Imagine you're sitting on a city bus minding your own business. You are contemplating whether you should place your gum under the seat or into the tattered ticket stub from Battle of the High School Bands that somehow made it through that extra spin cycle. In between bumps you do a sit down version of the electric slide to Willie Nelson's "Always on My Mind" wearing one ear bud and trying to get the other one untangled from your zipper. You get that strange feeling that you are being watched, so discreet but probable paranoia, you glance around the bus. There's the self important business man who gets his 5 o'clock shadow at 3:17, the mother goose lady in the 4th row who has somehow managed to stitch up the tear in her frock with unwaxed dental floss, and out that one window that no one can close is a woodpecker telling knock knock jokes to the shadow of an ant.

Just to your right, but one seat behind you, is a man with a satellite dish head, microscope eyes and pens for fingers. He is capturing all of these things and writing them down on your takeout bag, which fell to the floor just as you passed Dizzy Whiz on St. Catherine's street. That man is Jimmy Bessec. He walks the streets of a thousand faces keeping different paces, eavesdropping while others are window shopping. He is the international man of mystery, the man of intrigue bustling your table while spying but not spying. He is fascinating fascination. He cannot restrain from being the spokesperson for all things deemed insane, mundane, less than humane, profane and above all arcane. His meticulous observations of this existence are unparalleled and deeply inspiring as they provoke you to awareness of the next-to-the-last grain of sand about to slip through the hourglass. He is both riveted and riveting, the right reverend of the reverend. He is the bewitching tour guide whose words take you on a scavenger hunt to all the unsuspecting destinations of his day. You need only sit on the edge of your seat, unbuttckle and keep at least one of your hands up to enjoy the ride. Once you have encountered Jimmy Bessec's poetry you will never see people or places the same. Prepare to be hypnotized, mesmerized and captive to his captivation.
For my mother Peggy, my wife Sarah,

and Joan Boyd, my first and only creative writing teacher.

Parked her wheelchair
on the cracked uneven sidewalk.
She chose a spot
close to nothing
and absent of shade
to smoke a 100 without
using her hands.
Because she needs
them both to work
the scratch off
ticket she bought less
than two minutes ago.
Couldn’t make it home.

And it’s hot sun above,
hot concrete below,
and the wheelchair
lady in between.

Blowing smoke from the corner
of her mouth.

Expression trying
to scare stiff paper
into complacency.

It’s not in me
to stick around
and see how it ends.
Screaming Tennis Is So Uncouth.

If I'd been trying ever so hard to make the ranks of your elitist club you might have a point.

But calling me unintellectual is like telling my houseplants they aren't good at being hybrid cars.

I play tennis with the net down, and at all times.

You won't know what's going on when I run upon you with a racket and a peach, loft it toward you, scream "TENNIS," then run away.

Somehow, I always win.

We rolled out of the cab and into the bowling alley Christmas party like the world's least likely rap video. I look around the lanes, wondering how many other wives and girlfriends brought their quiet, awkward men, on the promise of free beer.

After getting acquainted with the taps, I guard coats and purses with my life and half my ass. It seems a good night to get quite drunk and emotionally involved in other people's games of bowling. But all has been pre-determined: I too will wear ugly shoes and act surprised that I am terrible at this game.

Three kegs empty and the mob is leaving I find myself suddenly hugged like a tackle falling on me. "Oh, poor Jimmy," in a manner too jovial for those words. I missed the context but appreciated the sentiment nonetheless.
We worked together at this restaurant. Alternating between hosting or clearing plates.

A white girl from the country who loved to say "ghetto." It decorated her speech with the fit of a glove stuffed with blonde dreadlocks.

One time, it was her day at the door. This young bluegrass fiddle prodigy came in for dinner with his parents. Before they were seated, she managed to say "ghetto" to them.

It was just like walking through some inner city and being robbed at knife-point by a jonesing piece of folk art.

All four of us kicked out of the Kevin Smith movie before it began.

Real seventeen year olds don't get so worked up over Galaga, I guess. Still, the manager could have at least let us finish teaching the space bugs not to fuck with our ship.

