherit.”

But she didn't factor in

the fact that

she'd never live

long enough to ever

see one single shiny dime.

She was never mine

To hold or keep

Just lay with

Temporarily

Ans she'd never

Stumble 'cos

She already had

Taken all her falls

I was just a boy

Back then

No one took the time

To try to teach me how

to be a man

though a few tried
to help me be more like them.

Sad-eyed Lindsay
Of the Roosevelt
Re-married clan

I can't say
With a straight face
That I miss ya' cos you're

kinda

Still with me

Smiling in the light

On another sunny day

Waiting for your man

To drop his glassine wares

Onto your filthy table top

with care

I can't stop

But I just did

Moms Blue Calypso

Moms blue calypso

strum with rum and the only one

I knew who could purr

in my ear like a cat

on a black top roof

inclined to be the best one

I'll ever find

Moms blue calypso

divine and sharp

in the key of need

can play it on Saturday

but everyday feels like Monday

when the weight of the Ocean

drains your eyes of light

and the heavy lidded

solemnity ain't a'ight

don't lie to me now

don't lie to me son

don't cry for me child

just smile for me once

Moms blue calypso

Plucked and picked

On a tranquilo

guitar willed to me by glory

capo'd on the first fret

and I bet you knew it

before I blew it

lips puckered

to los limones

para mi

para ti

para the party

in the Hotel Chelsea

when the moon

was creeping in

and the streets of Cairo

were filled with red banners

of a hapless sort of hope

Moms blue calypso

Sung softly
to the motherless child
who sleeps in Antigua
while cops stand around
on Staten Island
and watch a giant collapse
in a heap of flesh
disinterested in life
those half zombies
and they walk around like
prison guards
'cos they know
we're all on death row

don't lie to me now
don't lie to me son
don't cry for me child
just smile for me once

Lack Like

All you selfish pricks

With your selfie clicks

And your likes and likes

Without even a thought

To enlist or even

Evolve past your

Self-interest or

Even dislike or

Discuss the currency

Of your lust

Nor the dust that's settled

On your real life

So uptight but so

Loose and lovely

In the light from the screen

I scream into micro-

phones but no one

listens

I tap and prod

And I peak and poke

But the letters like spokes

In a wheel are broke

And ain't nobody no-

body gonna fix 'em

when you're a nobody

no body—

and the elixir to this

mix is I know I

do it all too—I am

become death

destroyer of illusions

utilized to replace

my delusions which

have dissipated over

the years spent

guarded from the

bombardment of images

barreling towards me

like headlights on the highway

And there are times

when I do feel connected

to the power source

when deliberate accidents

happen and I use

the illusions to manifest

real life

spirit clicks

More than toe

jobs or ankle licks—

a desperate yearning

for the ultimate fix

Chill

Close the door

sit down

and chill

There's silence

to fill

if you want me to

I will

Or you can

stand inside the rain

and watch it wash away

all those yesterdays

Talk to me

It shouldn't

have to be

such a mystery

I've been running around

this town

chasing after

this and that

Falling in

and fading out

Close the door

sit down

and chill

I want to hear

every chapter

of your story