

# POETRY

by Felix Kramer

## Excerpts from "The Fiddlers"

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### *0. The Fiddlers' Rhyme*

Hey Diddle Diddle  
This old man got fiddled  
And now he's dying too soon.  
The little dog laughed  
At a life cut short  
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

### *I. Judas Iscariot*

A man named judas iscariot cried seventeen tears last night. We all heard it. He was in the garden, beneath the big oak tree with the last years' king's big fat name carved right at the bottom. After he cried the seven-teenth, he brought his hand to his mouth and bit his skin, hard.

What do you have to say about that?

### *II. The Little Brother*

Call me the half-wit, wannabe Osiris.  
*(I can't seem to stick to one thing for very long!)*  
My brother's gone off to the war, and he's left me here alone.  
*(Actually, he's gone off to be a fiddler.)*  
The house feels really empty without him, though.  
*(Too bad the gunshots still wake me up at night...)*  
The man in grey in the big clock tower keeps  
    changing the time back one hour every single day.  
*(I don't even know what year it is!)*  
I'm starting to think that my brother's never coming home.  
*(I'll throw a match on the Cuyahoga in his honor.)*

### *III.*

The sick man with no fingernails said something strange to me yesterday. “It’s a fiddlers kiss (can you riddle me this?) that’ll titillate all of your dreams. with your littlest schemes in the middle it seems it’ll whittle you down to the seams.” Then, without even blinking, he died.

### *IV.*

when you sleep on the street, you wake up with black eyes, black lips, big sticky-stickies running down your arms and that slobbery feeling in your gut that says you know you’ve gone too far this time. then, you think of your old house, the one you used to live in before all of this stuff, and maybe that memory makes you feel a bit better as you pull yourself to your feet, brush off the crusties, and trudge down the alleyway, slow, one foot after the next. don’t look at the red-eyed bandit and the way his filmy nails dig in his lips. don’t look at the blonde-haired woman, the one that you think you used to know, the one that lets her pinky kimono drag too, too long on the ground behind her. don’t look at the old soldier or the man who built the fat bombs that took out the cities to the north with their one-two-three-boom. just keep your sights straight and your spine straighter and you’ll be alright, son, you’ll be alright. i’ve seen it all too, you know. i’ve seen the eastie towns with wet mud streets and porcelain sidings. i’ve seen those slip-lipped amputees, too, the ones that spit on your white white cheeks. i’ve seen the way you hide your hands at night. don’t be scared. things will get better. just hold on. hold on. hold on. i believe in you. i believe in you.

we all believe in you.

### *V.*

There’s a woman with green eyes and thin arms and breath that smells like chloroform. She’s been coming to my room each night to tickle my feet and rearrange my bedsheets. I know it’s her. I can tell by the way that the windowpanes always have those little pink marks at the edges. Once, we were friends, but I can’t remember what that was like anymore. Someday, there won’t be anymore nights like this.

**VI.**

you are my favorite ki\_\_er. i can't think of anyone i'd rather ki\_\_ than you. i hope that in a day or two, we can both ki\_\_ each other beneath the big oak tree, where my brother ki\_\_ed the red-haired woman who once hummed a nice tune but then on monday got very quiet.

**VII.**

Here's something for you that we think you should know, and we hope we can trust you with it, because it's a real big secret: the woman you called your sister died last night outside the house the old knave built. We tried to help her, we really did, but we couldn't, we couldn't, we couldn't. I guess the truth of the matter is that we just didn't care all that much at the time. You don't need to tell us that we should feel bad – we already do, thank you very much. It's all kind of silly, I guess, but, we thought you should know.

**VIII.**

caesar takes all the money and eagerly opens the window and after he does so he sits on the bed and he wonders how he should invest until cicero walks in the room and with hands full of acorns he laughs and he laughs and he laughs and he laughs

***IX. The Old King***

The old king's crown fell off when he frowned. It fell right down in the mud. The hook-nosed queen with her eyes so green said "what did you do that for?"

The old king grinned as he scratched at his chin, and he picked it up so quickly it'd make your head spin. "Why you see, my dear, stand right here. There's nothing to do but sob."

