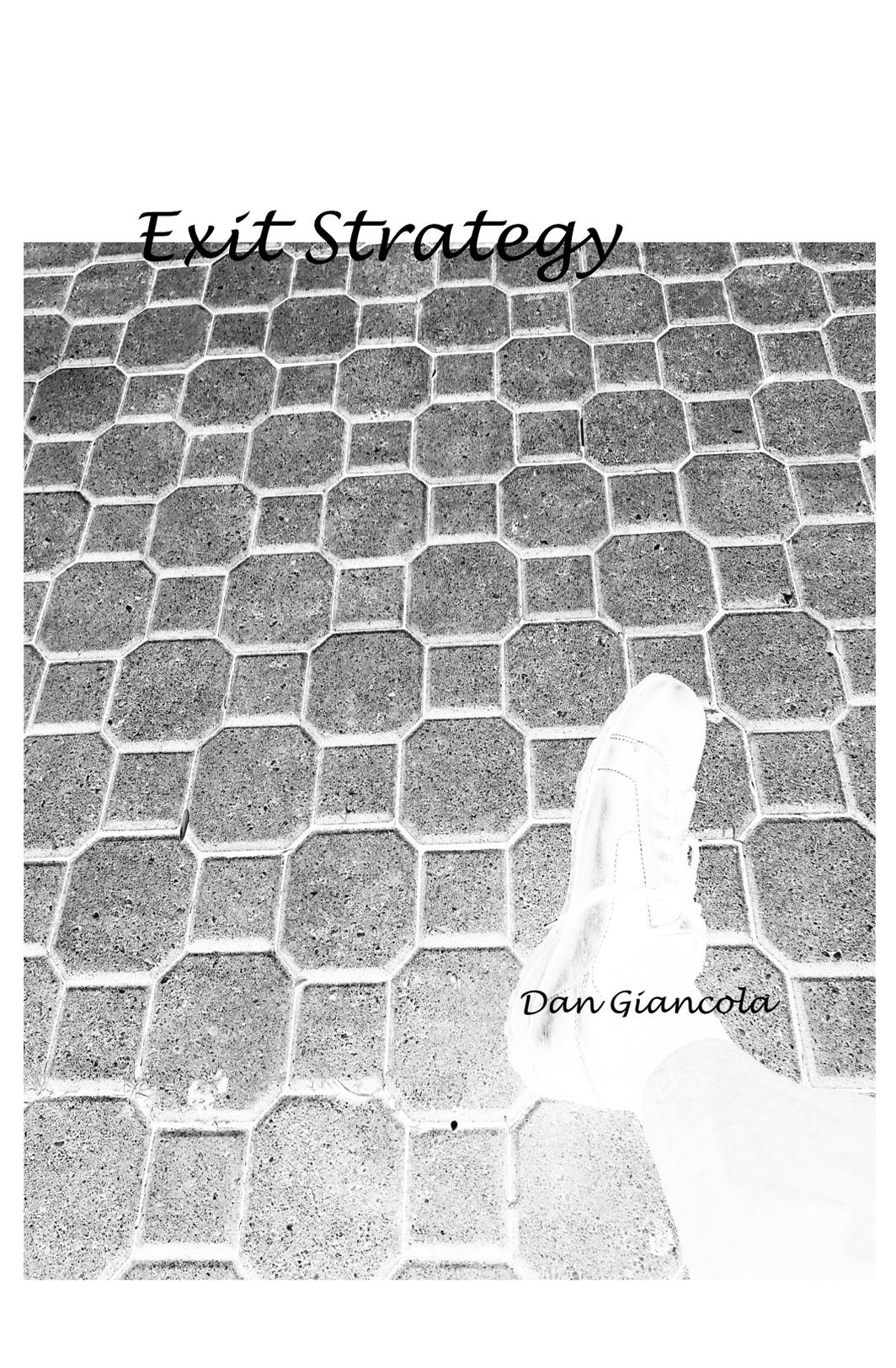


Exit Strategy

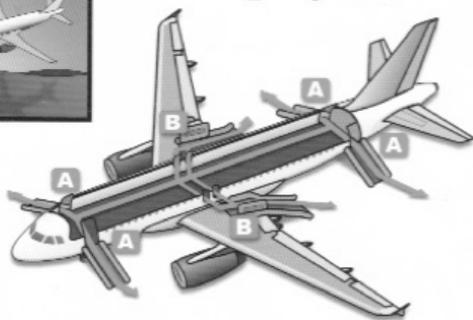
Dan Giancola



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Emergency Exits



Follow lights to exits. Keep in mind the closest exit may be behind you.



