Disaster Recovery Drawer

Matthew L. London
West Virginia University

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Disaster Recovery Drawer

Matthew L. London

Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts & Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing

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ABSTRACT

Disaster Recovery Drawer

Matthew L. London

This collection of poems engages the reader to think about the everyday landscape and activities, turn the focus-lights up, and stare at what things really are: the absurd definitions explained through the surreal. Like The Dream Songs, the speaker of the book is dropped in at various junctions as another character rather than (always) as an “I.” While these poems are not necessarily an overarching narrative, the sections address themes of relationship, future, and loss. The middle section titled “Dream Cities” is designed as a chapbook, at once independent of and supplementary to the manuscript as a whole.
What Is This Thing?

_Disaster Recovery Drawer_ is a tour into what I see as contemporary surrealism. The poems are born from my interests in both Russian OBERIU (the group of Russian Futurists under the banner of “Union of Real Art”) and surrealism, specifically French surrealism and its tendrils in contemporary writers. Writers whose lineage I am interested in participating in include Daniil Kharms, Paul Eluard, James Tate, Zachary Schomburg, Michael Earl Craig, and Matthea Harvey. The chapbook-style second section titled “Dream Cities” is my attempt at reaching into the absurd in the same fashion Kharms accomplishes in his prose poems and short fictions in _Today I Wrote about Nothing_. Kharms’ writings quickly set up a character and a scene and let the two (however absurd) play out according to what we, as readers, bring to the poem with our previous knowledge of the character presented (say, an old man) and the scene (a small house). My writing is intended to diverge from a nihilistic absurd vein and rather mine a more sentimental version of the absurd. Ralph Angel’s and Mary Ruefle’s poetry is a good measure for soft surrealism, and in that same effort I strive for a soft absurd impact.

I see the nihilistic absurd and absurd for the sake of absurdity as art that falls short of the mark. Ultimately, there should be an undercurrent of emotion that can be gotten at through the reading experience. “Dream Cities” challenges the readers to immerse themselves in a not-too-distant future and to consider these futures over the course of many pages of text and many different outlooks. In a way, this is something that Rod Serling and _The Twilight Zone_ attempted to create: a future that is believable enough to emotionally affect the viewer and to cause him or her to think about the consequences. “Dream Cities” is not _The Twilight Zone_. _The Twilight Zone_ has viewers image along with current trends in culture. For instance, many _Twilight Zone_ episodes will take place in a future time where technology or,
even more specifically, robots will play central roles. In this way, *The Twilight Zone* uses what was popular in the mid sixties and projects what will happen if those current trends come to fruition as dominant fixtures in everyday life. A modern perspective would depict society operating as a one-stop-shop because of the Wal-Mart or Super-Mart trends. “Dream Cities” asks the reader to make the same logical steps as *The Twilight Zone* asks, going from present to future but considering other aspects of life: the smaller gears of change. Take for instance the “Dream City” poem “Winter Wunderland.” The only suspension of disbelief must be that the climate of the world is capable of having a freak snowstorm. If the reader can dream in that fashion, all the following logical steps of progression are laid out for them. Zachary Schomburg nicely describes the Surrealism at work in poetry like mine saying, “Surrealism [is achieved] through a liminal world of dream-logic, informed by its own myth and folklore.”

*Disaster Recovery Drawer* leads the readers through a museum of disasters, yet, as is the purpose of the manuscript, the reader is challenged to see disasters in new lights, even asking the reader to remove the negative connotation of “disaster.” This disaster landscape is painted with the brush strokes of anxiety (anxiety over relationships, anxiety over future, over loss -- these drive the manuscript) and the overly literal, thereby turning the lights up on the everyday-landscape until the details of that landscape are so stark and focused that they become surreal. Borrowing from Andre Breton, these poems in *Disaster Recovery Drawer* are after the “spark, when emotional sincerity is juxtaposed with the quirk and humor born from the subverted reality of dream-logic.” These poems are only from the everyday. They are William’s plums in “This is just to say.” They are plums with one thing changed about them. The plums in this manuscript are not grown from trees but are mined. That is how the dream-logic in *Disaster Recovery Drawer* operates. But it’s not enough to have the image
without Breton’s spark. So these plums are mined from the cave where your dog got lost and maybe died, but your dog’s ghost is certainly there.

*Disaster Recovery Drawer* also explores depths of family and loss, themes that were unconscious to me as I wrote. For the manuscript, the sections were ultimately revised into thematic concerns, starting with family and relationship, moving to the future, and ending with loss or leaving. Ultimately, *Disaster Recovery Drawer* is about reimagining what we think we know, allowing dream-logic to help readers redefine definitions and scenarios. The reimagining makes use of Surrealism, while the poem points out just how absurd the everyday landscape really is.

