

a guy on the street
who looks like me:
I clench my fists
in case he tries to
get tough.

Stabbed

I told her while we were
lying in bed:
told her it was over.
She started to weep and
I wanted to comfort her
but could not, would not
and got up and went out
to the kitchen
and poured myself a drink
and she came out of the room
a little later
dry-eyed
and without any clothes on
but not really naked
and said "if I had a knife
when you told me
I'd of stabbed you"
and how glad I was
then
that I had told her in bed
and not in a restaurant.

Ballantine

Whenever I drank Ballantine Ale
I got mean, or
maybe I was already mean;
I don't know;
I don't think so;
but
anyway
one day
not long ago
after emptying several
of the green bottles
I got it into my head
that this big guy
who had an ugly face
I'd seen around town
had somehow
done me wrong
and I saw the guy
on the opposite side of the street
from me
and I screamed
YOU! GET OVER HERE!
like I was talking to a dog
and the guy stared
and I started across the street
and he ran
fast
as I chased him
to a house
he ran inside of
and I followed
up a staircase
to a door
where the guy
stood
holding an axe
and I backed
slowly
down the stairs
and left
just as cops arrived
in their shiny car
that I got a free ride in.

Flaming

The moon is on fire tonight
and the walls of this room
are alive with
rivers flowing
and vegetables growing
and lovely shadows and snow
in black and white like
TV in the 60's
and the radio is on to
a Springsteen song
"can't start a fire"
and I have a fire
in my pants
that can't be extinguished
keeps burning me at night
I get up and jump
into the bathtub
but the fire regenerates
smolders as I sleep
and in the morning
a new scar
I got
to go with
the old one
down the middle
of my heart.

Howl's Cavern

My aunt & uncle pick up
my brother and me
in their car
to take us to Howell's Caverns
in New York State:
I am young
my brother younger
the drive is forever
the walk from where
we park
a hike;
we enter an elevator
dimly lit
lined with chain links
like a cage
and we descend
down
down
down
and I begin to panic
my throat clenched
a scream in my breast
my aunt stands still as a statue
the cage rattles
we reach bottom
get out and walk
as a guide talks
about the difference between
stalactite and stalagmite
and pools of black water
shimmer
ghostly in somber light
and footsteps echo in
the frigid air –
"it is beautiful," says my aunt
but
I do not see it
because
all I can think of
is
going back up
to where
I belong.

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

I had a bed in my old college roommate's
room
in an apartment rented
by a couple with two kids.
The husband was a stoner and
every night we sat at the kitchen table
and got blasted
until one day it was discovered that
the kids had been molested by
the retired cop who lived next door
and the husband stopped
smoking pot
and got his act together
but I did not
and got kicked out
and slept on park benches
and in the bus station
until
I got a room at the Y –
a closet-sized suite
with a window
and a bed where I could
sleep without worrying
about anything
except the cockroaches
that ran over my face
and woke me;
on clear nights
I'd look through the upper right
window pane
at a star
shining bright
and that star
over many nights
became my star
my beacon
my guiding light
and hope...
but on cloudy nights
without my star
it would only be me
and the roaches
and whatever remained
of the night.

you're lion
not lamb,
triumph
not slaughter