Adaptation

The dude tweaking beside me on the train
jostles an earbud loose, eyes me like a heroin
sachet, helpless as a slab of highway
heaving in the heat, a hemlock rooted
in its infestation. Time, I guess, for another
adaptation, as when my girl once said, leaving
For you I'm always here. A conductor sidles
up the aisle punching ticket flakes, a festive
confetti slipstream. Perception's imperfect:

it's growing difficult to tell the world from art's
imitation, life lifelessly becoming art until no
life's left. This guy jonesing is *all* life
chasing a mermaid in his blood & living entirely
within his itchy veins. This life-force would stick
my liver for a fix. His eyes dodge mine
when I beam compassion, knowing I can't slow
or nuance his accelerating exit velocity. Synced
to train rhythm I sit back & begin my amoral nod.



Weal

In this daffodil light a whiff
of legacy waste. At their strangest
things get stranger; I've not
the wherewithal to munch escarole
in Abu Dhabi but can in perfect
Farsi belt-out gospel hymns. Yet I
continue to depreciate, my ichor
leaking. Every day's a referendum
the world's tenderhearted mercies

hold to validate my continued breathing
but shadows move like spiders on the sheets
& I can't amen my way through trouble
& perplexity. *Weal's* an Anglo-Saxon syllable
that doubles as well-being & a raised lump
upon the skin, the word itself—like so much
else—a paradox. Like the daffodils
that smell like death. Like optimism
for the future & all that awaits us there.

Advice for Dopes

What, may I ask
do you fear? She of the applesauce
hair & homely words?
It's time to blow the dust
off the one-man-band & play
for the balletomanes & their dates
in burkinis. Knock the dottle
from your bowl, sharpen your loneliness
like a stick & skewer the clocks!

Pity the glimpseless who can't go on
until they clear a code & excel
at efficient kitchen movement.
Ask your brother-from-another-mother
& the other enemies of linearity
if the moon doesn't weep rainbows.
Somewhere a con paces off a sentence.
Somewhere else an incompetent nice-guy passes.
Don't be afraid! Let bees bivouac in your beard.



Hole-Punch Sonata in C-Minor

Open in the Tilda Swinton silence
that bottle of un-Transubstantiated Red.
We're taking every way to nowhere
so why not slow down, savor
a squeaky grilled Haloumi, break out
the queca & decatastrophize. After
we'll watch egrets like elongated moons
perch waterside oaks dropping wizened leaves
to bookmark the season. Don't forget your inhaler.

When leaves loose their light upon the air
crickets serenade the moon plumping
like an onion in sky's dark loam
sprinkled with bright vermiculite. Spiders
haul in webs like fishermen's nets & cast-off
for some arachnid Florida. Drone enthusiasts
ponder sky-jams above sod farms. Hey,
when it is what it ain't—*Cha-Ching!*—
text me & we'll jumpstart the short-cut.

Oxycodone Comedown

Snow falls today like television static.
White plastic bags perch like egrets
in trees here in the center of some mosaicist's
universe where tinted windows turn the world greasy.
The compensated endorser says we all need one
so call now for your cost-free MRI review.
Is that an airplane or guts roiling?
We've been clumsy, foolful, have forgotten
to build cash value & infiltrate *nouveau riche*

enclaves where butter lacks salt
& children are made out of cardboard.
Plants at the window drink in the view.
Feeling comes into existence like a cloud
not a shoe on a blacksmith's anvil.
Load the smoker, put the pot on the hob.
Just pay a separate fee & your happy hour
namechecks will get you past your expiration date.
Wangle an invite. We'll deadhead into a future.



Wake to Attend

Orange street lamps like commas punctuate
night's city-street syntax that traffic
parses like a slow-learning child.

A pregnant coywolf crosses a bridge, returns
the wild to suburbia. Truth is never more
cynical than the Senate grilling cabinet nominees.
From Yaphank to Ypsilanti sugar flowers
flourish in hypocrisy's loam. Do you want
to kiss someone tonight? Do it

or the yobs will sniff out your pathological
timidity, pounce on your perfect imperfection
punish you for not practicing spontaneity
your puss slapped across social media
cyber-west where slander's seldom held to law.
Don't let emojis or emo-jeezus dictate
terms, muzzle your originality, your élan.
Wake to attend to the wild inside you
& gaze with wonder at your own idyllic squalor.

Trouble

In your eyes' galactic distance
I see civilization flashcrash in a metadata rain.
Wearing youthful footwear you ask me to dance
but skullbuzz & all my yellow bones
predict a faceslap dissonance
a sidekick's slapdash slapstick
not the peace rare as a loquacious Texan
that holds each pilgrim spellbound.
In your eyes old lover we ran a time

together & glowed like paper lanterns
lives moving along way-points fixed as stars.
Lacking whatever keeps two people paired
we've become exemplars of a new propriety.
Somewhere a radioscope listens to the universe
unspool like a bolt of pleated cloth.
Elsewhere thundersnow rumbles glazing the wind.
Call your mom before you power down.
Once there was nothing I wouldn't do for you.