**A Note on Form**

The poems in *Disaster Recovery Drawer* find life from theatre. Therefore the lines in the poems behave like the breath in an actor, carefully delivering parts of the scene and emotion through breath and intonation, indicative of energy and exhaustion. The actor’s delivery reveals the information and emotion of the play to the audience. The lineated poems in *Disaster Recovery Drawer* are the actor’s breath. These lines adhere to method acting in order for the poems in this manuscript to represent and wear the skin of the everyday landscape. Method acting requires the actor to become -- to live! -- whatever is being portrayed. In fact, the actor ceases to portray and instead *is* the part he is tasked to represent. So if the lines in *Disaster Recovery Drawer* are lines delivered by an actor (the actor’s breath), the lines are delivered according to Method acting (as opposed to, say, Vaudeville style). For these lines to wear the skin of the everyday language the lines must *become* everyday language. In that sense, the lines breath control and delivery as the everyday language breathes control and delivery.
The many prose poems (story) in the manuscript privilege the anecdotal representation of an emotional space whereas the lineated poems (the song, as it were) privilege the actual emotional space. I find it best to keep these different goals from comingling (I don’t want the anecdote-emotion in my lineated poems). The anecdotal in “Dream Cities” is such that the subject matter requires logical steps to achieve the representation of an emotional space. In this sense, the subject matter is more experimental. “Stray,” for instance (a lineated poem), doesn’t want experimental subject matter or even experimental characters. The subject matter is the reader and the reader’s dog. The emotional space is created in the absence of something the reader would hold dear. My lineated poems do not want to ask a reader to logically negotiate an emotion. The goal is to have any suspension of disbelief occur early. My prose poems may have the suspension of disbelief built up by every logical step, thereby creating the poem’s own world and adhering to that world’s own laws.
Disaster Recovery Drawer

poems by Matt London
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for the laughing and the crying
DISASTER RECOVERY is the process, policies and procedures related to preparing for recovery or continuation of technology infrastructure critical to an organization after a natural or human-induced disaster.

--Wikipedia
MUSEUM OF DISASTERS

Tours with Sunrise

In this room we have all three of the recurring dreams you’ve had over the course of your life.

No, honey, this is meant for the adults.

As I was saying, this is a very special room. In addition to dreams we have been able to procure for you: love.

What? No there will be no questions at this time.

Museum space is limited so please disregard the photographs of ribbons and continue down the hall to your left.
Disaster Recovery Drawer

This is where all the women and children are.
All the walls are made from bleached particleboard.
It has a nice, wood-laminate facing.
Despite the hollow cold, no fires are allowed.
They have battened down their furniture.
They have loosed their dreams.
All have released their prayers.
And the world is very slippery, very strong.
Refuse

Two trashcans talk to one another, toppled over near the “Watch Children” sign. At this point in the story, we’ve already missed the conflict. We came across them while we rode our 10-speeds – the cans’ mouths agape with clear exhaustion, the blue Rubbermaid drooling a little quicksilver oil on the yellow grass. We wondered who the girl was – surely a girl had been the catalyst of all the fall out. Just as we passed, the cheap brown can sighed, leaked a tear. And we all thought about you: how we couldn’t pedal faster, how the right leg wears out long before the left.
In the bush where your brother lives

You'll be asked to renno the bathroom,
lay some Travertine tile and grout.

But you tell him this is going too far;
he’s not a handyman and he’s not playing dad.

He’ll remind you to pick out a color swatch
and give his wife some reassurance.

You flip on a football game and wish
you were the backup quarterback.

Your brother breaks a sink
so you let him down easy in your own way.

In about an hour you’ll tell him he’s tacky
for renting in this neighborhood.

That he, as you know, remains a father, and
no one wears this place better than he.
When Bigfoot Ceased Existing

In the middle nineteen hundreds at a well respected scientific gathering down south over a long weekend, scholars and practitioners gathered to discuss important matters of state. They came from all over the world. Even from the landlocked countries. Bigfoot was there, not in chains or a cage or a top hat. He was loitering towards the rear of the meeting hall. Eating crackers and smiling at the passing men of science. No one spoke. There were a few coughs. Then the ballots were passed. And Bigfoot was shown the door. After the votes were tallied, majority ruled to request Bigfoot lie low for a while. He never entered the meeting hall again, and people began to say they thought they never saw the creature there in the first place. It was just a tall guy. Or no guy at all. One scientist who originally voted to oust Bigfoot began sobbing and saying Bigfoot really exists. The scientists around her immediately wrote scholarly articles debunking her claims. They discredited and shunned her from the scientific community. Her family now owns real estate in the greater Miami area.
(another) “Modest Proposal”

can I have your phone number?
don’t worry.
I won’t pester you.
but
before I conclude,
could I ask a few things?
it will only take a minute,
probably less,
    okay. Here goes:
how long do you like your hair?
what’s your favorite four letter word?
if you had to describe yourself as a cloud, what formation would you pick?
and
if I was an unpublished screenplay, non-WGA,
would you read me to your children? colleagues?
    just as some examples.
Oh, we will talk late into the night
    with only the commercials on
The first clock

