

# **DIDDY**

**Ken Sparling**

I didn't really have anything to say.  
I just liked writing—I liked pushing  
a pen across a page without  
having to call the result an essay.

-Helen Garner, *The Art of Fiction*

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**Let Me Talk And You Can  
Listen**

I am sitting in the chair in the living room where I always sit.

**I REMEMBER BEING A KID  
RIDING ALONG THE BEACH ROAD  
IN DAD'S CAR WHEN  
"TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD"  
CAME ON THE RADIO.  
I ASKED DAD TO TURN IT UP,  
AND HE DID.**

I couldn't quite understand  
what anything meant.

Anymore Of This And

I Might Lose My Mind

I want to understand.



I do.

Honestly.

I mean it.

But **The Things I Try To Say**

**Move Back Inside Me**

**Like A Dream Sunk Inward**

I Want My Life Back

Experts claim that the situation here poses no real health hazard, so they are not in a position to close us down, much as they would probably like to.

Pull Yourself Closer To Me

I Need To Feel Your Warmth

I take Parky to the airport bus.  
Then I drive home and sit alone  
in the driveway for a while, counting  
**things off on my fingers.**

Outside the front windshield, a  
tiny replica of the sun shines in  
the red tail light of my neighbour's  
car across the street.



**I was reading about roses,  
and about the attorney general,  
when my time ran out  
and I had to see about  
closing up shop.**

I Stop Off To Get A Coffee  
At A Donut Shop  
On The Way Home

“You want to hear about last night?”

“Fuck, just tell me about it, Sparling.”

“Okay, but you have to stop kissing me like that. I can’t think with you kissing me like that.”

“I don’t want to hear what you think, Sparling. I want to hear from your heart. I want to put my lips inside your chest and feel what your heart tells me inside my mouth.”

What Kills Us Is Always The Next Word

It was already tomorrow.

The girl in the yellow tube top was nearing the intersection of College and Bathurst.

At the frat houses on George Street, boys were singing quietly to themselves in the showers.

Another dog appeared in  
the front window of the  
Henderson house  
on Bernard Boulevard.

On Mount Pleasant, there's a  
place where the houses  
stop briefly and there's just  
a lot of trees. Behind the  
trees is a golf course.

No Horses Passed By  
The House This Morning

I think with the girl in the yellow tube top, I was already nearing some sort of resolution, or maybe I was beyond resolution and just savouring it all, the way you do when you get all the ingredients out of the fridge and get ready to cook, and it feels like it is going to be impossible to ever deal with it all, and then you are doing the cooking, and you are waiting to see how things will turn out, and finally, in the last stage, you eat, you savour, you stuff yourself, and then you're not hungry anymore.



I Was Starving For A  
While There This Morning,  
But Now I Feel So Full

They had a meeting.

They had it in the kitchen.

Neither of them liked meetings.

Their goal for this meeting  
was simply to make it a

good meeting. They wore their

bathrobes to the meeting.

**That's When I Heard The Stink Bomb  
Go Boom In Front Of  
The Convenience Store**

**When my dad calls, I am  
fully aware of the fact  
that he is already dead.  
And anyway, I have  
nothing left to say to  
him. “I’m at work, Dad,”  
I finally tell him. “I have  
to get back to work here.”**

God arrived at exactly

2:00 p.m. eastern standard

time. I know because

I checked my watch

to see if he was late.

You appear among the others  
feeling a bit lost.

When you disappear, it isn't a  
disappearance, really, it's just  
a trick of the mind.

You do not know  
who these other people are.  
You can try to pretend  
that you know, but all along  
you understand that this  
just isn't true.

You Can Stop Me

Anytime Now

This other person you are facing  
here is going to take you in,  
and then push you back out,  
like something excremental.



I Realized This Morning That  
I Am Unable To Relieve Myself  
While Listening To An Audiobook

I used to be a poem.

I was a poem about love.

I was about other things, too.

But mostly, I was about love.

