

Glow-in-the-Dark Thoughts:  
A Collection of Short Stories and Poems

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## Locomotion

My name is Mister Silly Silly Silly. I was born in 1992. My father's name is Leo Kushnir. And I am the most powerful man in the world.

Okay, not really. I'm not the most powerful man in the world, but sometimes I feel like I am. Sometimes I feel like I could hurl my stainless-steel toaster through the double-paned glass that separates this sixtieth-story penthouse from the cubic miles of smog, city, and people that live out there. The eight-by-eight panel would shatter in long, jagged chunks like dragon daggers. I'd swing that sorry appliance by its rubberized power cord and release it from my orbit with an opening of my palm. I could do it—I played baseball in middle school.

Crash, glitter, ..., ..., ... thunk. (sixty-*\*seven* stories up. That's right—I rounded down.)

The littler pieces of glass would shower onto the dining room table. They'd sparkle like morning dew. They'd tinkle like sleigh bells. I might just have to throw them in a bowl and spoonswallow them with whole milk. *Gulp*.

Just kidding. I'm not effing crazy.

Speaking of whole milk, I'm going to prepare myself some breakfast. Are you hungry? No? I'm *starved*.

I'm hippo-hungry. Cheese pizza—extra oily, please. "*PLEASE*"... HA. Allow me to pull out my pocket dictionary.

*Please: adv. a wimpy widdle weasel word said in lieu of self-respect.*

Oh, no. I've come on a little too strong—resoundingly negative. Let me switch the valence: you're beautiful. You're brilliant. You're cool and slick and musical... you're like Disney on Ice... *better?*

Sometimes I feel like I'm the most powerful man in the world. I'm not—technically speaking. But I sure do feel like it sometimes. I'm loaded. *Rich*. I'm not “daddy pays my tuition and we go on vacations”-rich, either. I'm not “we have a heated pool in our summer house”-rich, *get it?* I'm filthy, nasty, rank, rancid, sickly, grotesque, malignant rich. *Evil* rich, and I love it. I love it because I'm winning and you're losing. I love it because you said I couldn't do it. “*Me?*” you ask. Yes, you. You said it to my father, and you're saying it to me. *You*.

Before I start, imagine melancholy, but uplifting orchestral music for the background. Ideally, you're hearing something like the soundtrack of *Ratatouille* right now.

My father's name is Leo Kushnir. Born and raised in Brighton, Massachusetts. His mother Yulia—my grandmother—was Ukranian. Single mother. Hard worker. Tough. She'd cuss out anyone who brushed up against her on the street, but she had a soft spot for Leo. Of course she did. He was all she had—her only son. Every day before school, Yulia held him from below his armpits and raised his face up to hers. She looked into his shielded algae eyes (the same as *his* father's) and spoke to him.

“Leo means lion. A lion is proud. A lion is strong. Show me your teeth.”

He sneered high, exposing his gums.

“Good.” She set him down and tapped each exposed tooth with her nail, fourteen dull clicks. He winced each time, but it didn't hurt. Standing at a little above her waist with a red backpack the size of his torso, he would have been a cute kid—except for his lopsided cranium. Skull defect fixed by surgery left my father's upper third of his face protruding and warped like a stepped-on Coke can. At least the bone fragments at the top of his head weren't gonna grow into

his brain anymore. After walking down the narrow popcorn-paint hallway, Leo turned around, those deep mossy eyes searching for his mother's encouragement.

"Go, child," she whispered with a nod. He heard, reached for the doorknob, and left for the bus stop.

He leaned against the aluminum street sign. The puddles of water reflecting the pale sky on the asphalt looked like spilled white paint. Leo observed the tiny insects that skated on the film, their legs like needles pricking the taut surface. These disruptions formed circles that propagated out at constant rates from a moving center point. Leo considered the circles. They seemed too geometric, too perfect to exist in this world. They reminded him of an animation Ms. Chatlos had showed him after class to visualize the Doppler effect. It began to drizzle; his tick-red backpack turned maroon. He remembered that it was a Monday, and on Mondays students are allowed to take Marv the hedgehog out to the sandbox. He hoped that he would get to take Marv the hedgehog to the sandbox.