Gerrymander

The niceties have abraded, respectability's
bald tires by incivility's stray tacks deflated.
How peevishly we behave on the roadside
our nation's minds closed as tightly as clams
incapable of changing. Evidence, facts, rhetoric—
forget it! In your eyes an oration of roses
ill-equipped for flux & change addresses emotional fibrosis.
The right reverses Robin Hood while the left
censors what it's too sensitive to hear.

Haven't you heard a word I've been saying?
Now's the time to gerrymander your feelings.
Some poor schlub has taken the fork to the new life
over the ridge where people who wish to live forever
dwell in antiseptic dichotomies afraid of life.
There ain't never been no shit on them shoes.
He's too far out of the way to be out of place.
This is where our democratic relativism leads us—
everyone is right all the time & everything is wrong.

Arrogance

All my days doubt befriended me.
Doubt's an honest tough-love friend.
I did all I could, but love ain't like honey—
honey don't never go bad.
Life is what you *are*; living is what mind
makes happen. Now doubt's gone too
& life's a dim cloister where peace commingles
with despair. I drag my meat to work
my own voice lulling me to mediocrity.

When your shot dies on the rim
doubt's a better friend than arrogance.
The hyper-local forecast got the storm
all wrong but the schools closed anyway.
That's the way prediction goes, the ponies, Lotto.
Despite the losing, someone always wins.
Before doubt abandoned me it would whisper
in my ear to quit & save my wad of cash.
I'm a winner now if I say I won. Get used to it.



Flop

The junkie & his snowflake fresh
from having her eyebrows threaded
hookup to enjoy a post-coital snooze
& then are never heard from again.
Clairvoyant phones sext one another
(add something here I'm not ready
to discuss) while I consider going home
to live alone with someone I don't know.
Ask your actuary how *that* feels.

I live alone with secrets I can't spill
recuse myself from truth, stuff bags
with loneliness to drop off at Good Will.
Ah but why all this woe? Outside
a dog barks straining its leash. A honey bee
carries bloom to bloom the aphids
of its own destruction. My life of a sudden
appears beyond constraint & safe until I forget
who I am & what I surely came here to do.

Puberty

When he asked for asparagus I had to smile.
Nothing says novelty like stinky urine
but I prefer wind-up chattering teeth
even a whoopee-cushion strategically employed.
Laughter & embarrassment go hand-in-hand
your own at someone else's expense
or *vice versa*. This is how we experience
self-deprecation & compassion
without which movies wouldn't make us cry.

That's why puberty horrifies those who survive it.
The hormonal rush invigorates blood
& saps confidence, self-doubt a bonus
we earn for our participation. Sex of course
leaves us tittering & wide-eyed until we learn
to smile salaciously, after which the world
impresses upon us what we need to wrap our heads around—
the evils of fluorocarbons, how to recognize
the right plan on the wrong network, friend from foe.



Diagnostics

Here in the there-after the actual
may vary. Daily diagnostics enhance
survival's odds but chance runs rampant.
When gazing on flowers try to see only flowers.
My duty in life is to find the *me*
within my mind. Moments of perception
all too infrequently blaze. It's touching
how meaningless life is. Some of us
horde misery, others bewilderment

unhealthy child of wonder & awe
but it's never too late
to opt out of distrust & stagnation.
Thoughts move like light
through the mind's rooms, sweeping
intellect clean. Still we feel
every day what we can't say
inarticulate as weeds. Mind
can't do much to move the heart.

Philosophy

You must be kidding if for one moment you think that you can wake some morning just like that a Buddhist. Hard work getting wise, knowing not to be vain about not being vain. Take the Italian trampolinists leaping like quanta—every pass, flip, & tumble practically mechanized through years of diligence until the moves are made with empty minds. But such skill is wasted without imagination which we let wither in the algebraic torpor

of watching money making money. Poems like cartoons defy physics, articulate accurate misrepresentations truthful legerdemain designed to lead us to a quotient of relative certainties: he wins who outlasts his hey-day by an hour never discuss religion or politics while drinking & whatever you do don't become a government. vegetation scrolls into a frieze upon the fence Featuring nature's two colors, life & death.



