

# **ANNUS HORRIBILIS**

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## Year In Review

Now comes the summing up.  
What I did or didn't do in pumping up  
My Facebook Likes  
Or rank in Google Search. Yikes.  
Is it too late to optimize  
My narrative arc? To somehow realize  
The "journey" I've been on, a la  
Every Voice contestant who's been all a  
Twitter on Twitter (cue strings)  
Over some sick relative or other, which brings  
A catch to the throat.  
I guess we're all in the same figurative boat.  
Everyone wants to be famous  
For something while staying completely anonymous: *just us*.  
Everyone wants to leave a space  
Where they once were, for their particular species of grace  
To bloom outward, like the frost  
I scraped this morning from the Kia Soul. I'm not lost  
I tell myself, let me re-chalk  
My faint white steps on the sidewalk.  
Whatever comes, I'd walk  
On, I'll keep on: walk, walk, less talk.

## This Just In

All the news today is bad.

Ankara, Turkey: an off-duty cop assassinates

The Russian ambassador in an art gallery. Berlin: a loner who hates

The West, a self-radicalized nomad,

Plows a truck into a crowded holiday market,

Killing 12. What can anyone do to make it

Stop? Meanwhile an arctic freeze

Seizes half the country, downing trees

And power lines, stranding hundreds. Sad,

Tweets you-know-who. All the news today is bad.

A friend, stage 4, who fought and won an all-clear

Gets word: it's back, and worse. We all fear

What's coming next. A final apocalypse?

A burst Dow bubble? A Beijing-like, permanent eclipse

That churns the air to ash?

A White Christmas, I guess. Is it time to cash

In, drop out, go high?

To tell the LED screens a long goodbye?

No more news is good news. Someone wrote it

On a subway wall, on a Post-It:

Something something the sounds of silence.

Deep in the woods, on an icy pond, the *ka-chunk*

Of a hockey puck, *clunk*,

From stick to stick the only thing that still makes sense.

## Reality Check

So what is false? How much is true?

At the bottom of the TV screen, a scrolling chyron

Checks for you. Everyone must try on

Some new 3D glasses: the sky's not really blue.

Black is white, in some instances.

Torturers know the first step to extract

Any remaining resistance

Is to get their subject to contradict a fact.

Then it's all downhill.

How far have we slipped to date?

Outside, the ground is sheathed in white. Which one of us will

Vouch that it's a snow event? Is it too late

Before all turns to mush?

Sometimes just the day-to-day becomes too much,

Never mind the nutcase with an AK-47

Who believes heaven

Guides him to the back room of a pizza place

To infiltrate a child-sex ring. Has everything been orchestrated to erase

CNN's fingerprints?

How can anyone know what they know if in is

Out and up is down? Send in

The clowns, don't bother they're here. *Fin.*

## Nocturne for Migraine

So which one will it be, Gary: throw up  
At 3 a.m. or cope  
By hunkering down under a heating pad  
(While a rainy-pond app  
In my earbud goes drip, drip...)?  
It's all bad.  
Is it better to soak up simple misery  
Or flail on the bathroom floor? Be  
Or not, that's the real question, I guess.  
It all comes down to truthiness.  
Meanwhile the nightly fires  
Up their alarms to 10: the frayed wires  
In Oakland's warehouse, with all its dispossessed;  
The apartment blocks in Cambridge, Mass., a mess.  
The danger's getting closer.  
You can hear the news helicopter's rotor  
Buzzing overhead.  
As General after General on CNN are read  
Their White House briefs. Time  
To lie back down, try to sleep. I'm  
Tired of trying to make sense  
Of things. My head hurts. Let the immense  
World take care of itself for now.  
No pity, no help, nohow.

## Returns

Shock. Shock. Disbelief distills to anger as the clock  
Runs out. Any talk  
Evaporates in the acrid air  
Of tear-gas fumes. Trashcans smash through storefronts in the glare  
Of burning cop cars.  
The party's over, folks. The corner bars  
Go silent. The big TV in the living room  
In the eerie a.m.  
Sits stunned, alone, as states bleed red and red.  
Where's a tourniquet? Feeling's dead.  
On the news, a woman says it's like giving birth  
To a baby you know is stillborn. It's not worth  
The tears to cry.  
When something happens that was never supposed to happen, the why  
Is almost an insult.  
No one cares. No one cares. Every sane adult  
Stares at the kitchen wall  
In the morning, hung over, wishing it all  
Was a full-blown, meth-fueled psychotic break.  
Which it was. Now eat your pancake.  
For hours, everyone's been wide awake, too awake.