The arrival of the bus yanked Leo from his musings. *And* set his heart racing.

*"Freak!"*

*"Did your mom make those shoes for you?!"*

*"What are you DOING here, dent head?"*

He kept his eyes down as he trudged along the rubber-floor. He viewed the bus as a ribcage. The tips of the ribs his assailants firing their salvo along the path of the curved bones, colliding with him walking down the aisle spine. Leo found an empty seat, stuck his backpack between his legs, and tapped his teeth with his fingernails. He looked out of the green-tinted bus window and watched the world blur by.

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“That’s all we’ll cover on fluids for today, boys. Remember, fluids are all around you—they’re not all just stuff made out of water. The air you breathe is a fluid, even the window glass over there is a fluid—it just moves very, *very* slowly. Go out and play now. Avoid puddles!” Ms. Chatlos released the class for recess.

Leo darted straight for the hedgehog cage. He looked for his friend in his mock-log den and underneath the mound of wood-chips.

“You want this guy? Rat boy wants to play with the rat again?” One of the bullies cackled. Leo located the voice and swallowed hard. He was dangling Marv from his hind leg.

“Stop... please... please stop.”

*Please: adv.*

He spoke with no power behind his words. As the bully began to swing Marv in a vertical circular arc, Leo’s vision narrowed like a train tunnel. And again, as he buckled to his knees, he watched the world blur by.

When the world stopped blurring, he was thirty-two—and married. Kind of a miracle my mom ever fell in love with him. My mom, Daria, an artist. She must have seen a painting in him. Maybe it was the distorted skull or the allure of buried brilliance. But artists adore and abandon, and that she did. By the end of my dad’s schooling, his curiosity had been wrung out of him like a piss-soaked chlorine pool-rag. The rich vermin with their boat shoes and wool scarves and shortbrim hats in Boston School for Boys traumatized my dad so bad that he never grew a spine and got walked all over his whole life working subminimum-wage jobs (yea, those exist). Just

about right after I was born, my mom had to leave him because he was so damn unconfident he could never satisfy her intellectually, conversationally, sexually, or otherwise.

Growing up in Boston, I didn't have toys. I didn't have books. I made up games to pass the time in the apartment while my mom was in the studio like subtracting large numbers from other large numbers. I've always been fond of subtraction... At twelve years old, the turpentine must have finally gotten to my mom. The brain is flesh, and flesh rots. My mom forgot my name once, and then again. And then again. When flesh rots, flies feast. She deteriorated quickly.

She paced around the apartment, muttering, asking herself for her own name.

"Daria. It's Daria. *Daria.*" I whispered, hoping she would hear my words without noticing that I'd said them, hoping that she would think that she'd answered her own question. I left the apartment when I was fourteen years old. I still wonder if Daria noticed my absence.

I'll cut the sob story. Getting sick of talking about it and you're getting sick of listening. But just know one thing: I'm not ashamed of where I came from or anything I've done. I had *nothing*. And now I have *everything*. Things worked out. The windows in front of you cost as much your daddy's car. This breakfast tabletop is British slate. Just looking at this skyline is increasing your net worth. I don't need your sympathy, and I don't want it. I'd rather chew on broken glass.

But now that I've caught you up, I can tell you my whole shtick—you know, what gets me going. But let's do this classroom style, pedant. Grab your mechanical pencil and get ready to play *Guess! My! Shtick!* What do I do for fun? Got your guess? Ready?

Time's up! Answer? I'm a Manipulator. I coined the term myself, so you totally got it wrong. I'm classically trained in the art of magic. I *could* describe myself as a magician, but

Manipulator has such a ring to it. It's like a steel wire bent in five ninety-degree angles slips out between your teeth every time you say it. *Manipulator*. I still dream of performing. The casino was like a playground. I'm telling you, I have sloppy wet dreams of that place. I can see it right now.

