

# DUCK DUCK

Ken Sparling

Right After He Said, “I’m From London,”  
He Took Off His Glasses

Nothing happened. Neither of them moved. He heard the sound of the fridge humming. She took a breath, and he heard that. She slurped her coffee. He heard that, too. When she set the cup down, it thunked quietly on the place mat.

After Dad Renovated The House,  
I Started Dressing Different

I would sit by myself at whatever table I was at, surrounded by people I didn't know – nice people, for sure, but still, it made me sad and lonely, and I always wanted to go home, and I hoped that Kitty would still be up when I got there, but she never was.

So I Says To Mother, “Mother,”  
I Says, “Spades Are Trump”

I love waking up in the  
morning and realizing  
that, against all odds, my  
toes are thoroughly warm.

When She Was Seventeen, Lilac's  
Family Moved To Another Planet

“I like that one,”

Chef said, pointing  
with his nose.

I liked Chef’s nose.

She Looked Up And Saw Morning  
Arrive Like An Old Friend Named Lynn

There might be a witness protection program, or something like that. And an internet connection. And an aqua blue linen suit, with some kind of hat. And breakfast – eggs, bacon, that sort of thing.

Some Sort Of Beautiful  
Poison Sitting In My Belly

Deve came home from  
the future and showed  
Kitty a verbo on his  
magic screen.

He said: “Watch what  
happens when I push  
this button.”

Do You Ever Want To Double  
Your Words? I Do Sometimes

The quiet I sometimes  
felt was a kind of  
permission that I sat in  
the way I might sit in a  
bath, feeling it rise  
around me like heat.

Well, Yes, In Fact, Now You  
Mention It, I Did Make Him Up

The girl walked out past the place she'd been dreaming of. *I know this place*, she whispered in her mind. Where she was in her waking life no longer made any sense. In her dream, she was falling. She could feel her own fear without wanting to escape it. Back at the dream hotel that night, she took the damp underwear she had washed in the sink and hung it on hangers by the window.

I Try To Write  
Everything Down

He touched the hair under her arms. She moved herself around, tried to look down at him in the dark. “What are you doing?” she whispered. He reached up and touched her cheek, but then he let her go. She continued to hold on. “Don’t let go,” she whispered.

Something Itched, But He  
Didn't Know Where To Scratch

“Close the blinds,” she would say, and I would reach up over the sink and close the blinds, and that somehow made the kitchen seem even brighter, but at the same time more enclosed. Yet, I always felt the formula should be: Brighter = More Open.

What He Was Saying  
Was In Japanese

It was as if you happened to be recording someone in a high-quality recording studio, with the mic real close to the speaker's mouth, but no one was really paying much attention.

I'm Not Feeling Anything Yet

We'd come back home,  
and coming home became  
another part of the formula.

Even if all a person wants  
is to do nothing, that has to  
amount to something.

Beauty Was Bobby Fischer  
In The Loo

When I was a baby, I had just been born, and this is the way it always is with babies. As I grew, the family did things to me. Or sometimes they did things with me. Other times, they just left me alone.

It's Only Ever The Same As Every  
Other Breath I've Ever Taken

One time I was older, and I was riding my bicycle, and a guy in a car gave me the finger.

I couldn't understand what the people all around me were doing.

I was trying so hard to get out of my own ingredients.

Our Trips Became Equations

They were moving their hands, walking places, greeting each other, exchanging words. It looked like fun. I wanted to participate. But I seemed to be stranded on the outer edge of the sphere wherein which people were together doing the myriad things they were doing. And I wondered: if doing something just means doing another thing, how do I find out what to do next?

I Headed Up The Stairs In  
Search Of The Old Man

My little sister's white  
blouse had belled sleeves  
that fluttered about her  
hands like butterflies  
tethered to her wrists.

We Moderns Keep God  
Close By Killing Him

Well, the actual truth is,  
Kitty didn't even know I was  
doing what I was doing, but  
I imagined she would  
probably yell at me if she  
discovered I was doing it.

Sometimes, Someone You  
Don't Expect Will Touch You

Earlier in the day,  
everything had looked like  
sheep, but now everything  
looked like screaming.

You Don't Like To Think  
Of Yourself As An Object

What I like most about mason jars is that you can put the lids on so many different sized jars, even though the lids are all exactly the same size.

We Need More Whistling In Movies

God pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed beneath his eyes. *I have no eyes!* he thought, laughing. But he could imagine having eyes. He could so clearly imagine this. He could put his handkerchief beneath the exact place where he thought his eyes might be, and feel it there.

Is This Really The Time For That,  
He Asked, Watching Her Face

Swept down from before  
Christ, a fist of wind grabs  
her hair. Her Volvo rusts.

God Is The Static Gap Between  
Kitty's Hand And The Cat

Eyeballs up against the edge  
of the unknown, you  
suddenly find that you have  
nowhere to go.

It's like really being really  
alive in the exact same  
moment you could just as  
easily be really dead.

