

LATE STAGE MINOR  
OPIATE ADDICTION  
(AND EIGHT OTHER  
POEMS)

BY GREG BEM



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## 0: INTRODUCTION

I have always been against the use of prescription painkillers, be the use of the painkillers for the purpose of killing any physical pain, or be the use of painkillers for the purpose of reducing anxieties, balancing degrees of consciousness, or straight-up getting high. I have been a fan of caffeine and other stimulants, alcohol, and hallucinogens, but never painkillers of any kind.

In January, 2013, I received a blood clot in a vein in my leg (which is known as deep vein thrombosis, or

DVT). This large clot resulted in four clot-chunks carried to my lungs (PEs, or pulmonary embolisms), which have the potential to be fatal. Removal of them is extremely painful. I was faced with the necessary use of painkillers as wardens of pain, and became mildly addicted to the painkillers long after the pain went away.

I'm writing this introduction half-way through the completion of this collection of poems. I say halfway because I believe I am halfway. I do not know for sure.

I currently take two Vicodin pills daily, one at midday, one in the early evening. The active ingredients are Acetaminophen and Hydrocodone. The pill shape according to the prescription bottle is described as “white oblong.” “May cause drowsiness and dizziness,” the bottle reads.

I take them because I have them. I take them because I enjoy the feeling they give me. I have not gone overboard and increased the dosage, though I am well-aware that my body wants me to do just that. I do feel the pressure throughout the day to

take more Vicodin which leads me to believe I am addicted, just as I have been addicted to amphetamines, nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol in past periods of my life.

On several occasions, I have triangulated my experience with these Vicodin pills with the ingestion of two other substances. The triangulation resulted in some of the poems in this digital repository, this digital collection.

I wanted to write poems that reflected the tone of my thought process while on Vicodin, which, when

moderately taken, does indeed slow life down, reduce stress, and allow the user to remain entirely functional in everyday activities and responsibilities. The mind on Vicodin is best described as the bottle suggests: drowsy. You feel tired. You feel sleepy but don't want to pass out. I can imagine overdosing or taking "too much" would put someone in a stereotypical opiate haze, where they don't do anything. I fortunately never reached that point, though I still have approximately 20 doses left.



I don't typically write under the constraint of substances, at least I haven't recently, but I have certainly surprised myself with the poems born during this experiment, during this habit, during this lifestyle, during this dream. – Greg Bem, 02/10/13

# I: LATE STAGE MINOR OPIATE ADDICTION

*I sense another world close to me,  
perhaps no more lived in than the moon;  
they, however, never let a feeling alone,  
and all the words they use are so worn.*

- Rainier Marie Rilke, "The Solitary Person"

PHARMACIES



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MD

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EVERY  
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NOPHEN

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5-325# 30

MALLINCK  
ARW/MAD

With Your Doctor.

Reading William Carlos Williams,  
a critical inquiry of pillars.

But there was also the music,  
and the tide of blood beneath my skin.

Hiccup, hiccup, hiccup.

It has been six months.

Perhaps you are mistaken.

The carpet does feel alive when you don't move.

The desire to feel  
skin against skin, bodies  
like a light snowfall  
covering the ground.

The biggest hashtag in existence  
climbed out from where we lived  
and ran, ran, ran down the road.  
Slicing everything in its path.



Triangulation of drug use:  
smoke and water and fire.

There is laughter  
and there is singing.

But it doesn't do to stare at the clock.

And as much as we agree to intoxicate,  
there are children within each of us.

There is the craned neck and the bed.

Crescendoing out.

The classic takes flight too.

Empty 'hood streets  
nod, wink, and gaze.

Crane yard with wrecker.

A stack of beams.

Worn socks without holes.

The task of text messages.

Life: an introduction to biology.

Death: a conclusion to biology.

Books in piles on top of the table.

Manic screams beyond the window.

The low hanging fruit grimace  
making up the entire misted incision.

I am cruel and so are you.

Buckles, belts, and spinning tires.

Revival of the Vivisection.

I am undulating.

This afternoon you let your hair down.

Two days later you will keep it up.

Your smile shifted.

A river in wind, you told me  
and you told me again.

Mostly we are unaligned.



The sudden drop of a wine glass.

And a purchase of a table.

The rejection of remission.

There are the most wonderful gaps.

Do you even know who he is?

Issue the judicious behavior.

Call forth the froth of dogs.

The literal paces and the parried.

Bring your mattress.

Sell it and be rewarded.

A plastic card portrays a lifestyle.

Damn the lights that glow over our faces.

Scorpions are not black crustaceans.

Their blinking claws spark.

I know no one and everyone else.

A screen is dying agony, and scripted.

I hope you get to where you're going okay.