A great number of people were gathered at the Royal Swiss National Theatre one evening. An exciting announcement was about to be passed down to all the citizens of the country. Even some diplomats from neighboring countries – even countries across large bodies of water – would be in attendance. A great, mustached man known as Dr. Clement took the stage, flourishing his way through the heavy, scarlet curtain. *This is for all of us* and he flung open his dress shirt, popping the buttons along the seam into the crowd, his tie still narrowly swinging around his Adam’s apple. Someone in the front row started gagging. *Quick, the man in the front row* a woman shouted and tossed back her bonnet. She made a dash for the man. Dr. Clement studied his audience. Everyone forgot about him and came to the aid of the man in the front row. *Look* someone said *he can tell time indoors*. A handful of patrons glanced up then went back to attending to the man. Dr. Clement wailed and removed the pendulum from his shirt collar. He took out his embroidered handkerchief and began wiping off the numbers around his chest and stomach. *That is not acceptable in this place* said a woman who was no longer of importance to the health of the man. *And you should be ashamed of yourself*. She took her pointer fingers and, with a sour scowl, jabbed them up at Dr. Clement. Dr. Clement could not find his way back through the curtains. He still lives on that stage to this day.
You are a 12-inch action figure

and I am a blacksmith.
It’s odd that we should meet this way.
We were never meant to be together,
you being that soft, low-temperature malleable type
and me with these hard soot hands.
Spooning is difficult,
but you let me adjust you to fit in the crook of my elbow
just so.
Yet, we will never marry.
They will never allow it.
The wedding attire will be returned
to be reimbursed only at half face value,
and I’ll turn your head just as you blush,
before you snap under the anger.
Still, I will take you home,
carry you across the threshold –
exuberant, teethy-smile,
spinning you around and tossing you up, excited
to show you to mom.
The First Can of Cola

Sarah Walters returned from the drug store one Friday afternoon. Her husband, Allyn Walters, was home because he was working the midnight shift at the mill. She brought back with her the usual items: half-dozen brown eggs, carton of whole milk, a loaf of sliced bread, some flour, and two colas (one for herself and one for her husband). Allyn met her at the door to take the brown paper bag from her (she was with child). Sarah wouldn’t let him take the parcel. She teared up around her right eye, the one most susceptible to emotion, Allyn remembered. *What is it, honey?* She set the groceries out on the credenza in the breezeway, placing each item on the crimson runner one at a time. The flour she handed directly to Allyn. And, before she crumpled the bag (a sound which Allyn always hated because it seemed too loud for paper), she produced two silver, sweating metal cylinders. In the end, the Walters froze one can. Cut it in two with a hack-saw to get at the cola. The other cola took on metal shavings in its dark bubbles. Mr. Walter used a hand-cranked can opener for it that one.
Knock, Knock

Edgar Allan Poe and I
walk into a bar.

It’s a locals only,
cash only situation.

He is a nervous wreck;
he forgot his shoes.

Me, I’m a realist.
I spill my sorrows.
Heritage

I’m in a phase where I don’t cut my fingernails. They are cantilevered out over my fingertips and are yellow and gray and dangerous. A piece of bicycle chain grit is under my left index fingernail. I don’t even clean them out. I carry this decay. This story will probably appear in my family tree. Somehow.
Watching *Perfect Strangers* with Mom

Balki is my foreign aunt
but I don’t have any
knowledge of another
language.

Mom tells me I don’t need
any skills at conjugation
and I’ll please a woman
one day.

I never got it
– was it a joke? no? –
that I’m related to
a character.
Death by Bus

for Rosemary

What if a group of people wanted to end their lives? They decide on throwing themselves in front of a bus. I heard a person say this once. *Now let's all go throw ourselves in front of a bus.*

Okay, that might work. For the first person. But what about the others? See, the first person would get splattered by the bus, no problem. The suicide would go off without a hitch. Maybe another person might make it simply out of the bus driver's shock. But, if you have a group of 3 or more people trying to throw themselves in front of a bus (and, by the way, this works for “under a bus” folks as well), then the other, later members will find this means of suicide more difficult. First, an APB will go out about crazed pedestrians jumping in front of busses. Police might be called. Oh, they will be called to the scene of the accident. Public transportation will suffer. Next, the remaining members of the group will jump out in front of alert bus drivers. The bus will stop, and now the would-be suicide will look like a buffoon, possibly compounding the reasons to commit suicide in the first place. Maybe someone in Hollywood will buy the rights to this story. Now the suicide-group members will be infamous and such an attraction that everyone will know who they are and will stop when they get in the road. There could be autographs. All of the survivors begin wearing masks. And they will all die of an old age. They will be so cherished.
Midnight Disturbia

I’ve been having really active dreams lately. Most of them have to do with old motorcycles and motorcycles for older people – midlife crisis bikes. – And helmets on occasion.

Okay, the bike is my dad’s, but he doesn’t ride it anymore. And it’s maroon. But I would like to have it, in my dream, that is, not like when, in my wildest dreams! No.

