All of Me

I'm in my Sinatra mood tonight, hat cocked and smoke rising,
A surly charm in the air, a night made for
Barflies and punchlines and the ghosts of bad companions.

When I hear that Hoboken baritone on the make,
There's no obligation to behave: I'm immune
To the loonier reaches of the pious and the mindful.

It might be loneliness grown feral, with no place
For the smaller courtesies, or only
Bitingly polite, like a rattlesnake in a napkin ring.

I take my booze so strong, the eyesight goes
From twenty-twenty to five-and-dime
(No inebriated cherries, no tiny umbrella in the glass).

And the weather I like best? Rain falling straight down
Like quotation marks around silence,
Knives of lightning that rip the sky apart.

But these days, the women who used to come to me
Like tornados to a trailer park
Retreat, blown backwards in a black spiral.

And all the old arguments that ran the gamut
From gamy to crazed, now sputter
In some perpetual exhaustion of the heart.

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I cant and I recant and I can't go on from here:
Mon dieu, adieu. With panache or not,
Every elixir leaks out to the same gaunt conclusion.

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Glaser Salvage Yard

Apostle of the tawdry, gimcrack Jesus of the clearance bins,
I can't get enough of
The marked down, the flawed, the more for less.

Is there not some impossible beauty
Lurking among the troubled remains on the sales rack,
That one Hawaiian shirt

With blue-eyed parrots agape in the purple palms,
Or a mismatched bikini made for
Some lopsided lady with the waist of a weasel

And breasts like ten-gallon hats?
It hurts me when things go to waste. Even a wilted cabbage
Might keep a starving orphan

Pasty-faced and alive for another miserable week.
And that forgotten fan belt
Buried among the old debris at the back of a body shop

Could someday turn the engine
Of a rusted Hupmobile, until it coughed and farted up
Little black puffs from the tailpipe.

There's no reason to just chuck out anything that's maimed
Or missing a crucial part,
Not when there's always a geezer in the neighborhood

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Who knows where to find
A left-handed wingnut for an aspirator pan, and loves
Nothing better than to fiddle away

Whole weekends shaping a retro-hairy lampshade
Out of raccoon skins
Spliced to the ribs of a wrecked umbrella.

My daddy was a junkman
And gave to his place of work this grand and fitted name:
Glaser Salvage Yard.

God could have done no less, had He known more about
Carburetors and inner tubes,
About how one man's disaster is another's living wage.

And so, clumsy and all thumbs,
From the outcast and forsaken I save what I can,
Whatever sorry hash I make of it.

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Back in the Echo Chamber

It's hard to believe in the vast sweep
Of Grecian ideals and Western culture
Once you've heard the Cramps do

"Bikini Girls with Machine Guns"—
And yet there's something about that backbeat,
That anarchy of bass and drums . . .

It makes me wish I could grow
A Spanish goatee and Mexican moustache,
And look locked and loaded and barrel-aged.

It makes me want to say: I like my women
With a little Memphis in them
And some funky New Orleans on the back end.

I was that guy who always campaigned
To turn Glocks into glockenspiels,
And screwed down deadbolts in the frightened door,

Who argued against the monsters of the mind
Born from the bowels of some mad catastrophe.
It's been a long time since I've sprawled

Across the porcelain with hairy eyeballs and the retches.
But now I could almost give in to
Mangled glands and the crackle of appetite.

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I might go high on the hog and low on the skunk.
I might say at a drive-up window: I'll take
Anything you have that's chicken-fried.

Whatever's got into me today, it won't come out.
And no algorithms in the secret code,
No byzantine switchbacks in the brain

Can equal the insolence of that broken music
Or the messy sacrament of sex, where
All the finer things fall between the cracks.

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