I Just Want To Know  
What Happiness Is

God made a graph.

Dead people stretched out.

Jagged lines of skin.

Everybody crying, and the  
wife keeping a diary:

*Try nine minutes on the eggs.*

The Boy Touches His Finger To  
A Button On The Girl's Blouse

“We should be allowed to interject or ask questions at any point during the meeting tomorrow,” the boy said.

The girl nodded in agreement.

I've Got The President On  
The Horn For You, Mr. Carlyle

I went to shut down my computer,  
but the man on the screen said,  
*Wait*, and even though I wanted to  
go and have my dinner, I waited.

A strong wind would whip me  
apart.

No one could smell me.

I'd be dead.

Some Of My Friends Are Like Doors  
That Open Onto Fields Of Tall Grass

Like a tightrope walker  
about to fall, wishing briefly  
that I'd gone with the net, I  
peered over the edge of my  
life and suddenly saw  
everything very clearly.

The boy reads a newspaper article to the girl in bed:

“A McDonald’s fry cook felled a rat and cooked it on a Toronto-area McDonald’s grill last week.”

The baby starts to cry.

Do You Ever Wonder What's  
The Last Thing You'll Ever Do?

I think the woman across the table from me named the city she was from, but I can't remember what city it was, although I'm pretty sure it was somewhere in the midwest.

I loved it when Mother stood by the window mornings waiting for me to get dressed.

In the End, Though,  
No One Was Happy

From the kitchen table,

I could see the far-off

look in Liberty's eyes;

she wanted to go

someplace new – and

I wanted to go with her.

**Sit A Spell, Emmylou**

What if you were like a bag of confetti thrown in front of a standalone air conditioner, caught on the wind of your dreams, so that sleep was only ever the place you could go and exert some measure of control, and even then, you only got to control the way you gave yourself to the wind.

She Wasn't Quite Sure What Angus  
Might Be Trying To Tell Her Here

*Enjoy this! thought the girl.*

She got up and poured her  
tea down the sink.

Then she rinsed the cup and  
stuck it in the dishwasher.

He Felt Like It Was Okay To Just  
Stand Still Here, Maybe Forever

Kitty needed to sleep, so I left the hotel and walked down the hill to the small neighbourhood shopping district, taking pictures of trees along the way. There were walls with barbed wire at the top. It was Sunday. Everything was closed. But I found a flower stall that was open, as well as a little deli. I bought beer and water and some food for dinner. I got cold coffee in a bottle to have in the morning. When I got back to the hotel, Kitty was asleep, so I sat on the rooftop patio and drank.

It's All About The Dogs

“I like the garden best in the early spring,” I tell Kitty, “the way everything looks so fresh and promising.” Kitty stares at the garden for a while. She is sitting in the car. The car is in the driveway. The car windows are rolled down. I’m standing beside the car. “The garden looks better when the flowers are in bloom,” says Kitty. She starts the car.

It's Just A Lot Of Emptiness If  
You Stop And Think About It

“What did you just say?” said the boy. The girl laughed. “I’m not sure,” she said. She knew she’d spoken, but she had no idea what she had said. She remembered saying, “Ah, well,” but nothing else. She heard a piano playing in a big room somewhere over the barrier between where she was now and where she was thinking she might one day find herself floating.

The Entire Film Is Just  
This Crazy Guy Riding His  
Bike To The Laundromat

The first wave came in ships that floated on the sky. They dropped like spiders slipping along strands of web until their feet settled onto the ground. The next wave just appeared out of the air, like sudden apparitions. The third wave burrowed up out of the earth. And the fourth swam up out of the sea. Together, the four groups annihilated the human race.

In The Empty Anger Of  
The Moment, He Tried To  
Purge Himself

She didn't know where the  
boy was.

She didn't care.

She kind of hoped he'd gone  
out for a walk or something.

Just Slather It In Butter

A prince weds a girl, the  
daughter of a scullery maid,  
and they cavort and couple  
and romp, while in his mind  
the prince tries to work out  
how to win the hearts of his  
people in spite of his recent  
vow of silence.

Remember That Day In The  
Kitchen When The Cat Shut Up

The raisin toast was a little  
too far beyond golden brown  
for the boy's liking.

Upstairs, the girl wouldn't  
wake up.

He reset her alarm and left  
her to her own devices.

He attempted to resurrect  
the feelings he'd had  
recalling his mother's name

I wiped Tommy's hands and face. He yelled at me to stop. "I want more cheese," he said, stomping his foot down.

These Days, He Wore His  
Glasses Only For The Freedom  
He Felt In Taking Them Off

“Maybe,” said the boy to the empty sky above the lake, “everything we do together is equivalent to cutting something off, like severing a piece of your body. Maybe you have to cut some opening into a person before you can truly join together with them into something new.”

If You've Just Caught Yourself  
Thinking, It's Already Too Late

The sister shook her big shaggy head and made a tsking sound, sucking against her teeth with the tip of her tongue in a way that was quite gross if you paid close attention.