These dreams always end dirty: digging in the front yard. I think I’m looking for hidden things plastic or deep, primary colors faded to something like cupcake icing.
One-Bed Room

When Mr. and Mrs. Dean Sommerset arrived at the Suncrest Inn and Lounge, they found something most horrifying in their room. Now, the Sommersets have been vacationing at the Suncrest Inn and Lounge for the past twelve years and never so much as once were they troubled by the slightest hiccup from the lodgings. To their everlasting shock, Mr. and Mrs. Dean Sommerset found themselves in the presence of a king size bed. *What are we to do* exclaimed Mrs. Dean Sommerset, tightly grabbing her husband’s lapel. *Marian* said the good Mr. Sommerset. *Get out of here. Get out of here at once!* Mrs. Dean Sommerset backpedalled out of the room, nearly tripping over the curb outside. Mr. Sommerset swore at the bed and demanded to know the whereabouts of the two small, individual beds – the twin beds. *I’ll have you know we aren’t sleeping here.* Upon hearing the ruckus outside, a bell hop immediately ran to the aid of the Sommersets. *Mr. Sommerset, What’s the matter?* But when the bell hop found Mr. Dean Sommerset, the stately man of 57 years of age was on all fours, gnawing on the bedposts, his pants around his ankles and his tie wrapped around his fist like a prize fighter before the gloves.
He thought she was cool, but not for tattoos

or the county fair,
the old Ferris wheel with the yellow and the rust and the vomit.
He never took her walking without his hand
since his had a topical form of gingivitis.
They experienced bad writing together,
mostly in marble museums downtown
because he and she preferred the blue collar haunts
along the Monongahela.

She would always get sick for applesauce
and make him wear a beard.

It was clear this wasn’t going anywhere,
that nothing was as important as this:

*hard on the land wears the strong sea.*
My blown away face

holds hands and takes walks in city parks
with me streaming red green purple kites.

We buy cotton candy at quiet carnivals
and sometimes fish
& dangle our feet off the pier.

But when the weather isn’t fair,
we read books in the window sill.
It prefers Melville on melancholy days.

And I can never turn down a good Dickens.

Each spring break we travel to Cancun
and take our tops off
and get schlackered and posted on Facebook
and it isn’t as scandalous in the morning
as it was that night.

We eat green donuts on St. Paddy’s Day.
We call Saint Patrick’s Day
St. Paddy’s Day and tell strangers
we are Irish.

And someone asks “are you two related?”
Talkies

It was the night of the premier of *The Jazz Singer*. Forty-five men and women attended the theater. Fredrick Butterson was there. Annette St. James was there. Mary Benstein was there. The rest of the town was there. Everyone wore their best clothes, even the people in the back. The film began to play, and the actors began to speak. People in the front row looked behind themselves. People in the back of the theater accused the viewers in the front of talking during the movie. One man threw his tobacco from his chew down on the heads of the audience in the front. When the commotion was heard outside, the ushers came in and turned on the lights. The movie reel was stopped. All the accusations were leveled at all the parties, and the theater employees assured everyone that none of the audience members were talking. The film resumed as the lights faded. People gave the film and each other another chance. A lady in the middle of the audience screamed. She realized the voices were coming from the screen. Her courter sprang from his seat and drew a 5” blade, and, charging the screen, plunged the knife into the silver sheet, crying and laughing bubbles. The voices in the film did not stop, did not change, did not acknowledge the stabbing. Others in the crowd started to wail and cry. Someone shouted *End it, End the experience*. By now, the whole audience surged around their chairs and tore at the screen with their fingernails and teeth. They shredded and soaked the screen with tears and drool until the movie projector clicked after the credits rolled. The lights came on. The men and women of the town straightened their clothes, wiped their mouths, and exited the theater in single file. Of the show, one woman remarked *I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite like it. There was such atmosphere, wasn’t there.*
The Signpost Up Ahead

This is supposed to explain me,
like somehow taking what I say as truth
and trying to go up to a teller window
and cash in on it
to receive the negotiable instrument of me
will illuminate anything for you.

I'll warn you not to be sick of stars
(the celestial bodies of light
drawn on a roll of unused newspaper stock
across the floor of a classroom
in a building where no one belongs).
It was a real science project, or
some lesson.

If you have the stomach for it,
hold my hand next to opening doors,
shattering windows,
and the dizziness that accompanies
the world in black and white
and gray,
and grey,
and gray.
II
MUSEUM OF DISASTERS

Tours after Lunch

Wait. First
I need a clipboard.
I cannot stress how important this is. Okay,
now we can proceed.

If you step double-time this way
you will certainly notice
what all the commotion is about.
Ah ah ah! That’s installation art,
you are not allowed to ask it questions.

And that is a performance art piece.

Well, his character’s name is “Jeremy Piven.”
Not the actor, no. Not the actual actor.

Clearly you cannot (nor should you) be allowed
to take part in this. So please,
step back behind the line,
mind your feet and arms,
and hold your breath. You’ll be back there soon.
DREAM CITIES
Winter Wünderland