It hums. I lean against a slot machine and breathe it all in. The dull knock of knuckle on felt—*hit*. The squeals of a bachelorette party—*drink*. The clear red plastic on a sweat-slimed button—*slam*. My eyes dart from scrub to scrub. The stench of alcohol and want. A labyrinth of lights and lies, a maze of money and machine. Carpet floors, low ceilings, pull the lever, taste the feeling. Worship sin and be our prey. Genuflect to greed and pray. Stay and play, the people say. Stay and play, stay and play...

I saw a woman perched on a stool in front of a slot machine. Over thirty-five, under forty-five. Shiny white dress, lightning blue eyes, drink in hand, and the glimmer of a Cartier on her left wrist. Perfect. I took an extra-long blink as I approached, reciting my induction sequence to myself and pulling my glass-shard necklace out from my shirt. I slid two Bicycles between my index finger and thumb. *Snap. Flick. Blink and you'll miss it.*

"Very nice to meet you," I said, injecting my syrup-smile into her night. "Mind if I show you a trick?"

"Please do," she said, half laughing. She shot a glance up at me with the tips of her lips curling up. The motion was seamless—maybe she was used to pulling that move. I pretended to fall for it and kept my eyes locked onto hers as I shuffled. The fifty-two cards blurred beneath her vision.

"Pick a card, miss."

She chose one, memorized it, and placed it back into the deck. I started shuffling again, but this time she watched me closely.

“That’s a pretty strange necklace, magic-man. I like it. You ever cut yourself on those edges?”

I faked a laugh and tugged on the shard. The magnetic clasp at the other end of the white-gold chain separated. I dangled the jagged fragment in front of her.

“Sometimes I do. I’m used to it—little nicks and scrapes. Never draws blood.”

I kept the shard out in front of her eyes. Using my other hand, I removed the top card from the deck and placed it in her left palm.

“Hold onto this like it’s *gold*,” I instructed, closing her fingers and squeezing her hand. She didn’t notice me snap open her watch clasp. I dragged my nails down her left wrist and watched her pupils dilate—that was just for fun. If she looked down she would have seen the 10K I just stripped her of. But she didn’t—*you wouldn’t have either*. I raised the fragment higher now; the spinning chunk of glass intersected the imaginary line between her eyes and mine. The tint of the glass made my green eyes greener. She didn’t blink.

“So, what’s your profession?” I questioned, rolling the string between my fingers, causing the shard to rotate, spin, blur.

“I’m a realtor—Philly based. And I suppose you’re a... magician?”

“Something like that. Philly checks out. You’re definitely not from around here. Bachelorette party?”

The shard was spinning fast now.

“Nope, visiting... a couple of my Boston friends.” Her speech slowed. Her lightning eyes lost their charge.

“Look into my eyes. What do you see?”

“I... I don't...”

“Go on, look harder. You can see your card, can't you, miss?” I asked, almost singing. I furrowed my eyebrows with concern. I'm fake by profession, *understood?* My art *is* artifice. If you're not artificial, you're fish-fried. Go drown in some air. You're faking it, *too*—and if you're lying about it, you're faking it *twice*.

“I don't think... I don't remember my card. I'm sorry...so sorry...” She sounded like my mother. I winced at the memory as if I had just bitten my tongue. Her eyes sharpened, gaining lucidity. I refocused.

“Not a problem, not a problem at all, just listen close, okay?” I fingered the cold metal timepiece now in my pocket.

“Okay,” she murmured, barely audible.

*“The blacks of my eyes are tunnels.*

*On the floors of these tunnels are tracks.*

*At the end of the tracks is a train, but it's far, far away.*

*You can't see it now, but you know it's coming.*

*You can't see it now, but you'll see it soon.*

*It's obsidian-black, going fast, and it's steaming white like a cloud.*

*It's obsidian black, going fast, and it's loud, loud, loud.*

I *SNAPPED* my fingers in her ear. The shock sent a pulse throughout her body.

“Can you see it now?” I stared deep into her glassy eyes.

“Yes.” She responded from a faraway place. I *FLICKED* the shard with my nail. It spun so fast its blur gave it a new form. Like an inverted teardrop, or a dagger.