Jon drove us back to Shaun's Mom's House, where we took turns blaming Craig for being the youngest and waited for our town's midnight curfew.

We stepped outside at five minutes till and watched the traffic light switch to blinking caution which was our cue to dance on the yellow lines.

Half a minute of improvised tap. We looked like a mosh pit of cloggers.

Then a car was heading right toward us. We ran inside like desperate men, hoping the driver wouldn't turn us in.
He moves aging knees and a jean jacket to the bus seat directly in front of me. Just a dull, tired, fifty-year-old.

As soon as he’s seated, I see the bird shit. A fecal bull’s-eye in the center of his denim.

The whole bus ride I wonder if I should convey the bad news. But his grim face, worn clothes, use of the TARC, and finally, upon taking his stop, the bee line to a pay phone make it all too clear.

He knows he’s been shit on for a while now. He just doesn’t know what to do about it.

I’ve never seen a “stop caring” switch. It happens as the rocks turn to sand and sand falls to the bottom of the glass. Now there’s sand in your coffee. But when you’ve been drinking your beverages like that for so long it’s hard to remember what sugar even is.
It wasn't my kind of bar, but it had been one of those workdays where you don't get done so much as survive. Listening to factory workers talk shit about the Mayor seemed a relative privilege. I was close to re-imagining my sanity when these two burly gentlemen in NASCAR T-shirts with the sleeves cut off arrived.

They ordered their Bud Lights, and were starting toward the billiards, when the one we'll call Richard Petty stopped abruptly to ponder aloud, "Why ain't the air conditioner on?"

Although he appeared to be asking God, or the room itself, the bartender assumed he was talking to her and replied, "Cause it ain't hot," she looked at us four or five barties for confirmation. We all gave our best non-verbal "We are quite comfortable..."

thanks for asking. Dale Earnhardt scoffed. "But it's Summertime. Ain't you supposed to run it in the summertime?"

"NO. You're supposed to RUN IT when it's HOT."

But all us barties knew she was losing the race. Petty chimed back in, "Look, we've been workin' KHUN-STRUCITN all day." His tone implied that anyone who questioned the bravado of such an act was little more than a terrorist who sells Ketamine to orphans.

The bartender rolled her eyes and closed the door, fighting a pleasant April Breeze to do so. Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty tied for victory.
Today at work a table of ladies was talking about how much they hate Facebook.

As I listened in I realized they hate it in the same way I hate pornography.

Because the thing that girl did in that one film, you know, at about eight minutes and thirty-seven seconds into scene two, in the left-hand corner of the screen was just wrong.

Squint and bit zoom I swear you'll see it.

Disgusting.

This fat guy farted and I heard it, even though I was outside and not very close to him.

Before I can think to spare his dignity, my head jerks toward the man like a dog that just heard something interesting in the distance.

And I realize I should have looked away at the moment our eyes meet.

We both force awkward laughter.

I walk a mile more and see no other pedestrians.
Seventeen. double pneumonia, waiting to get a shot thick as Karo Syrup into a bony asscheek. Mom was arguing over insurance with the receptionist as I attempted interest in Homes and Gardens for lack of Game Boy batteries.

As I gave up on the magazine, a nurse emerged, called the name "Roosevelt Johnson." I had to know who owned that. He was better than I imagined. White beard to his belly-button, Einstein hair inseparable from the beard, arms like a cartoon sailor, and tattoos that backed up his nautical legacy.

He stood, started forward with a limp that refused a cane on principal.

As he made his way up I contemplated both our states. Myself young, but perpetually ill. Still coughing brown after two weeks. The man, old, slow, and steadily reaching the end of his race.

Eventually, I received the injection. Karo Syrup slowly stung its way down my thigh. I walked with mom to the car doing a bad impression of Roosevelt Johnson.

His co-workers who thought it was a good idea to bring him out tonight are now backing away from association as he proceeds to get so drunk it can be seen from space.

Two shots ago his rap song was surprisingly good. But now he's onto the joke about the whorehouse. There's no punch line. It's just an exercise in repeating the word WHORE-HOUSE!