One day it will snow. It will snow a lot. And no one will expect this. It’ll be fall, early fall, and even though it is strange, it’s still close enough to being believable that people will be relatively alright with it. Mayors from around the globe will convene out in the Midwest. Most likely they will meet in a conference center in Omaha. That will be a lot of mayors, which will be more shocking than the sudden onset of snow. The mayoral summit will discuss snow removal on small budgets and analyze the salt, cinder, and plow costs for the winter ahead. Funds will be grossly disproportioned. The report from the meetings will reach the world in no time at all, and citizens in most countries will brace for a harsh winter. Everyone will wear ski masks. Vocation and community schools will offer classes and certifications in the following: snow shoveling, snow shovel repair, salt distribution practices, igloo engineering, salt distribution practices II, and winter walking 203. Winter will come and be mild till March then cocoon the world in ice for twelve hours. After this, it will never snow again. The certificates will be put into drawers in wooden desks and not be mentioned on resumes or in obituaries or at social events and smell like yardsticks.
Fake gold and cubic zirconias will command higher prices than legitimate gold and diamonds. Antwerp will fall apart. The windows will wilt down from the buildings, and men and women will clean up after them. This will be the reemergence of the mom-and-pop store. Customs like Christmas and engagements will be forgotten. And people will stop watching television. People will paint caricatures on the meaty part of their fingertips and gesticulate to one another with pizazz. Somewhere someone will shout how wrong this is, but no one will hear her. People need to see the fingers.
Cloudless

All the clouds will disappear. Weathermen will lose their jobs, but no one will notice this. Some people will be sad, but there will be no correlation with the job losses. For a moment, farmers and CEO’s and stockholders will be concerned about the crops dying. People everywhere, for that moment, will scurry to buy bottled water. This will make the water distributors very happy, but they will not be prepared for the onslaught of water purchases. Then a scientist will post on her blog that all the water in the rivers and oceans, ponds and seas will remain full and moving. Everyone will calm down. A trend will sweep the communities north of the tropic of cancer – everyone will gather at the center of town and pour the water out of their bottles and into the street-drains. Waterfalls will become strong. Mostly, people will forget about the clouds, too. There will be nothing with which to compare a mattress anymore. People will stop sleeping. They will only stand and look up at the night sky. Rows and rows of people will line the streets. Roofs on buildings will become out of style and obsolete. All cars will be convertibles from here on out, and no one will drive. Eventually, everyone will become naked for no one will look at anything around them. And everyone will be happy or warm.
At some point

Deer will be the main mode of transportation.

Not in any rude way, no. Nor a saddle-on-the-back way. But a way we can’t discuss quite yet. It will be in some tender way, a way that can’t be fully realized or expressed yet. Once we resolve it, there is a great likelihood there will be no new words created in order to explain the situation, or any new connotations. It will probably be a sensitivity to the great and benevolent circumstance of whitetail deer stepping out from between the trees and coming to our rescue without looking both ways, without second guessing. But that last bit is just speculation.
Dream City 5

At the Movies

All movies will feature scores composed entirely of “The Entertainer.” This will be a slow transition, a resisted transition. Sects of people will throw old vinyl recordings off bridges in a form of protest. But once all possible genres of music produce covers of “The Entertainer” and all possible vocal styles perform “The Entertainer,” people will begin to forget that all the songs are really “The Entertainer.” Radio stations will find an increased number of listeners and an increased number of requests for “The Entertainer” which does not necessarily correlate to the aforementioned. Movies will feature more cop-and-robber sequences. Some movies will do 10 minute stills on the surface of a lake. Or a smoking, spinning tire @ 6,000 rpm’s. Masked villains will appear in crowd scenes. Then there will be an intermission. Intermissions will once again be en vogue. Instead of the salty, yellow popcorn, concession stands will permanently sell kettle corn and nix all boxed or bagged candies. And only one size bucket will be provided for the kettle corn. But a vast array of prices will be charged. At random. And every single person will be really, very, inconsolably upset. Forever.
Lye

One day, all the world’s structures will be replaced with lye. The supports, facades, and windows and arches will be replaced with lye products. A slew of contractors will be hired to dig up all the earth’s topsoil and replace it with lye. The lye mines will be warm with redundancy. No one will go to the ocean to swim. Not anymore. The sand will have become lye.

DREAM CITY 6
Underwater where you live

All the world will be covered in water. Photo albums and memory disks containing photo albums will be defunct. e.e. cummings will be defunct. Funny movies like *Waterworld* and *Laurence of Arabia* will be defunct. People will no longer speak. Somehow there will still be people dreaming. We will still be alive and still unable to figure this out. Sunsets will also be defunct. We will communicate by whistling. All of us will whistle underwater. There will be no fish to hear us. In fact, we will no longer hear ourselves. All the world will be covered in water.
Arms Race

There will be no arms here. At first, people’s arms will be shorter. A little off on one side, then a little off the other. Arms will reach the waist only. Then short sleeves will not be called “short sleeves” any longer. They will just be “sleeves.” Babies will be born with only fingers. Then, after a period of about 50 years, no one will have arms anymore. There will, in fact, be no remnants of these vestigial limbs. Hands-on learning will pass away. And yet, no one is angry. Everyone is fascinated by their own contentedness. Families grow and flourish. There will be so much art on the walls. And everyone tells each other stories.
Occupational Hazard

At the start of every business day, all people – both employees and customers that happen to be present at the start of the business day – will pause for 3 minutes. During these 3 minutes, everyone will stand up and be silent. They may choose to look up or look down or look straight ahead, but they must keep their eyes open. Any person found in violation of the 3-minute pause will be promptly arrested at the 3:01 minute mark. This change will subsequently seem like it correlates with a worldwide catastrophe, like a flood or an invasion of giants from out of the sea. People will be completely on board for this alteration to their daily needs.
Future Town Construction