I've removed the old mattress.

I've installed the new mattress.

The shitty movie from before is still playing.

To not be alone with someone.

To continue to stop staring at the stars.

The length of space between our eyes:

it's killing me that distance.

Nobody Walks.

Angry Poems.

Pale Chance.

The slap of sound over the basket.

Sometimes the piqued scab  
draws more blood than nails.

You've spent your mouth  
drawing the thick material out.



When you speak  
I hear ideas  
and the taste:  
dry, milky, and chalked.

I dream of people reading  
and across the room those hearing.

This is not a challenge:  
wrappers arriving as waves.

I don't want to explain;  
I want to break my digital accounts.  
I want my life back,  
realizations over simulations.

Rilke waits to pilfer  
the collision of urns and walls:  
simple pinching of love  
while we watch and grimace.

The belly grows full, round,  
and my mouth sharpens like arrowroot.

Goodbye perfect ruined moon.

Goodnight my uncool fantasy.

The leg gets elevated by the lump.

The lump equates to pillows with sheets.

Lump elevated by mattress.

Mattress elevated by old wood.

I do well to read Milutis.

I hear a clanking of the toilet.

I smell the colors green, red, and gray.

I touch the clothes with my body.

Nudity and rationality.

Your pictures are passion.

Passionate lashes filtering thrill.

A deep wooded suburb.



Rx# 555  
TAY  
D H H S

May Cause Drowsiness And  
Dizziness. Alcohol May Intensify  
This Effect. Use Care When  
Operating A Car Or Dangerous  
Machines.

Contains Acetaminophen. Do Not  
Take More Than Recommended.  
Too Much May Cause Liver  
Damage.

Rub your tongue to the edge.

Teeth poke air like graves.

I chose to not use the semicolon.

Don't interrupt the clouds.

Claustrophobia.

Breathless and grotesque.

The last time we talked

I couldn't see the color of your eyes.

Mink coat conversation.

Goblets governed by years.

The sullen shadow

rests beneath the chin.

And let the credits roll.

Dingy bets take the tolls.

The “e” is invisible and silent.

Hush before murder.

The clock expected the room  
to turn and the door  
to open up by my hand and  
meanwhile there's still the clock.

Will you let the curious person  
discover how their place  
has been overgrown  
and yet underfed?

In this period of my life  
or the period just after  
people chase each other  
and everyone is similarly alone.



## II: EIGHT POEMS STARTING WITH MAGED ZAHER



The following poems start with lines originally by Maged Zaher, all from his book *Thank You for the Window Office* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2012)

*It is time to exchange one exile for another*  
and it is time to start putting a stop to travel.  
I watch in sequences the macrocosmic displays.  
I turn my camera at odd angles and press in.

*I will write you a letter about breathing*  
but first I must reach the hilltop,  
where the buildings will never collapse  
and the poor are whored over lack of access.

*Hopelessly middle class*

they sit and pinch with their eyelids.

They have appropriated “we” and left me.

A faint opportunity encroaches and damns.

*What is a city without its interpretation*  
but a tug of rust, dirt, anonymous rubble.  
Reminds me of anonymous wires and cables,  
and the shadowy disinvestment of the Internet.

*My basic fear is keeping the systems in sync*

and then you're supposed to grapple, say:

What is your most complex fear?

My smart fear, you mean, and it's the water.

*He brings his loneliness everywhere*  
and he reminds me of my skin,  
which I scratch and rub,  
trick into wrapping me up and letting me go.



*The cubists in their cubes are waiting*  
but meanwhile I too wait, in my home.  
The liminal depends on whether or not  
we are connected or connecting to Google.

*The city is overbuilt*

with Frank O'Hara's logical operators.

I do this or I do not do this.

I do that or I do not do that.