The co-workers know they must intervene before that clique of leather jacket posers gets tired of hearing they're not so fucking big. As they help him to the waiting cab he says:

"I guess this is where I get off." They don't know if he's conceding defeat or finally concluding his terrible joke.
Whoever Paul was, it was his birthday. This much I gathered from reading the cake in the walk-in fridge as I left with a tub of butter balls.

Happy Birthday Sexy Paul in cursive blue on white, and encased in transparent plastic, then. Love Miranda

That night I received a few more tables than I could handle, plus Sexy Paul and Miranda

He was balding, middle-aged. To say he was ugly would imply that he stood out in some way. But Miranda, she was out of his, mine, and most leagues. Her only flaw being that she was clearly artificially the color of expired carrot juice.

I was late with every course and water refill. Miranda was gracious through my apologies, and Paul didn't seem capable of any emotion beyond nonchalance.

It was time to present the cake. I had to get people to sing with me.

But instead of asking, I just brought the cake to the server station. Started lighting the 4 and the 0 with my Zippo and said, "If anyone wants to hear me call this guy Sexy Paul to his face come sing "Happy Birthday."

I got six people.

As we walked to the table the hostess asked me, "Will you really?" And I said, "I think so."

I looked straight at him and sang his name as it read on the cake.

Miranda applauded through suppressed laughter.

Paul's facial expression was somewhere between smirk and death threat.
Maybe if I don’t know you you’re not very real to me.

SUV sideswipes a little purple car at Fourth and Kentucky and all I can think is “Oh man. Really?”

Lady in a denim dress has her van door open, stands halfway out watching fluids drip from the bottom of each vehicle.

No one seems injured, but her mouth hangs open.

She sees me trying to move ahead around her van taking up much of the crosswalk.

Gives me a dirty look. I’m supposed to stand with my mouth open too.

Maybe if I don’t know you you’re not very real to me. But I’ll do my best not to gawk at your misfortune as if it’s of use.

The Airbag Deployed late

Thanks A Lot

When my seventh grade science teacher entered the room to the sounds of the class testing their lungs on an easy subject, she launched into inaction: “Cut it out, kids. You shouldn’t pick on Jiminy just because he’s different.”

I wondered what I’d done to deserve to be pushed under the bus by a former prom queen.
Working the host stand in the old hotel restaurant,
like being inside the cicada shell
of fancy.

Nothing to do but rub
my three day beard,
and stare into
my wrinkled pants,
and wonder who among my co-workers
was a big enough spaz to have written
Masters
of
Disaster
in large letters on my podium.

Finally, we had a customer.

A man in cutoff jeans
and hair that can only be achieved
by waking up
and avoiding mirrors.
He got to my podium,
placed both hands
for stability
and asked in a voice
of strained urgency,
"Where's the bar?"

A few tense seconds
as looked for the right words.
But nothing could fathom the blow of
"Sir, this is a dry town."

Hands dropped
from the podium.
Eyes enlarged
in disbelief.
"You're telling me I drove ten miles
into a dry town."

Before I could confirm the facts for him
he turned and almost ran
through a group of three
old ladies.
They approached
and one lady said,
"It's not like he needed it.
He already reeked.
Something near the window, please.
It's such a sunny day."

I sat them at their high horse table,
where they would soon say
something stupid to the server
along the lines of
"We need decaf coffee."

I went back to my podium
and tried
unsuccessfully
to erase all remnants
of the master of disaster.
The man on the second floor of the library.

Two index cards, stuffed into either side of his ever-present toboggan.

It's a rejection of his peripheral, in favor of what lies in front of him.

Ten or twelve slips of paper laid out on his table, shifting their place from time to time.

He converses freely. With whom or what I don't know, but it's neither clandestine muttering or the screams of a man to be removed by security.

I always stare a little too long. Partly out of fascination but mainly because I know he's rigged not to see the likes of me.

When I pull myself away, back to my literary search I have an envy of his perfect tunnel vision.

I get tired of looking left or right to see if my crazy has finally caught up with me.

Redneck Bar

It's funny how if anyone here could see what's in my mind I'd be getting my ass beat right now. But if I stay silent they accept me as one of their own.