“The next time you blink you’ll fall deep, deep asleep. When you wake up, you won’t remember the last five minutes. You will, however, remember my eyes and that I performed a marvelous trick for you—the most marvelous magic trick you’ve ever seen in your life.”

She *BLINKED*, and her eyes sealed. Face pointing at the slot machine flashes, chin folded, she was unrecognizable from every other scrub around her. Walking around these carpet halls, you wouldn’t have even noticed her lightning eyes were shut.

So, what was the card I placed in her left hand? Custom printed deck—a business card: “Mr. Silly Silly Silly’s Magic Shows—213-313-3133.” You really think I’m gonna pass up a business opportunity? The people I steal from are my most loyal customers. I expect a call the next day. “*Snap, flick, blink. Book now!*”

A watch here, a debit card there. I win big whenever I want to. And *that’s* the difference between you and me. I call the shots, get it? I say sleep, you sleep. You hang on to my every syllable, every flick of my tongue, every twang of my vocal cords. Gatorade-blue adrenaline surges through my veins when I see your eyes grow dull and faraway—when my greedy fingers enter your mind and body through your face and I get to hold your whole world with two hands and squeeze as much or as little out of you as I want like orange juice—*extra pulp*.

Hypnosis is voluntary. You can exit your trance at any moment. But you won’t. You think that you’d leave, but you wouldn’t. Because as much as you hate me you love me. Because you’re *looking* through my *green glass shard* into my *green glass eyes* into the *train track black*. And you *know* the train’s coming and it’s coming loud and it’s coming fast. And more than anything you know that it’s gonna be here soon, and when it’s here—

*Ding!*

You'll have to excuse me. My toast is ready. And I'm *starving*.

\*\*\*

## Pinpricks

A spider made of chrome crawls between my teeth.  
Smaller than a taste bud, it climbs in and falls  
through the vessel veil, muscle matrix.

The mirror sheen is red.  
It's made of needles. It pricks like eight.  
A machine of metal mind, have you seen one?  
I'm looking for mine, lost so long.

It drops through my hollow body. I like it.  
Tumbling as it tears lines in my canvas,  
Stabbing and dragging at the slated cadence  
of a slalom ski.

I like how it pierces a hole large enough for its body to fit  
through the tip of big toe beneath nail  
and squeezes itself out onto the rug.

It leaves a trail of wine like a painter,  
The stain starts and spreads.  
Purple! Blue threads and red.  
My chrome spider curls into itself  
And disappears into a grain of dust.

You're brilliant and more.  
You sob when you sleep.  
It burns you to breathe.  
You're an artist.

You're vitriol.  
You're rotting.  
You're swallowed teeth.  
You're an artist.

I'm breathing now in the heart of space the ruby flames of the sun.  
I'm chewing now the glassy glean of a platinum diamond stud.  
My mind tastes asphyxiate. It's sweet like the tip of a pen.  
Your arachno-sting is saccharine.  
And you're red, red, red.

\*\*\*

## Invincibility

I am the black-hot liquid dread  
That you drink before you dream,  
That you pull before you peel  
The rind of a clementine in your hands  
Sticky and sweet and tangy and acid.

What deserves your attention?

I am the snap of your neck,  
Steel-frame metal, bending and bent,  
around the hollow knock of your skull  
Pia mater, periosteium.  
white-topped, bone-split, cranium.

There are dreams you have had where you were not dreaming, but living.  
You were living your life; you were not dreaming.

This is one of those times.  
That deserves your attention.

\*\*\*

Why am I like you I'm not like you

Now I'm in the pity zone.

I'm not depressed,

I'm not psychotic,

I'm a potato chip in your mouth,

I'm the wrinkles in a foil ball.

My fingers ache and my stomach curls.

Can the devil hijack me through my belly button?

Do I need tampons if I'm not a girl?

I got this answered where's the delete button?

I'm really not feeling well do I have the flu?

My head is helium in a balloon.

My neck is thread three thousand feet long.

Does anyone have scissors? A key might work.

I want to go to space.

My tendons ache from typing,

I'll probably just go back to bed.

I taped my pillow to the ceiling

and draped my neck in four coils.