## **The Black Black Thickets**

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The road to ruin slowly grew inside the wide and wavy lane,  
And all the knaves have taken up their places on that gravy train.

## **The Fool**

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*Idiot Savant* – a wanted imbecile who brought the peasants  
pheasants and unpleasant little creatures that he caught.

## **Patrick's Hat Trick**

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*Patrick's Hat Trick*: That chick's cat checks out the way the hatchet sways.

## **(shouted around horsebend)**

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“Here he comes up with his thumbs up!”, spat his words around the curve.

## **In the Blood-Stained Mud**

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On Unified Jupiter, stupefied Cupid  
Crawled under a manger where yesterday, two hid.  
And after he slobbered the sides of his stew lid  
He clobbered the skies and he sobbed at what you did.

## **The World I Remember**

*(The Nuclear Holocaust)*

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That day when fire razes one-by-one  
Each man-si-on and bricko'd house, nev' mind  
The hoodlums that got lost beneath and  
Cracks to swall'up slippy skins  
No, I —  
(Spoken with flame in my eye)  
Won't cave in or fallbehind.  
The scrap-ears pick-up — shush! — your scent  
And houndies snap up snippy, bound by chain.

## **Taurus**

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Taurus tore his tunic, tuned his lyrics, leered before us.  
When he tuned the dials; war tore up the land.  
    With that, he ruined us.  
His tour has reached the tower now. We fear the foreign hordes.

# Koenig

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## *I. Bev Koenig Mi*

And twill a king-fore reign to spread  
    across all-toward and o'er lands.  
There won't be raised what you can't fell  
Beneath your sword you noblesir,  
    you neverheathe.  
So gaze upon an ungrey mount,  
    from sky to sky,  
    'till death we fande.

## *II. The Devil*

Say goodbye to sympathy and sendery  
And other silly sinfonies.  
Never forget you that I am a killer;  
A blackhand, a coldart, a brutalist.  
A devil whose hands on your neck every night  
    pulls your breath out; the squeal of a fatbellow.

In Quatreago there were those with redeye,  
With fists like gunpowd'r they tore down the walls.  
And so did you dream to fold into their ranks  
    if you were yet a man.

So come to me, and I'll sieve out your face  
And suckle each tear from the ducts of your eyes.  
There would be many nights like this  
Had you been a king, and not a fool.

### *III. The Dark*

Carve inside and say to me  
    These honesties,  
    These anti-lies,  
These thoughts that slice in needle-thorns  
    Your soft achilles heel.  
And what we shared were those long nights  
    And blacksights  
When you did many a black deed to me.  
You stretched my skin a canvas-block  
Despite my nails still bedded in your sides.  
With knives enveloped each inside of us  
From heart up into gut  
Within that antifony spark  
    Our toiles set me free  
    And always 'fore the day was lost;  
You laughed and how I sucked it up like honey.

### *IV. Luraixe*

Luraixe mi, luraixe mi,  
Close your eyes and laye upon me weary head  
Where all those ceaseless kingdoms sprawl  
Where all those feeble-fingered crooks  
    Have slid in cracks a thousand fears  
I beg of you to spill them out  
    In sooty tears,  
    In bilous spits.

Through sleepless nights I'll stand  
    Watch by your side  
To splatter out the guts of teasing imps  
And other ragged carminieres  
That long have tugged your sides.  
For I am yours and offer up  
No less than my heart, drawn in full  
And too this foolish flesh  
That all around it pulses tight.

A dreamer had once said those words.

## *V. Trickster*

- i.* Call me a trickster; it's your hand I prick  
Can you stand to be picked by the skin-of-your-eyes?
- ii.* I'm torn in twain but wouldn't doubt  
That you could be a noble man.  
I'll chisel and chip at your every disguise  
But I can't stand to hold your hand.

## *VI. Closures*

Fold up all your photographs and pitch your pictures in the mud.  
There's always time for me to say "No use for dirt, no place for blood."

I've paid a pretty price, and all the things I've done, I've laid to rest  
In coffee grounds and alcohol.  
In all the books you never blessed.

I'd rather have an idle hand around my neck than on your crown  
For who on earth could understand the way you held that devil down?