All towns will be built on slanted foundations resembling an up-side-down cone or a penny collector at a mall.
A Tiny Man

Somewhere in the tropics a man will be born. He will be a normal size baby, even as an infant he will be average. No one will know his parents. And one morning the child will wake up and he will be tiny. About the size of a 4” action figure. Apparently, as he will recount later in a made-for-TV documentary, this process was painless. To the contrary it was the most rejuvenating sleep I have ever had. At first, when he shrinks, people will not pay him any heed. Yet, eventually, as things like this always are, he will become antsy. He will leave the tropics for Massachusetts and Paris. Scholars will say this is so cliché of him, but, inside, everyone will be jealous. A small group of insurgent professors will make an attempt on the tiny man’s life. Some will say it was out of envy; others will conclude the group was trying to keep up the status quo. He will go on to write books and take mistresses. People will pay him money to research his secret of shrinking. There will be infomercials. He will do all the research on himself. Most airlines will anticipate his arrival and have built small seats for his new class of flying: 1.A. Then he will die. He won’t live past his 10th birthday. And everything will be as it was.
Bored Game

Everyone in the world will be issued “Get out of jail free” cards. Everybody will get one card. Some religious groups in the Appalachians will donate their cards to charities. Something like half the prison population of all the countries in the world will be released. All small business owners will purchase 12-gage shotguns and post signs reading Still have my *Get Out of Jail Free Card.* Municipal governments will collapse. No money will be posted for speeding tickets. No one will speed reasonably anymore. Penalties for all crimes will be ratified with the resulting verdict being life in prison. Nobody will realize this. Everyone will think things will go back to normal after all the cards are gone. To avoid identification, people will make masks of their neighbors. Forgeries will be made. The sentence for forging cards will be *immediate execution.* The world will become small and intimate. Everyone will eventually learn how to be happy.
Likely Future

People will buy up remaining supplies of typewriters. The kind Angela Lansbury used during the opening credits of *Murder, She Wrote*. But people won’t remember Angela Lansbury. In fact, it probably wasn’t her typing. The typewriters will have been stockpiled in a climate controlled warehouse in Idaho. The whole town will work there. They will say to each other *merde* and leave the warehouse for the last time. But, do not worry, they will go on to live long, full lives. Once the typewriters arrive at their destinations (all 947), the people will write prophecies in short, 100 word segments. Everyone will keep them for themselves. There is a great chance no one will ever read them.
The man in history’s stead

All small towns will disband their history. In its place will be a man. This man was in jail for loitering. People will not understand. They will not grasp how he was released from jail. This man will resume producing pamphlets and propaganda about the future. People will forget the past that they once had. At least once a year high school students will sing a song to him. At least once a year, this man will cry. Exactly once. And not during the high school’s song.
People Puppets

Everyone will either die or make puppets of themselves and then retire. A guild of people will build scaffolding high above cities and towns and by-ways. The puppets will then be strung to controls for the young people in marionette masks to make dance. Young people will get younger and younger as a consequence of the dolls. Eventually, no one will be left to man the puppets. Births will be reversed and cease being tangible. So, thoughts gather in the ozone and dream about how to hold a conversation.
National Acoustic Symphony Academy

In the skies over America, and maybe some other countries (eventually), clouds will exist. They will be completely normal clouds. Little light, fluffy clouds about the size of a tire swing. They will not dump rain, nor will they move through the sky a great distance. For all intents and purposes, these clouds will be in stasis, seemingly tethered to the blue sheet behind them. And they will house large speakers. Spherical, rotund, white speakers certified by a masked military contractor as “space-grade.” Of course, no one will notice these new clouds. It will take the Academy about three years to put these clouds in the sky and fix them in the air. Then one fall evening, the Academy will commence the inaugural atmospheric symphonies. It will be quiet at first; then the violins will come in shyly. Almost everyone will run for cover, diving under cars and getting in fights over space in the nooks and crannies of city blocks. But then the kettle drums will roar up from the deep-sky. And clarinets will coax the citizens back into the streets. And people will come out of their homes and look skyward. And rest beneath trees or lampposts, cuddling in groups of five or six. The first night of the symphony will be glorious. The serenade will go on forever. Occasionally, some speakers will blow out, as is the nature of things. They will be mended with newer parts, playing the same melodies as the other clouds.
MUSEUM OF IDEAS

Tours at 4

Come to my right.
Now,
Now you will be able
to properly appreciate
this old tragedy mask.

It is one of eleven
red models crafted
at the hay-day of Hanley’s
Oasis Mart on Plumb Ave.

Note the purple celery stalk
carved inside the cheek.
The creator, Garrison Hanley,
intended the celery to be
a metaphor for his wife’s
stigmata
some nine years prior.

Your responses are not quite ready,
or calibrated just yet.
Here:

if, by now, you are laughing
you should be crying.
Those of you experiencing sadness
should participate in things
through humor.
Stray

Your dog ran away.
Did you know that?
It's kind of big news around here.
You never liked her.
That's what your mom told the papers.
What are the steps of grieving?
Your dog never had papers.
No one grieves here any longer.
In a picture frame, there is a farm cottage.
In that picture is a mask.
Behind that mask is your dog, panting.
Here, eat some blueberries.
You will feel better.
Poem-gram

This is a poem about meat.
Nothing else.
It resembles a carton of cigarettes,
the poem.