## Terminus

The last class arrives,  
Slumped behind their chair-slash-desks.  
“Professor, Professor, what’s next?”  
The party’s over. Time to go back to our lives  
That go their separate way.  
Drink up. And think good thoughts that all’s ok  
In the US of A. *That* could never  
Happen here. No Putin-plutocrat could ever overpower  
All three Federal branches  
In a year or less. We have balances,  
We have checks. We’re not Russia. We’re  
Not Italy. We’re no pushover.  
Fuck. It’s dark out already,  
Only 4:30. Along the Charles, a steady  
String of headlights heading home.  
But whose home? The one I dutifully phone  
Every other week  
To talk to Mom, still holding on—we speak  
The same flat vowels, the same “uh-huhs.” Or the one  
We’ve laid a claim to, here, the one we run  
Away from, then toward  
Repeatedly, as if looking for the perfect word.

## Final Tally

All that is solid melts into air,  
Says Marx, Karl not Groucho. Everywhere  
A brand of fear  
Stamps itself on faces: on the bus, in a rear-view mirror,  
Poring over a café menu  
Or into the ice cubes of a vodka tonic. When you  
Consider all that's happened since,  
Anxiousness makes sense. Time to wince  
As billionaires punch the Up button  
That takes them to the Tower's top floor. What's been done  
Can be undone, the arc of history  
Can be bent backwards until it hurts, until this story  
Ends unhappily: no hugs, no lessons.  
Only open lesions  
As the country tears itself apart.  
The final tally's done. All those in favor of an open heart  
Say Nay; the Ayes  
Have it. Say yes to a world where big lies  
Become our daily bread.  
Say yes to letting the living dead  
Rise again to walk among us; we're their feast.  
We're their host, their yeast.  
A toast to the old guy, raise a glass.  
For whosoever's first among us, it's a gas gas gas.

## Same Old

Another year. Another *horribilis annus*.

If our past is also our future, fuck *us*.

In no one can we trust.

So what is going to happen to us? The dust

Has barely settled; the ninth chair's

Already draped in black. Where's

A purple flare to shoot off, to watch erupt

In sparkly rain? There've been far too many abrupt

Endings: in nightclubs, in cafeterias,

On street corners. Too many vigils verging on hysterias

Of sobbing, propped up

Before the TV cameras. Too much blood to sop up

From the pavement. So a prom queen

Is crowned a few blocks from the shooting scene.

So two Colombian guerrillas

Declaim their love in a jungle clearing. Is that as real as

All that's gone before?

It's hard not to think of it as war.

Remember Kenya's burning barricades of tires

To block voters? Remember the fires

Set by migrants in their squalid, makeshift camp

To protest? In North Dakota, the U.S. flag's a stamp

Against a barren sky. It's war.

Teenager brawls in malls. Fistfights in midflight. Stay tuned for more.

## Insomnia

Just when Alto jumps a chasm  
With a double-flip—as I am  
Swiping up my thumb—landing with a dramatic shush  
On skis in a rush  
Of adrenaline, from the slope ahead  
A rock appears. Is it this feeling of dread  
That keeps me in my place,  
Unsure of a strange pillow, of how to face  
The ceiling's vast whiteness? In his studio in Nice  
Henri Matisse  
Threw the shutters wide to welcome in  
A smudged-blue sky, a red umbrella, the twin  
Spires of a cathedral.  
To his eye, everything is equal:  
Jug, cloud, elbow, beach.  
All pattern, all geometry. To each  
According to its needs. In the ever-spreading universe  
We call home, a terse  
Burst of radio waves arrives from a cataclysm  
Eons ago, reminding us there is some  
Thing, so far, that remains unknowable, like what makes up  
95% of what takes up  
So much space. From the city streets below comes  
The dark thrums  
Of human activity at 3 a.m.  
You never know what's next. I am

Afraid of being afraid, I guess. What if Alto's skiing  
Disturbs a malign being  
Whose manic sledding threatens to overtake him?  
What if I die before I wake? Hmm?