## *0. Untitled*

So, here's a riddle for you.

Vassi hito, palo, et glovenaup tatto?  
Dassi dessi des mi?

Do you want to be mine?

## **Battleliers**

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The battle is over. Why haven't you gathered  
Your tapestries from those delousing abbetors?  
From warpaths so scattered? From demons so slathered  
in mire? From liars and scoundrels and debtors?

## **The Old King**

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If you could see the old king now,  
He'd draw out laughter from a cow.

## **Ditchman**

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He's made it miles in grey-sooted clothes. And he no longer finds cause to pay attention to the bits of old friends and lovers clinging to ev'ry wooly fiber, so it's a crunchymarch he marches on in half-time, slow-time (dreamtime, lovetime) ; the world's a crumble off beyond sights but the woods look like they were scrawled with delight in chalk and charcoal and he's catching only slightest whiffs of copperblood and deadpatch-ers from over-top the hills. Maybe it's gotten a little mundane how he picks through every farmboy's body found sometimes beneath their makeshift grave-cover of dried leaves and loose bark-peels. And — he's grown sick and tired of sharing his breakfast with rats and their rat-stragglers. Ear pick-ups the scrape of axe-or-sword that's somehow near'n and near'n with each step forward and it takes a conscious effort to return his thoughts to tincans, drygrain, rainwater. Then he sees on the path a dead'y-bird, and it's something he doesn't expect. Drops his pack just where he sit-downs and the sound's gone; branches against branch once more. Rough-skinned like the little teeth of pebbles in his shoes — the next camp's soon.

## **The Black Westerneer**

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I've been too judgmental. And. Truth be told, yes,

I'd love for you to lash-whip 'cross my palms and drive me

To the desert ground.

Take me down and

All in sights of cattlepath, hang-nooses, horse murderers.

Not just little the frontier towns but: the slaughteryards that follow, too.

The greying of the ground. The blacking of the –

And. Who are you –

Some wanderer with fish-hook in your hand and a dream of:

A faraway dark-tin-type saloon to take you in with shimmy-shine grin?

The one who staggered up, jag-spurs onto the roughwood;

Your clothes still in their atramental wrinkle

A guard against my gaze upon your skin.

And. You step up to the hang-horse now a criminal

With coarse-hair, seedy-eyes and noose-bound neck,

And a perfectly ugly little smirk,

And mayb' something clicks-all into place somewhere inside your clock-work heart,

That with our gaze connected might feel good; yeah, could feel all-right.

You'll reach into back pocket, feel tin-tokens you've collected

through all trials, tribulations,

Even though

the crowd snaps up to watch heels swing.

With that look in your eyes, you'll wave goodbye; a-smilin' all the way.

In ghostlands, shoulders brush mine, and I think

I'd like to ride away somewhere

And watch your hoofbeats slash dirt roads

And never catch the end of night.

## 3/4 Horsemen

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### *Pestilence (Lust)*

And so nevertheless, you can cleverly guess  
What became of us as (room-by-room) we undressed.  
Through the slippery steamrooms,  
    through halls and through doors,  
We emerged with a laugh into camps made of cloth  
With the walls slick and swollen, in festering heaps  
All our bodies we nestled in ecstasy thick.  
And on mattresses waterlogged more with each breath,  
How we all wanted faster, and further, and more!  
The sentence was just; we would not be paroled.  
Both our bodies and countries the horseman controlled.

### *War...*

War advanced on dancing horses,  
Holding handsome hounds at bay.  
Bludgeon bodies with a cudgel —  
Put your butcher blocks away!

### *...and Famine*

Famine ran in empty rivers  
Into cities desolate, where  
Kings and barrons, both adrift,  
Now scraped for seeds in earth now bare.

Our fields infertile, ditch to desert,  
We ate pages, choked on dust.  
Though once we sweated, bulged and laughed  
Now bones raised tent-poles for our skin.

As he rode, we swayed like thistles,  
Chewing only pennies for the taste.  
He galloped past us, onto sunset white.  
Our eyes too dry, they papered. He was gone.