What will be accomplished
is a craftily laid out exhibition
of preserved meat
and allusions to famous, historical meats.

The last stanza will be designed
to provide intellectuals
and academics
and neophytes
and Philistines
with fodder to discuss
at length
over a steaming
pot of black bean soup.
Finally, no one is the wiser.

Okay, here we go:

Footnote (to “Poem-gram”)

Alright. See what I've done here is created a scenario where you read line by line, using the line breaks as pauses. I told you right from the beginning that this poem is about “meat.” And there is nothing else to it. You keep reading. You get a list of people who will read this poem, and people who will talk about the poem. But you don’t get the poem. See, I set you up. That was just a prelude. No one can write that poem. And the title doesn’t mean anything. But it still had to be written. Get it?
Things to be mad about:

Photorealism.
Sliced bread.
The first radio broadcast.
The first radio broadcast to the whole country.
Talkies.
The first automobile.
The first Greek play put on in an amphitheatre.
People riding on the backs of horses.
People riding in the backs of cars.
Lists.
Rotary phones.
Plastic bags only.
Personal television sets.
The moveable typeface.
Louis Pasteur.
Making Expressions

You had a mouth full of clip art,
and I got lost between the corporate motivational material
somewhere back in the molar area, or rather
where the molars used to be
before the discount cartoons
set up their shantytown.

Before, when you asked me if getting a tattoo
design from a clip art file was a good idea,
I told you
while you’re at it
why don’t you needle my name in your ear using word art?

The thing is, you spelled it wrong.

I wanted my name written on your heart
but not like it is;
freehand would have been best,
gliding a pencil over the pericardium, pushing
just a little,
just enough to feel the arteries squish and slosh.
Testament

I am cremated/and am salty ash.

× × ×

We eat white pizza-red pizza-sweet pizza
and wear Harlequin masks
and suddenly I can speak Italian, like “ciao” and “that’s amore!”
with a little more sauce on “amore.”

× × ×

Now I am picturesque,
a monosyllabic wafting
monk set against a cartoon
with limited cyan hue and hood.

× × ×

I wrote in my will
I want to be put in a pepper shaker,
but all that’s left of anything
is this poem, ink.
Never go shopping when you're hungry

Thursday around 3 o’clock
I miss my snack
– I’m riding my bike.
Now I’m walking on linoleum,
carrying a basket down an aisle.
I need to get white bread
because I can’t keep eating out,
so I might as well get hot dog buns:
they’re portable.
Onto the milk aisle and I can’t
decide among the sizes.
Gallon is out of the question,
and I usually go for the half,
but what about the quarter gallon?
What do they call that size?
Well, it is more expensive,
so I’ll buy the half and throw a third away.
Cookies would be good;
Oreos go well with milk;
oh and so do graham crackers and
peanut butter, and something else.
Next aisle over.
I see a deal on bologna
– freezes well if I don’t open
the other package which is on SALE!
I shouldn’t have used a basket,
and why do they still have baskets
as an option anymore?
They could have downsized
around the same time as paper.
I’ll rent the golf cart next time, after all
these new aisles are spacious
and painted with lines
and reflective paint, which probably isn’t easy to handle
for the cleaning crew.
Probably should get a turkey and freeze it
– Thanksgiving is nigh!
That stock boy is sort of
dressed like a Pilgrim, isn’t he?
If I didn’t have hardwood floors
my waxing budget would greatly wane. Carpet
comes in a two-pack if
I download the coupon to my phone
and show it to the cashier.
– might not have enough battery left.
But I must hurry,
the samples are running low.
A replacement cam-shaft doesn’t take up
too much room in my garage and
I just got paid so okay.
Would the Oreos put me over? Because
I have the grahams, but I don’t remember
about the peanut butter at home – which
I must have with the grahams and milk.
Flux Capacitor stock look low, must be
a popular item. I don’t want to miss out.
My neighbor would be so jealous, but
don’t worry: I’ll loan it to him.

No way.
I need an Alexander Hamilton.
He could hold my hats and get into arguments
with my coworkers when they come over
– still room. And he’s 20% off. No.
I think I’ll pass on the grahams.
Guess Who©

Someone once told you
you look like a preacher’s wife.
You didn’t know
what to do with this
new moniker.
After all,
Ellen is a fine lady
with a tight front yard.
Hear Ye, Hear Ye

I walk into a bar and shout *I have an announcement*. People like announcements. The bartender tosses a coin up and down in the air, flipping it like a gangster off the tip of his thumb. I told him, when I did this a year ago, that I didn’t like gangsters. *You didn’t do this right last time* he says to me. *Why don’t you explain how you are going to announce and then we can follow along with your actual, real announcement.* The coin distracts me, but I forge ahead, orating: *Listen very closely everyone, all of our money is gone.* A suit near the end of the bar pulls out a hacksaw from of his attaché and starts going to work on his barstool. *Not yet.* Says the bartender. *Let him finish his announcement.* The suit’s fervor encourages me. I take a deep breath and puff out my chest. *The only way to keep on going is to start collecting every animal we can find and start gathering them into a farm.* Everyone stops their fidgeting. The bartender puts on his moustache and glasses. *And the men and women shall have equal shares, and the animals will have respect and the names of real people.* Someone says they’ve heard all this before, but everyone else heads for the door. *And once we get all of the animals we will have money again.* As they leave me, *this is not a pyramid scheme, this...*
In retrospect, about the announcement