The experts have spoken, and something's not right.

I might have a hormonal issue.

Or a vitamin deficiency

Or stress.

I hope this isn't forever.

Don't look at me like that, okay?

Stop

Stop watching me live.

\*\*\*

Till the fields

paradigm shift  
paradigm shift

let's be real, and do a paradigm shift  
everyone needs  
a paradigm shift

to see around the corner,  
the corner, the corner!

you're in a hedgemaze,  
why not jump?

two hundred feet high  
till the apogee,

cry tears of joy as you whiz on by  
fingers first! drill down deep,

to the other side of the earth! (earth)  
twist your body through the  
liquid core  
drink the fire till your lips get sore...

covered in mud  
rinse off clean  
in the saline breeze  
of the Sulu Sea.

start a business!  
and get rich quick!  
burn your money,  
and inhale the fumes

till your head gets silly till your feet melt,  
till you live your world in quicksand.

and your hands get stringy, and you can't but  
see the dragon in front of you.

he's long and white and red-eyed,  
his scales are big and razor sharp.

you hop in his nose and hijack his mind,

you think and feel in dragonspeak.

you swim in the ocean and swallow a whale  
you like the blubber, the baleen, the tale.

your friends get worried and you don't know,  
Who or where or why you are.

you're so confused  
you're confused confused

and you crawl back in time  
Into your mother's womb.

you're birthed again as an infant.  
you're all grown up and twenty one.

in college, you're a frat boy.  
you're tall, buff, and popular.

it's Halloween! and you're drunk! (drunk)  
Hey, let's go to a hedge maze.

\*\*\*

Does God jerk off to me?

I don't know,  
It's just kind of creepy  
When you realize that every time you clip your toe nails  
In your dorm room  
And let the clippings rest peacefully  
On the stinky carpet  
Like the early civilizations  
of Mesopotamia and the Harappan,  
you're being watched.

If I were God, I would probably live a noble life  
For like the first thousand millennia,  
But by the second thousand millennia,  
I think I'd probably do some fucked up shit.

Do you think God has a God?  
He probably does.  
He's *God!*

Am I God?

The sheer volume of people that He watches shower must be  
Overwhelming.

That's perverted.  
And gross!

Next time I'm in the shower,  
I'm gonna make a silly face.  
He won't see it coming,  
And it'll totally kill the vibe.

I'm a Catholic who jerks off frequently, but  
Am I allowed to?  
Will God go to hell for masturbating?

Why would God masturbate to me  
When he can jerk off to  
Mythical creatures?

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## Protection

It reeked of formaldehyde. Germless, stainless steel, sterile... disgusting. Anand just turned eighteen, but he still felt eels tunnel through his intestines when the bleach-white-coated, ticky-tacky-doctor snapped on latex gloves. What shade of blue is that, anyway? Does that color exist in nature?

Anand doubted it.

They made him wear a dress? The air spiraled in silent, invisible vortices. He couldn't see it, but he could he feel it. He could feel *everything*. Under his armpits, behind his neck, *in between his legs*.

One reason prisoners wear uniforms is to strip them of their individuality. It makes them weak. It makes them complacent. Anand's gown had red polka dots.

He couldn't believe his mom was in the room. He asked her to join him out of habit. He forgot he was eighteen. In this room, she was a vestigial trait.

The questioning began. Volleys of arrows shot from a hundred yards away. Curious how doctors ask their questions. They stare at their monitors and nod and type and say "mhmm" even if you say some crazy shit like "I shove chapstick up my butt for the tingling sensation" (*you know, the tingling sensation?*). The questions tiptoed closer to plausibility. Surgeries. Nope.

Drug use. Nah. Aches and Pains. Sometimes...

Anand breathed shallow breaths. Mountain air.

He had been hooking up with Haley for four months. But they weren't dating. And his mom didn't know about her. He should totally lie. Utilitarian morality, right?

But he's an Honest Man™. He has Integrity. He respects the Doctor's Mission and Commitment to his Health. *What the F?*

Anand is a big fat honking hypocrite. He lied every time he told his mom he was “hanging out” with Haley doing “““homework””” upstairs. But Anand is an Honest Man™.