## Sincerity

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Milk still on my lips I walk out.  
Shoesoles go splishsplash, and puddles  
Slip into my socks  
But  
Turning over in my pockets  
Little coins, fortunes, bottlecaps  
I'm on my way home.  
Storefronts flicker in and out  
Like bad memories  
Chain link, barbwire, gravel  
A place where once some crime scene blood  
Made a mother cry when rain washed it away  
Three more blocks and I'm  
No longer thinking about black eyes, broken windows but  
Noticing pink child's toy on front door-stoop  
Everything-  
And each step spikes that ache  
Up 'gainst the state of my skull  
A real number on me  
This time  
Some screech of tires and  
Teethgrind  
The buildings stare as I  
Not limping, am I?  
Sit on the curb. Just for a second I swear  
Not drifting off  
But  
It's all so sore  
My blood's gone bad  
Eyes –  
And that crack as I lean forward –  
Can't tell what it was –  
Rust gate heartbeat  
A police siren  
No  
Not like this

## **Traindreamer**

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Losty in mist goes I white-eyed soft skin thinner than you'll know.  
Pacesteps be-tween collums be-called. Cementwalls?  
No matter. One more walks the tracks.  
He walks the tracks.  
He walks the tracks.  
Those dreams are never coming back.

## **Shyness**

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When you spoke to me I-  
    Turned my head away.  
Feel that shudder in my gut;  
It's hard to hear your words today  
When even kindness burns as hot as coal.

## Yardy

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So this black city sprawled stockyard crates  
In cramps and circles all around it  
Mangy voices;  
Those screams from

Those hells.

We've razed slums to flatten out a stomping ground for cows' hooves;  
Left tycoons to finger through the tins of rich mans' trashbins.

When you hear  
    Through thinny curtain  
When you hear  
    Out past the:  
        factories  
        the old smoke belchers,  
Where the river dirt's  
More oilslick than earth  
It-

When you hear  
The scratch  
The pleas  
Scraped through throats gone crunchy  
Sloped from forehead to cement  
And plucked out hair-by-hair-by-hair-by-hair  
From leatherbound skins

When you hear  
And turn a blind-eye

When you hear  
And peel those sinews from your gums

And when you hear  
Gasp'd wordless in the dead of night  
All brays that reek like prisonshit  
Beneath  
The sweaty, sweaty night

You really don't

## **Shoreline**

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Step a wandry measure  
Oft the sills of patchy sands.  
Clasp each finger two-and-twi  
And let your long tongues lap up  
Seasalt, and whitesofts, and cinnamon.  
Dark-edged; do you see the way 'et photos  
Curl-up in the attic? Those blackends drone in more each year...

## **Ribbons**

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Three blind mice pull, pull, pull  
On little ribbons. On sappysuckers and sillycappers.  
On honeysticky lips.  
And in the cold-walled shower,  
All that white's just steam upon your legs  
And death's own misty pinkies  
A-scrapin' at your ankles.

## **Zurie Zurucko**

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Maylies maylikes maglikes magflies  
Zurie Zuricko he is. A real. Sharp. Shooter.  
Insulario

# Ghosts

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## *I. Vermin*

and then you died. your brain turned dry. thoughts and tunnels clo-sed up. your tear ducts clo-sed up. they said you lived a quiet life. a house kept clean. your heart kept fit. polite enough to turn all scrutiny to brute attacks; you died uncriticized.

they took their time in finding you. your skin was dry as paper. and so it flaked off as they moved you. placed you down upon a gurney; chest, they opened up, no autopsy, but just to see the way a heart can turn to such a pow'dry stuff.

## *II. the ghosts of...*

the mice the mean cats killed

*(now stashed beneath the carpets, their bodies lie as flat as coins.)*

meals you swore you'd make

*(ingredients turned bad.)*

projects planned and thought of in the daze 'tween bed and sleep

*(you never wrote them down.)*

maybe someday.

maybe next week.

maybe never

there's so much that you'll leave behind

when even buildings fall to crumbs.

someday the last cat will meow.

the last time any hear that sound.