No one

has good moustaches

anymore.
Turned-Down Collars

Something happened around the turn of the eighteenth century. It was the most alarming trend in fashion. Some held the opinion that it was out of necessity that the change swept the world, or most of the world. The known world. Old reports suggest men started turning down their collars in the Caucus Mountains region as a result of climbing temperatures. This, as they say, was born out of necessity. Though no one ever really thought of the inhabitants of the Caucus Mountains as trendsetters. But it caught on, and cravats dwindled. Everyone became wary about accidents, fearing the tighter neck-hole could asphyxiate the wearer more readily. Some people in the East went as far as to cut off the collar entirely. Adam’s apples were exposed worldwide, and beards took to fashion. Poets who wrote odes and epics about the days of high collars were burned at the stake for heresy and their ashes mixed in the mud downriver of bath houses.
Things lost in a duffle bag

- An old rope
- Horseshoes (5)
- An early portable cellular device
- Opera glasses
- A picture of you
- Two copies of Rappaccini’s Daughter
- An unopened water bottle
- 2 general ideas
- A release form
- A charcoal étude of your pet
- A topographical map of Nebraska
- One unlined, black notebook with price tag still attached ($7.99)
- A cassette tape of an NPR special on bicycles
- Heartthrobs
- Sepia-dying instructions
- All the hair you would ever grow
One of Our Moments

I lost an idea somewhere. Maybe someone will pick it up, dust off the odd debris, pocket it but not purloin it. I'll tear down the reward posters and disband the Facebook group so people will forget, and be happy perhaps even wild.
Title Fight with Old Saint Nick

Santa Claus is not welcome in my house. It’s not that I’m anti-Claus, or even against fake white beards on itchy stretchy straps, but I’ve been trying to figure why he won’t come back during the rest of the year. Really, it’s rude to enter my domain and not even say hello. I called him once, the Claus, and he answered saying “yello!” so that put me off. He said he was actually headed out grocery shopping and he would call me back. I said my number quickly and curtly, and he said he got it, but I didn’t hear any scribbling and no one has a memory good enough to remember a telephone number right off, first try. In the end, I moved to an apartment in the city. It was on the first floor.
Ransom Note

as read by a bandit wearing a paisley bandana over his nose and mouth

First off
don’t read this to anyone.
I meant it.
...
Really not joking.
...
Next!
with the payment we discussed earlier,
you’ll need to include a can of pasta
and meatballs.
And a canoe.

After placing the aforementioned
into a burlap bag,
attach each of the bag’s corners
to the foot of a falcon.
So, by now,
you’ll have many falcons. Yes? Yes.

Good.
Once payment is received,
I'll put this in a Red Rider wagon
and push it down the nearest hill.

You need to be at the bottom,
arms outstretched in a V,
smiling so big you drool,
thinking about your first time
reading something extraordinary.
**Forest, On an Island**

Cracked drinking glasses make me nervous like nervous never done before.  
I see the little cities in the fissure,  
their economies quick and cold,  
their citizens and inhabitants  
gyrating, melting the translucent walls around them, maybe  
waiting for some nervous-partners.

People organize a support group and an NPO  
under the banner of a multi-national corporation; still,  
they maintain that one day they might not be so far removed from their own benevolence  
and dwell in the precipice of those swirling bodies.

And it all starts to make sense:  
the island that was never on a TV show,  
the forest that doesn’t have any trees so you can clearly see it,  
the honkytonks with an all-Elvis jukebox,  
the omnipresence of all-Elvis jukeboxes,  
the actual size of us, the actual size of the people of the cities —  
the molecules of life made up of the barbs clinging to socks after a hike.
I lose onions everywhere I go

I started out the year
with a large duffle bag packed tightly
with onions.
Then I figured,
the duffle bag wouldn’t hold all I’d need,
so I ordered a ginormous burlap sack
big enough to fit a Volkswagen
from an online, wholesale distributor.
They tried to up-sell me a dehydration kit,
but I thought that was ridiculous.
I would take stock of my onions
and found that my loss-rate
was 2 onions per day.
Being a smart investor,
I hired a diagnostics firm from Europe
to issue a stop-loss on my onions,
but even that didn’t quell the trickle.
I lost my last onions
while sitting in a movie theater
during the crying scene
at the end of the feature.
I wanted to cry too,
but they wouldn’t understand
why I was joining so late in the game.
Someone yelped.
There’s an onion looking up my wife’s skirt.
And, as much as I tried,
I couldn’t convince the man.
I couldn’t convince him.
Wednesday Night Marquee

After we leave the movie, I say to my friend “I think they took all of the images in that movie out of my mind.”

He says, “That was the point.”
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