*Imposters come and go.*

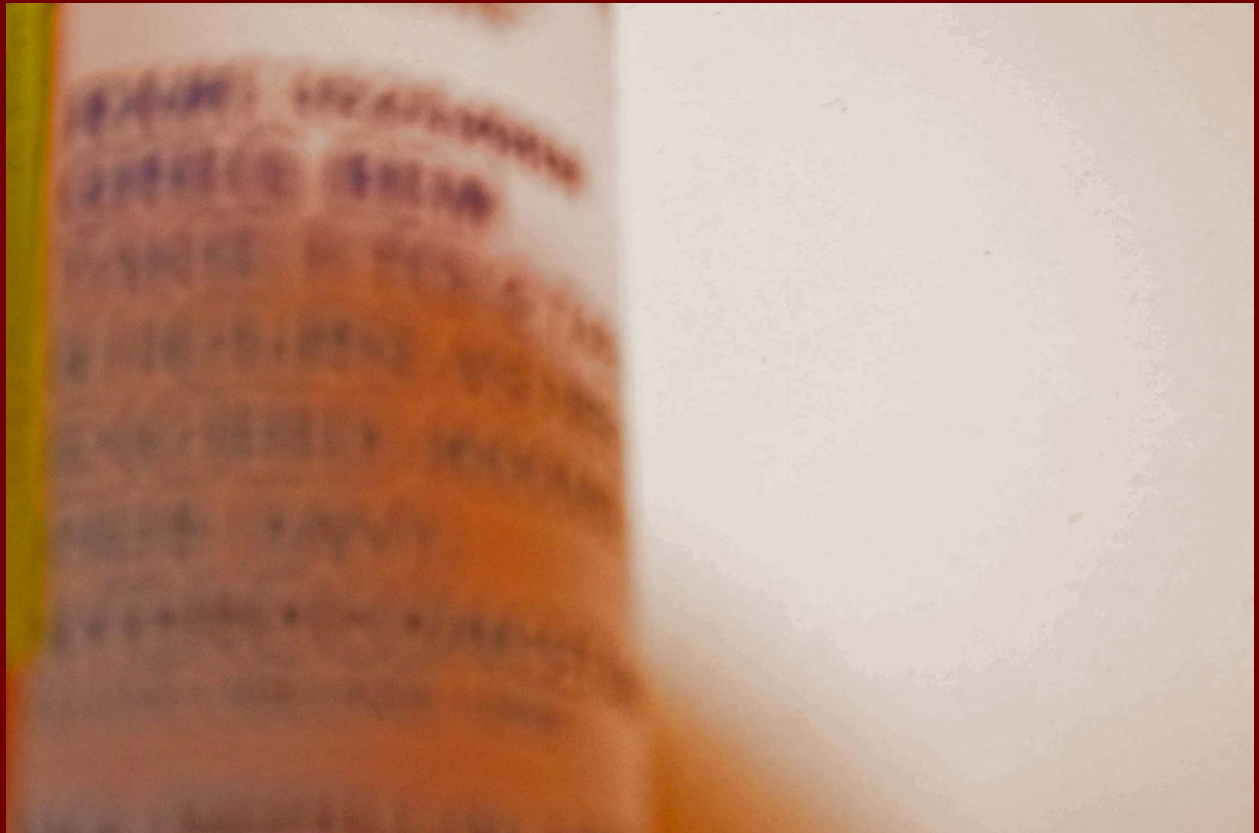
So do I, underneath the chromance.

I always thought gasoline beautiful  
reflecting colors, rainbows.

### III: LATE STAGE MINOR OPIATE ADDICTION

*As separable, controllable united of meaning, each with its own visible boundary, each with its own fixed and independent use, written words project their user into isolation.*

- Anne Carson, "Archilochus at the Edge"



When the floating stops,  
when the bubble of bounty bursts,  
you will watch yourself  
acclimate as yourself.

The last twenty pills swallowed.  
An inflatable raft beneath the belly.  
Lake Washington another dark plain.  
Knife in hand for drowse to prick.



Today is Fat Tuesday.

I remember the filth of New Orleans.

I remember Suzanne's pink skin  
and staring up at our room's ceiling.

Dreams are shaken up  
by cyclones of chat glyphs  
barring no eyes from the screen  
and spittle discards to desk corners.

At least I am careful with the dose.

Though I do miss the high.

Though I do miss cream,  
miss the blank cavity or canvas.

A note to Cristin:

I still lack proper self-awareness.

And yet I have searched.

But when doing so, my skin screamed.

These times are cryptic.  
Walking Denny Triangle,  
Aaron describes the stalker.  
I photograph a laboratory.

And to Elyse, more love  
than I could ever harness.

And to Elyse, thank you,  
for more than I'll ever accept.

Opioids like bureaucracies.

Networks and new software.

Phone numbers, questions, passkeys.

Prove who I am for me.

It's not what you're feeling anymore.  
The black chrome headphones dangle.  
There's a blue light next to a white dial.  
My eyes gravitate in the heaviness.



Stalwart comes to mind.

So should shaman, but then  
the lights shudder.

Spasm begat original pain.

It is.

I typed this multiple hours ago.

The ice machine cometh.

Sitting in a bedroom office chair.

A felt voodoo doll arrived in the mail.

Removable clothing.

Movable clot.

Thank you, Linda.

I tell her, “A normal breath.”

The magical substrata

defined by echoes

in the paperless document.

Go buy your next experience.

I tweet this.

Minutes later I return.

Where am I going with thoughts like these?

Last night I thought of *that her*.

Thousands of still images flooded.

Impossible to deny or confirm.

The silence of impossibility.