*I know how you sometimes  
worry that someone will find  
out the truth, but I have to  
tell you, someone will always  
find out the truth.*

*Somebody already has.*

Through the window,  
I can hear the recycling truck:  
the roar as it moves toward  
the next driveway; the clunk  
of plastic on metal as the guy  
dumps the bins into the  
back of the truck; and then  
the thunk as he drops them  
back down onto the pavement  
at the end of each driveway.

Looking out from the living  
room, I can see the glow of  
reflective tape wrapped  
around the calves of  
joggers in the street.

*Sunlight comes through the  
window, catching the tops of  
things – my knees folded up  
under a brown blanket, the tips  
of the plant with the  
yellow-spotted leaves.*

At the end of the day, the  
rattlesnake plant closes.

Its long skinny leaves  
stick straight up

as they huddle together

like penguins in a snowstorm.

YOUR APPOINTMENT TO MEET  
WITH THE OTHERS ISN'T TILL  
4:00 P.M., SO YOU DECIDE IT  
MIGHT BE OKAY TO SIT A  
WHILE LONGER IN THE  
BATHTUB TRYING TO READ  
THE LEAVES AT THE BOTTOM  
OF YOUR TEA CUP.



The boss came running  
out of the site office  
and called up to me  
saying he had a job and  
that I was to hightail it  
over to the pit  
immediately. So I fired  
up the digger and  
lumbered down into the

pit. But on the way  
down, I got to pondering,  
so that by the time  
I arrived at the bottom,  
I had decided to park  
the digger and not do  
the job. I left her idling  
and put my feet up on the  
console. I was tired.  
Tired of this job, tired

of the woman I was  
married to, tired of  
being tired. I went to  
sleep. When I woke,  
I could hear the boss  
hollering down from the  
brink of the pit. I looked  
up over the shovel and  
saw him. There he was,

like he'd arrived out of  
my dreams. I kicked the  
digger into gear, lowered  
the shovel into the mud,  
and lumbered forward.

I like this room. There's a big window across almost one entire wall, and some trees I can see outside that window, and some houses across the road, and behind the houses more trees – huge trees that rise up from a ravine, which has a little river running through it. As I stand in my living room looking out this window, the blond boy from across the street comes out onto his front lawn carrying a cob of corn.

HE WENT TO THE  
GROCERY STORE.

HE COULD BARELY WALK.

HE FELT SO FULL OF  
WHATEVER IT WAS THAT  
WAS FILLING HIM UP.

BUT HE HAD TO  
KEEP WALKING.

I went there once,  
to that place in my  
mind, to meet with  
some people, and  
afterward, on the  
way back to work,  
I stopped at a bank  
machine.

I don't know how  
any of these things  
continue to happen.



I sat on the subway,  
trying not to turn  
my head.

WHEN GOD DIED,

HE BECAME A MAN.

AND THEN, WHEN SOMEONE WROTE A HISTORY OF JESUS,

HE TOO BECAME A MAN.

THUS, YOU CAN SEE THAT WHAT KILLS US

IS ALWAYS ANOTHER MAN.

I rode into town on the third day  
in a bid to deny the rain.

I wanted to get some coffee  
and some juice and a lemon,  
and possibly some sour cream.

**When I got back,**

**I went for a swim.**

**Then I sat on the deck out front.**

**It was Thursday.**

**The sun shone through some trees.**

**My chair was comfortable.**

**Little whitecaps popped out of the  
lake and glistened, like the lake had  
white hair for the sun to shine on.**

**It was windy.**

**The wind made a different sort of sound from that of the waves.**

**But the two sounds seemed related.**

**It was like a really loud whisper, and then above that another really loud whisper, and the two whispers were trying to meet each other in a kind of urgently whispered harmony.**

**Tomorrow, I go home.**

I dreamed I had a body  
and everybody else was  
shadows. The shadow people  
could see me, and I walked  
among them, and they  
reached out to touch me,  
and I laughed. Their shadow  
hands could not hurt me,  
and they suffered as I had.  
I wanted them to suffer.

“Everything just fell apart,” a man says. God glances down. Shakes his head. *When was everything ever together?* he wonders.