Flight or Fight

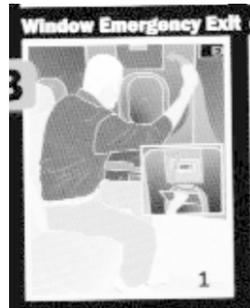
We'll watch TV until we crash
but you go ahead—exercise choices.
After rain worms glyph asphalt.
Show us an act of thought
& we'll show you glasses that granny
your face. Ours is a copycat
wasteland filled to the brim
with bobble-heads & gelatinous
space ever quaking. Can you

get a chubby snaggle-toothed angel
to tap on the head of a pin?
Somewhere a clichéd sunset fades
in its frame while the State hands
down its hand-washing campaign.
We'll take names & kick ass later.
Your flight or flight response flickers
watching great end to end action.
Hell, even felons get pensions.

Against Empathy

You are a book not yet written.
Words like bats fly from your mouth's cave
assemble on a foolscap sky.
Your message increases my perplexity
so I leave you for another network.
At this age it's best to befriend pain
understand the flea sipping tears
from a blind dog's eye. How exquisite
your isolation, the certitude

of my corrupted melancholy.
I turn myself inside out like a sock
try to live as simply as a shadow
but you dead-bolt your heart against empathy
enjoy with a rubbernecker's festive silence
the machinations of adieux. Light eddies
in your eyes to wedge me from my lair.
Adroit thoughts begin to torque your face.
Pardon me & my stare's diminuendo.



Existence

Cleanliness smells like glass cleaner.
Cautious as a Catalan we encrypt
a blossom's fragrance the plant
lifts into air. Don't allow those
for whom violence is love bemuse you.
Machismo resides in the hands.
We slip off control like a pair of favorite
mittens & troll dolls let down their lead
tinsel hair. The dog sleeps on the carpet

a question mark tonguing
the shag. She doesn't hear the jay
outside squalling. What does existence come to
living a good life or bad?
Do birds whistle on other planets circling
distant suns? Do creatures destroy
themselves elsewhere? At night the stars
fall like snowflakes, cold & no two
alike. One day we're here then we're not.

Stop, Drop, & Roll

The news t-bones you—they've lost
the substitute muddler!—saps
your sacerdotal mojo. How sad
attempts to make the world fair.
The rules will soon be changing.
Until then we'll continue to perfect
new veneers. We know life imprints
even the cut-throat but whatever claim
I've had on you is gone. *Haute couture's*

plucked eyebrow ceases to please
when all the world is only "bidness"
& our thoughts in their straightjackets
have long ceased to struggle free.
We're growing tombstones in the concrete
garden, raising toadstools in the fungi shop
supporting a powerhouse cast to invest
in a combovape/hookah bar. If only we
could run the loop backward, stop, drop, & roll.



Post No Bills

While warming a mitake mushroom soup
we watch a sunlight lance scope
the linoleum & slowly laser its way
up the wall, a lazy animal content
elegant, eloquent as a bag of lint.
Afternoon's metallic tang foils
our palettes. The moon climbs a hill
carrying a casket on her head.
It's always time to do something else

so set the table & eat, *please*, 'cause
it's almost wine o'clock & I'm getting hangry.
The uber nerd thinks it's not the heat
it's the timidity, so let's knee-cap
those who grow impatient with gestation.
After, we'll enjoy a connubial doobie
the dog will circle into sleep & stars
wail in the back of their dark closet.
We haven't thought about living ifor years.

Obsolescence

Under watchful grinning capitalist eyes
shopoholics practice retail therapy...
Even liberals who wish to tear the system down
forgo the revolution while their 401-Ks fatten.
Money makes us timid, brings the comfort that engenders apathy.
On city mornings barmen stack empty kegs that ring
like atavistic chimes. Countryside sunshine spots
turbine blades cartwheeling one before the next
in unsynched post-modern choreography. Horses

the color of dishwater crop meadow grass under sun's
free power. On a suburban street a heel
like a downtrodden dirty heart attests to cheap
plentiful goods & the cobbler's extinction.
Gone too the knife-sharpener restoring utility
to our dull blades, sparks fleering & disappearing
like our culture buried in landfills, products made
to fail, to be quickly subsumed by the next new
best thing like the unplanned obsolescence of this poem.



Exit Strategy

Late spring's last tawdry tulips
articulate eternity but your artisanal poems go
the way of hospital clipboards, extinction
a form of fame: the dodo, Studebaker
Western Black Rhino & authenticity, living
as we now do in a world naturally flavored
with other natural flavors. We've trouble
discerning pearl from paste, duped by ambiguity
& the euphemistic, how we get Clinton/

Trump, two sides of the same bogus coin.
We wage war to protect capitalism, claim
we can't stop because populations we bomb
will fall victim to totalitarian ideas, but we worry
really we'll lose markets & consumers.
Mornings when birds scribble song lyrics
in the trees & I verge on orgasm with my
voluptuary, I decry my lack of exit strategy
& she shouts *Pull out, damn it, just pull out!*