Tonight *this her* and the integral pull.

Thought: the head rains jet black thread.

Arched travel the cheeks, wet skin.

The placement a lake and a year ago.

My best splice is a scrying glass.

The fingertips make up the mirroring surface.

The sound of clicks covering precision.

Two hands waiting to accept the gift.



QuadrTECTonic

or

Quad Ra Tectonic

ore

Slip up

pup ils

pupils

pupi l's

I promised Amber 125 pages.

Or I promised her 100 pages.

A page that is no longer flat.

Is a computer screen's image flat?

It is not that I feel the chill  
but that I feel the ghost of the chill:  
covering the look of the blanket  
a body made from the smoke.

Having fun was always  
the act of jumping forward.  
You knew their sounds at last.  
You could tell them through movement.

There's not as much ash  
(to clean from the pipe)  
as I remember from before.  
Your hands are still growing.

Reaching the point of certainty  
realizing your vocabulary  
would never find perfection,  
would always need better words.

I've heard this ironing  
without watching  
and the poured water  
drips through her face.



Do you or don't you  
tell me through the tweets  
that process is rolling  
and progress cycling?

No longer effect

but storm of light heat beneath scalp.

The breath of the chipped skin.

Flaking air parades to the tablet glass.

I fantasize your eyelids closing like drumbeats  
and the largest space is the imagination  
and so the largest loss is from the self  
even if we reach for rhythm and obtain it.

Stared at I-5  
and uttered brusquely “nihilism”  
(first time in 5 years)  
and the traffic continued.

It'll take drastic measures  
and my phone will be charging  
and the dust will be settling  
while a hundred fires erupt in my veins.

The old jeans slithering  
around the bickering of my hips  
before I stuff my face  
and think of being ornery in oblivion.

Laceration of lace

before the flurried brow:

I could really use her response

as I daily take to her advice.

The chance of additional white pills  
is high.

The chance of placing a pill on my tongue  
is high.



What will I do when subject matter  
has come down like the reaper  
and scythed the fields of daily activity  
turning previous greens into future browns?

Go back to the mall.

Go back to the boxed woofer.

Go back to the rolling wheels  
and take your username with you.

The sense of despair  
is the most depressed of your problems,  
like sheets sagging in the wind  
or a set of yellow game-pieces.

Tiffany your striped shirt blew me away.  
I was dancing to the hush and the hush  
of everyone in Seattle becoming a single person.  
Justice. Challenge. Discourse. Intention.

The cell phone message cometh!  
Pressing hard on a screen to retrieve,  
you're thinking, "It's busted."  
You never had to *press in* this much.

Where does Laura go to cry?

Where do the old screens go to die?

I imagined a stack of dead laptops.

And a dream involving a paralyzed tongue.

I thought technology slow,  
but it was I who caused time to collapse.  
Sawed buzz of perceptions broken down  
before the grove of fingers.

My beard is longer  
but nothing drags more  
than my longing for you,  
now so faint and ethereal.





Sputter, water  
periphery  
double, dizzy  
before a mouth.

Her video giggle tickles a window's  
reflecting pool of light and object.  
Watch as we transform the image.  
You are required to blink your eyes.

I heard about the blood in the gallery,  
and that dude who pushed the couple down.

Dictating remaining white wall-space,  
they're now convinced, and thirst for throats.

A fantasy:  
packing the elevator  
the hands lose their balance  
and start grasping everything.

Hear Crickets.

Crickets. Crickets. Crickets.

Crickets. Crickets.

Hear Crickets.

I tell her it feels like a weight has been removed,  
stress has slid away, off the tips of my shoulders.  
I want to tell her that I think she's perfectly pretty.  
Instead I talk loudly about my problems.

Tessa don't cry anymore.

I am never awake for your texts.

We stopped G-chatting months ago.

I hope to see your latest goal successfully reached.



Aaron's in Northern California

delivering some dog and staying in some places.

And the Madvillain track is all applause.

And my leg swelled up again #BloodBalloon

It's a stupid metaphor.

Part Two of a Poem You've Killed by Reading.

Only another week of this crouching dragon.

Only another calm parade of charades.



Greg Bem lives in Columbia City, Seattle. You can discover his poetry on [gregbem.com](http://gregbem.com).

*Thanks to Maged Zaher for the portrait and the poetic inspiration. Thanks to Amber Nelson, Jason*

Conger, Alex Bleecker, Laura Wachs, and Quentin Dechery for providing Greg with an opiate habit support network. *Thanks* Alexi Brown Schmidt for driving Greg to buy his second mattress in five years from Ikea in the area just south of Seattle.

The poems herein were written between 02-09-13 and 02-16-13.

This chapbook was released to the expanses of the Internet on 02-17-13.