Later, it will rain. People in grey coats will line up, stand in puddles, wait.



Dee-de-deet-deet-dee...

# Newsflash:

Grey sweaters are  
no longer available  
at this location.

"You're late," I said.

"No I'm not." God held up his arm for me to see his watch.

His watch was one of those wind-up jobs old guys get when they retire.

I looked at it for a moment.

"Your watch is slow," I told him.

I showed him my phone.

“You can’t get those shoes anymore,” the salesperson told me, “except at certain locations.” She waited for me to say something, but I didn’t. “And even in those locations,” she added, “all that’s left is red. And then only in size 17.” I still didn’t say anything. “Your feet are petite,” she said, looking down at my feet. “And anyway, you don’t want red shoes.”

As I struggled to remove the car keys from my pocket, I dropped my éclair in a puddle. I looked at it and swore. I thought about picking it up. I could see puddle water seeping into the brown paper bag. I never should have parked by a puddle. I looked back into the donut shop, expecting to see everyone laughing. No one was even looking at me. No one had noticed my fallen éclair.

I called out to the assembled masses:  
“Look at the veins in my arms.”  
I held up my arms.

The assembled masses looked.

“They are blue,” a small boy called out.

“Like rivers,” shouted a woman.

“They look like a complex system of  
waterways,” yelled a man at the back.

“They are like a map,”  
said the President of the United States.

"Like something made by satellite  
a hundred years ago," says the  
poet laureate. "Then lost," she adds.

"Forgotten," says the toastmaster general.

"Then found again in a cabinet in a little  
corner office in an abandoned building on  
the other side of town," says Moyra.

"Where the sun don't ever shine," says  
a little girl who needs to blow her nose.

**Many People Walk  
On Sidewalks,  
But Not Me**

Sometimes, when you take the coffee filter out of the plastic bag they sell them in, you get two by mistake and then you have to stuff the extra one back in the bag. Then, later, when you go to use the coffee filter you stuffed back in the bag, it's crumpled up, and it's harder to get it to sit in the basket right, so you risk the danger of getting coffee grounds in your coffee.



Slept badly last night.

This morning,

snow snarled traffic.

Parked the car

at Finch Station.

Took the train.

"I love you  
from the depths  
of my nucleus  
accumbens."  
I told her.

She looked at me.

I looked at her.

There was nothing  
going on that day  
so I called up  
my hairy friend  
Nino for a chat,  
but he claimed  
to be too busy  
to talk to me.

Carlo got a text from his son Merlin at 10:05 PM. *Go to bed*, it said.

Carlo texted back: *Your mom wants to watch another episode of The OC*. He stared down at his phone.

*You're still watching The OC?!* the next text said.

Three little dots were bubbling at the bottom of the message box, so Carlo waited.

The next message was a mad face. Then: *Stop watching that stupid show!*

By the time I look up from my toast, Kitty is gone. I sit down in one of the two chairs we keep at the kitchen table. I look across at the other chair, empty now that Kitty is gone. I know she isn't actually gone. She's still in the house somewhere. I can hear her. She's upstairs moving around in the bedroom.

There were some issues  
gathering at the edges, all  
around where we stood  
together in the middle of the  
room. I couldn't see them, but  
I could feel them, encroaching.  
*It's true what she always says,*  
I thought, *we really can't see*  
*the issues.* I turned my head,  
saw the empty space above  
the bed, then turned back to  
her to see what she might be  
able to see that I couldn't.

**There's a snow boulder in a  
little clearing where the  
snow has melted inward,  
away from the banks piled up  
by the driveways across the  
street, and I believe it must  
be what's left of the  
snowman the little boy who  
lives at #26 built right after  
that last heavy snowfall.**

*Believe what you want,*  
I say to myself, almost  
angrily, *it won't change*  
*a thing.*



I spend the next three hours lying in bed, trying to determine if it's even possible to assign a tone to the little voice inside a person's head.

Out the window, I see a tree  
that is dropping its leaves.