The brother looked down along the side of his arm toward the floor, which was carpeted wall-to-wall in beige broadloom.

She Was Completely Unaware  
Of How Gassy I Was

He is phasing out like a man on  
a transporter pad, becoming  
one with the air, then returning,  
joining trees, waving arms like  
branches reaching for clouds,  
his hair caught in wind, curving  
like glass, waving like grass in  
the fields beyond.

The Girl Bent Over and  
Bounced The Tennis Ball

“At some point in the not-too-distant-future,” says Poindexter, “Grammerly will take over, and you won’t be allowed to write a grammatically incorrect sentence.” “Is that your mother downstairs?” asks the girl, taking her mouth off his weapon.

He Made A Sound  
Like Something Hollow

The old man felt a surge of excitement, knowing he would be able to watch the events of the world unfold out the back window of his condo. He rolled his wheelchair into the kitchen to get some coffee.

They Call Up The Future  
And Ask It To Surrender

Just as the first drop of  
glistening drool stretches out  
from the corner of his mouth,  
the front door lock clicks and  
he comes fully awake.

The Sound Of My Heart Stopping

The book is open to a page  
with a picture of some  
ducks talking to one  
another, but the child does  
not understand what the  
ducks are saying because  
they are talking in Duck.

So I Said To Him, Get Your Hand  
Out Of There You Fat Pig

There were two kids.

One of them was me.

The other was someone else.

I wanted one of them to be happy.

I thought if one of them was happy,  
that would be enough.

I'm Telling You, It's Never  
As Easy As You Think

We sat for a while listening to  
the sounds of the parking  
garage, muted through the  
closed windows of the car.

My wife tapped at the cigarette  
she was smoking with her  
index finger and ash showered  
onto the floor.

It Was A Crazy Wind

I pull on my underwear.

My pants.

I tuck in my shirt.

I sit down on the floor.

Pull on my socks.

Then I tap Mother on the arm  
and tell her I have a headache.

The Girl Floated Up From  
Her Dream Like Something  
Consigned To A Petri Dish

I spend all of my waking hours, and probably a bunch of my sleeping hours, too, answering questions that I don't even know how to ask.

What In Tarnation

*There's so much to be  
sorry for, God thought.  
He touched his chin.*

It Wasn't Just Another  
Undershirt, She Said

The boy's shoes touched down onto the road, one foot following the other, like two friends learning a new dance together. The power lines made a noise that snowed down onto his head like shattered glass.

Your Tongue Feels  
Warm There, Johnny

“Is it too late to take  
one of those lactose  
pills after you start  
drinking your milk?”  
asks the girl.

I Still Like Thinking About Rhonda  
Mornings When I First Awaken

The only sounds were crickets and the odd car rolling along two blocks away on Yonge Street. The girl said nothing, but by now the boy had his head turned toward her, and he saw her nod slightly while continuing to stare at the moon. She looked at him for a second, then back at the moon. They both didn't say anything. They were both trying to decide whether or not to say anything.

Please, Just Let Me Talk

You might think the problem would be that if you get stoned, you don't care enough to do a thorough job, but the real problem is, if you don't get stoned, you can't see how it doesn't matter one whit if you do do a thorough job or not.

I Have No Friends, Really

There was something they  
couldn't put their fingers on, so  
they kept putting their fingers onto  
each other, like they could pin  
something down. Or spin away  
from something and run, then turn  
around and run back to where  
they'd been in time to catch the  
secret of what it was that was  
constantly eluding them.

This Isn't An Example  
Of Something Else

Adolph was ticking things off  
on his fingers.

Shauna squirmed a little  
where she was standing,  
like some little kindergartner  
who needed to pee.

Next Time I'll Know  
Not To Take You Along

The big tub of craft supplies was on the table; numerous dishes were in the sink; my running shoes were on the floor by my chair; my coat was on the floor beside the shoes; black and yellow pom-poms were spread out across the table; the big orange plastic spoon was on the counter with spaghetti sauce on it; a wooden spoon was beside that; the cheese was sitting open on the counter; a box of cereal sat beside the cheese.

The Kid Who Won The Contest  
Met Me At The Bank

Veggie tales was over, so Deve  
came running into the kitchen.

"I want to go to the river," he  
said. "We're not going to the  
river," Parky said. They yelled  
at each other for a while.

Meantime, I went upstairs to get  
everybody some socks.

When I Get To New York,  
I Have To Rent A Car

“Where did you get that thing?” she asked. “Can I get one?”

# Beauty Can Be Deceptive

He looked her over. “Are you wearing anything under that?” he asked.

It Was Obvious From The Start That  
No One Would Ever Be Happy Again

I stand by the window. The roofs of my neighbour's homes are sheathed in frost. Smoke rises almost straight up from the chimneys. The sky is blue but still. It's a little dark yet. Soon, the sun will rise and my children will awaken. My wife will come down in her robe. I will make her coffee.