I pull out my trusty corn cob pipe, somehow it's a red flag. 'Boy you tryin' to smoke dope in here?' It's weird how here I'm boy,' downtown I'm a hill-billy Honkey. 'It's just tobacco, man.' The upright citizen walks over, jerks my pout off the bar. His grizzled face studies it real good. Satisfied, drops it back, goes back to his Budweiser and chums. I finish my High Life and leave without playing the jukebox as I'd first intended.

Sometimes the price of having cheap beer is just too expensive.
A girl with blonde dreadlocks is changing clothes at the red light as if ear windows make her invisible. I look for a second too long then pretend my cigarette is very interesting. The green light absolves me of any further voyeurism, and I walk as the blinking hand suggests.

Less than a block later a black lady is running with a ponytail redneck close behind. "Why you followin' me? We got nothing to talk about, and I gotta go pay my bill." Somehow she catches my eye. "What you think you're lookin' at? Ma'am, I've been doing my best not to look at anything for a while now."

I toss my cigarette and cross the street again.

Bittersweet is not always the same as true sadness. Some nights there's nothing better than hearing old country singers do covers of dead country singers.

Bring on this blue night. I'm ready to rename some aspect of the past, my glory days.

And maybe I wasn't much better then, but I'll keep raising this glass until I convince myself. Until the mist and the fog make it true enough.

Crooked smile, dirty old chair, and Merle Haggard on the radio, doing his best lefty Frizzell.
Ten mile drive for groceries, and the only other dining options are Hardees or my Mamaw's.

However you go, you'll see most everyone you know.

Taciturn farmers wave from pickups as you pass on roads too narrow for two lane traffic.

Christina Aguilera plays with the windows rolled down so little brother can prove sophistication beyond this place.

Little does he know all the hipsters in the city are learning banjo ballads to match their flannel shirts.

Upon returning, Food Country bags in both hands: "Oh mom, before I forget, the Stapletons, the Mullineses, the Spiveys, and the Early's all said to say hi to you."

"That's nice," she replies while crushing a butt into the ashtray.

Eyes never moving from the Law and Order marathon.

I clipped my WAL*MART name badge to my shirt pocket and smoked some marijuana.

More out of principle than desire.

Big bags of dirt, Hostas, and lawn timbers awaited my arrival.

"Jimmy, where's your vest?"

"Hell, I don't know. I haven't seen it for weeks."

"What is this store going to do with you?"

"The same thing they've been doing to me?"

"Re-stack the manure bags until you get a customer."

Five minutes later a Crown Victoria with flashing lights followed a rickety Dodge Shadow to the end of pursuit.

Both stopped ten feet from the stack of soil bags.

I was suddenly swamped with customers who wanted one bag of dirt and information.

"How could I know? It just happened."

Each different phrasing of the question stealing...
the rest
of my good feeling
the State Trooper
hadn't already taken.

But eventually
the cop drove away
with the Shadow's driver.
I left the dirt
and went back to my shit.

Then a man in a Jeep Cherokee
drove up to the marble pebbles.
He was kind,
helped me load
all ten
fifty-pound bags.

Finally, he worked up the nerve to tell me:
"I really liked you as the retarded, paranoid guy in the play I saw last year."

"Thank you."

As he drove off I thought:
Well, it was nice to talk to someone
who wanted more
than the dirt at 8 A.M.

I tore a big hole
in a bag of peat moss
and put it in
the discount bin
for a friend I'd see later,
and pondered
the best way
to get high on my lunch break.

A white tablecloth crew
drags its Sunday ass
through the motions
of dinner set up.

Two servers in black shirts and long aprons
place silver and plates.
Discuss the brand names
of their hangovers.

Bartender sniffs
and pinches at
the recent discomfort.
Then wipes a glass
with a seriousness
that seems exaggerated,
but he means it.

Hostess listening
to an i-Pod
and the white noise
of a vacuum.
Drowning yesterday
ineffectively.

Common sense
set to vibrate.
Messages taken later.

Because invented problems
are easier.
than saving the world, than creating a dream.

Glide them like volume control. Until you're suddenly in the high twenties on a bruised planet full of dusty guitars, setting up for dinner on a Sunday afternoon.