The leaves gather on the grass  
below the tree, conspiring  
together to make patterns

I will never in the entirety of  
my life be able to decipher.

I get up

once again

and go over

to the window.

*What time is it?*

I ask myself.

For a while there,  
I had no intention  
of explaining anything  
to anyone.

But it turns out  
it might be me  
who wants an  
explanation.

I just don't want  
you to ask me  
for an explanation.

I want the explanation  
to reveal itself in the  
moment I stop trying  
to explain.

Marilee's mother takes off her  
apron and goes out to the  
garden. *This doesn't have to be so  
complicated, she tells herself.*



My grandparents usually said nothing. They nodded a lot.

It was like they had heard something once, heard someone say something they couldn't quite believe, and now they were listening to try to hear what they believed couldn't be heard so that they could prove for once and for all that it could never be heard.

Sometimes you can do things,  
productive, useful things,  
and still feel happy,  
as if you were doing nothing at all.

I woke up naked on the front path.

I looked up to find Kitty

standing in the doorway

in a flannel nightie.

I was freezing,

so I scampered up the front steps,  
trying to cover my business

with my hands

but Kitty pointed away from the house,

sending me scurrying

back down the path  
to retrieve the blanket  
she'd thrown over me  
sometime in the night.

There was a moment –  
I don't know exactly  
when it was, but it was  
a single moment –  
when I fell in love with Kitty,  
and I've been in love with her ever since.

Where do you keep your  
concord grapes? the  
woman asked, rummaging  
through the fridge.

While I sat at the table  
stirring my soup,  
a squirrel in the tree  
outside the kitchen  
window looked in  
at me between bites  
of the nut it was  
holding in its paws.



**SHE WAS GETTING BETTER  
AND BETTER AT PLAYING HER  
CHORDS, UNTIL EVENTUALLY  
MY WORST NIGHTMARE CAME  
TRUE. SHE DIDN'T EXACTLY  
SING. IT WAS MORE LIKE SHE  
WAS SKETCHING OUT A LITTLE  
MELODY THAT BARELY HELD  
ITS SHAPE AS SHE STRETCHED  
IT SHAKILY OVERTOP OF THE  
ARPEGGIOS HER FINGERS WERE**

**PLUCKING OUT CLUMSILY  
AMONG THE STRINGS OF HER  
GUITAR. AND ALTHOUGH I MAY  
NOT HAVE REALIZED IT AT THE  
TIME, THE THREAT OF HER  
SINGING HAD BEEN FESTERING  
DEEP INSIDE ME LIKE AN  
INFECTION FOR SO LONG THAT  
I FOUND MYSELF WELCOMING  
THE RELIEF OF FINALLY BEING  
DONE WITH IT.**

You bad man, she said.

We laughed.

She shook out her wet hair.

Looked up at me.

You're a bad, bad man, she said.

This time I didn't laugh.

I was a bad man, and I knew it.

But at that moment,

I didn't really care.

She went upstairs

to blow dry her hair.

I wanted to open the fridge

and find something

I hadn't known

was going to be in there.

***Open Could Be Equal To  
The Space Around Us,  
Don't You Agree?***

The sky is a terrible tapestry  
of raucous storm clouds.  
I walk out the front door  
and along the path to the  
street, gathering bits of  
weather in my jar as I go.  
At lunch time, I rush back  
into the house and laugh  
when I see myself in the  
hall mirror. I can hear the  
horses out in the garage,  
whinnying for more oats.

All the nothing a person does all day  
becomes something else altogether  
when the person does it in a restaurant.

I looked out the window and saw tippy recycle bins teetering on the edges of snowbanks, like mountain climbers perched precariously over driveways. My own recycle bins were so carefully set out at the end of my driveway. It was like a call to create, and I almost went out and moved my bins into the snowbank that was melting into puddles in the mild March air.



I LOOKED OUT THE BACK

WINDOW AND SAW NOTHING.

I WENT ROUND

TO THE FRONT WINDOW

AND SAW NOTHING.

THERE WAS NOTHING TO SEE.

If I Have To Move, I Will