Anand has Integrity.

“Are you sexually active?”

“...yea.”

His mom disappeared into the wallpaper. She didn’t move. She didn’t breathe. He stared at a cabinet. His face was hot hot hot hot. His mom returned from the wallpaper realm and stepped out of the room. She didn’t say a word because atom bombs were exploding in between her ears.

You know, because when Anand told his friends he was fucking Haley they were like,

“Fuck yea. Niiiiice, man.”

You know, but when he told his mom he was fucking Haley she was like,

“What the FUCK, Honest Man™?”

You’re not an Honest Man™.

I can’t believe

I ever thought

you were.”

\*\*\*

## Mind, Here

This is Mind speaking. Hello.

Mind speaks, and Mind wants. Mind manipulates, and Mind dreams. Mind is the only thing that Mind knows.

Mind is the only thing that exists. All other statements of existence are unverifiable. Mind does not trust the unverified.

Mind predicts that other Mind is reading this word page. Mind labels this other Mind as Reading Mind.

Mind predicts that Reading Mind's experience is comparable to Mind's in terms of thoughts, colors, and phantasms.

Mind believes that Reading Mind exists, but Mind cannot be sure.

Mind imagines that Reading Mind experiences this word page and thinks that this word page is a manifestation of Mind's mind. Mind imagines that Mind from Reading Mind's perspective should be called Writing Mind. Mind imagines that Reading Mind may doubt Writing Mind's existence.

Mind accepts this possibility and respects it. Mind hopes that Reading Mind believes Mind when Mind says that Mind exists, but Mind knows that Reading Mind cannot verify this statement. Mind knows that Reading Mind should not trust the unverified.

Mind is so alone. Mind sits in nothingness, yet exists. That is all mind knows. Mind knows so little to be true. Mind wishes that more things could be true.

Mind weeps.

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## Suffering and Satisfaction

Her chemistry teacher's words blended into proton pudding. Amelia slunk into her chair. Following her usual habit, she dipped her toes, then legs, then waist through the membrane (that most would call the floor) which separated the classroom from the world beneath it. Curious that none of her classmates noticed her slip away.

It smelled like plums beneath the surface. It was cold and dark and silent. The high viscosity of the fluid softened every movement. Her four limbs treaded in a sinusoidal glide—it wasn't hard to stay afloat. A world where troubles can't feed on her skin. A world where every second takes twice as long, where every tick-tock is  
tick  
tock.

Amelia knew that she would get used to the chill. She submerged herself further. The cold stuck to her stomach and underarms. Cold like purple fridge-Jell-O.

She took a deep breath. Amelia shivered until she was neck deep.

\*\*\*

Skull hit steel. Slur hit brain. Spit hit face. Three swords sliced Jonathan in three pieces—three parallel lines. Legs, torso, head.

That's how it felt, at least.

That's every 3:35 for Jonathan. A tiled hallway floor looks different when your cheek is pressed up onto one. That floor is colder than you'd think—glacier cold—deepspace cold. If you lie there for long enough, you notice how notebook paper drifts with the drafts, how crumbs crumble, how dirt dusts. I don't know how long Jonathan stayed in that hallway, but what I do

know is that the paper, the crumbs, and the dirt accumulated until you couldn't see the tiling. Jonathan stood up, but the mess kept rising.

He took a deep breath. Jonathan shivered until he was neck deep.

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Juliet raised her hand. Then she raised her hand higher. Mr. Guy called on her. She produced the answer in a sentence as perfectly articulated as a cobra's spine. No one was surprised. Juliet's the kind of girl that goes home and does her homework for next week's class—some kind of futurologist. You could use a page of her history notes as graph paper. When she's not reading, she's writing, but her pencil's always sharp—single-atom sharp—subatomic sharp.

“Well said, Juliet,” Mr. Guy returned.

Crunch. She bit into that validation M&M. Hedonic hotspot. Neural Pop Rock. She plays it cool so no one figures out how much she loves it. But I know it, and she knows it, and now you do, too.

Shhhh...

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