### ***III. Tearfall***

you cry at night now. and your face it glows, a full moon it looms down  
and stares. and widened eyes eat up the goings on of some young boy  
whose name you can't recall. a family far happier than even your most  
glistnin' memories.

those memories; they're far away. and with each motion how they're far-  
ther still.

they slip away. like catching fish.

### ***IV. Stains***

You left a stain upon the ground;  
It marked the spot where you were found.  
*You died alone. You died alone.*  
There's nothing left to call your own.

### ***V. Childish***

Your dying thoughts were something funny.  
Circus trips. An old stuffed bunny.  
Birthday gifts and baby clothes.  
Tag, you're it. I've got your nose.

Those animals are long since dead.  
And baby's bunny's lost his head.

### ***VI. Soliloquy***

Perhaps you'll someday see the seas and drift across the sand  
And let your body float away into some distant land.  
Perhaps you'll fade away in time, an angel's hand in yours.  
You know they'll never understand the way your spirit soars.

## **Loop**

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-won't make a rebar from a ring.

This is the path of every game.

A hula hoop.

A Möbius strip.

A tape that loops.

This whole round trip.

Familiar, aren't all these things?

But knowing how they're all the same-

## The Ziggurat King

---

Lava flows so bilous, wedged tight

Between gold absoliths – half-pyramid, half-city –

All in gleams and blindings

To the eyes of men who look away instead.

Perhaps they wish their eyeballs to avoid the sands

But maybe it's these structures they can't stand –

Violent defiances against the desert's oh-incinerating heat –

Made no better

By the bubbles of the molten stuff below.

Cables stretch as tight as taffy from a mid-size ziggurat

To one as tall as Sinai in legends.

And from the cables, objects hang by heavy ropes and hooks,

As pulleys pull them 'cross.

And from these hooks there's paintings. Statues. Cars and couches.

Pulled up into bay doors, into pyramid's black depths,

Its holes.

An elephant, he goes by slowly.

Ropes held tight, and he's

Uncaring and ungrossed by all that lays around him.

Sun sears white into his tusks

His skin made rough by time then soft again.

And something happens –

Cable snaps –

He plummets so far down

And hits the lava harder than he should.

I'm there and at the ledge, I look down,

And I scream.

My voice is stolen from me

The sand mutes away.

And the emperor,

he vanishes beneath the red.

## Through the Neck

---

Stand zere,  
Faceless few and multi-beasted many,  
Skinthin zandoustriosos,  
And plundandrious fatswollereries.  
The ones with glit 'll up ther' faziez,  
An' doze wi' stoch'ns to the nines.  
The cliffs are cruel,  
Arena wide,  
And you think I've come here to give you  
Clean words of encouragement?  
Eneath sky ov derision-spite  
The cloud 'zey hang and hang.  
And I with  
Teeth-clenched-grated-hard  
And fists zay-merry-fightin' proud.  
Zeres'zosze who'd slay  
From throngs beneath  
To send heads up on poles,  
Yet proud am I,  
A knight so violent-victor'd up with colder eyes 'n most.  
In these scrapes up against the throngs  
We all have years that won't come back.  
I hold them as would polaroids so leave  
Their inksprintstween my fing's.

## Absent

---

To climb over each rock you might think the scrapes they leave

    Would last forever

While your breath it left like fleeing mice

    Into an air that turned your clothes near-grey.

We lost our color;

Lost what we could have become

And you're already the type to leave in snow

The sun lost its tether and drifted far away

Two buoys are now stranded at sea

I don't even remember what red is

## Trindreamer

*(second phase)*

---

We're back again, the trainyard tracks

With pins pushed in to spite your soles.

A bed of nails. You can't relax.

The trainman died at his controls.

I'll pour out a bottle of gin at your feet

And remember the loveletters' end in the trash.

There wasn't a verse that I'd ever repeat.

You never got inside my head.

Cement affixed around your shoes

Stays haloed by the stones and bricks

That ten years earlier I chose.

So choose what you think might transfix

A wiry kind of soul as I.

You didn't succeed. I threw it away.

You never expected that I'd say goodbye.

Find another discarded cassette to replay.

Look up at the sky. At the sky. It's gone grey.

And you just wanted one more day.