Hi, my name is John Kenney, and I am the author of Love Poems (for Married People), Love Poems (for People with Children), and Love Poems (for Anxious People), as well as the novels Truth in Advertising and Talk to Me, every one of which has won the Nobel Prize for literature. I have a new collection out this fall, Love Poems (for the Office).

“I thought I might read a few poems” is a sentence no one wants to hear, ever. Before I do, though, I thought I might address the photo you’re looking at. That’s not technically me. We had some difficulties earlier remote videoing, and so the marketing team, to their great credit, scrambled to find a likeness of me. They typed in my name and personality traits—middle-aged, confused, underwear, writer, neutered, slippers—and this was the photo that was a one hundred percent match, so…

A quick thank you for listening and for committing to buying one hundred books when they do come out. That’s much appreciated, it’s a great cause—the cause being me, I guess.

So here we go: Love Poems for the Office by the man in the long underwear, John Kenney. The dedication to the book reads: For my boss. Also, I quit. There’s an epigraph, and it comes from Bertrand Russell, the famous English soccer hooligan, I believe. I could be wrong on that, I’d never heard of him. A word of advice to aspiring writers: always use an epigraph from a long dead English or French person, as it makes you seem smart.

Russell said, quote, “One of the symptoms of an approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one’s work is terribly important.”

So I thought I might read from the question and answer section that opens the book, and then I thought I might read forty or fifty poems. So if you do have to use the bathroom, now would be a good time to do it, and I will wait.

[Author reading]

So this is a Q&A with the author

Q: Your last collection, Love Poems (for Anxious People), came out at almost the exact same time the Coronavirus hit the United States. Now you have Love Poems (for the Office) and many offices are either closed or at least radically changed. Should you stop writing books?
A: That’s a great question and you are not the first person to suggest that (my publisher, friends, readers, my parents).

Q: What will your next untimely book title be?

A: Love Poems (for the Apocalypse).

Q: I read Love Poems (for Anxious People).

A: Thank you.

Q: What you’ve done in this book is take the mundane world of the office and turn that world into mundane poems.

A: I think that’s exactly right.

Q: You have been called the greatest poet of your generation. What does that feel like?

A: I have? I hadn’t heard that.

Q: Wait. Sorry. That was Mary Oliver who was called the greatest poet of her generation. No one has called you anything except for some very bad names on Goodreads. Would you like to hear some of them?

A: I’ll pass.

This poem is called:

**What I would do differently if you weren’t my boss**

I wouldn’t laugh

the next time you tell that joke

about the two nuns

because it’s not funny

or even physically possible.

I would just stare at you

as if to say

*you’re a dickhead.*

And then I might say

Out loud
You're a dickhead.
And when you came by my cubicle
to ask if I had gotten to that report
even though you could see
that I was eating an egg salad sandwich
only to say
I guess it will have to wait until after your lunch
and make a face
and say how much you hate egg salad
I might say something like
That's funny because I hate your face.
I would say that if you weren't my boss
and I didn't have a mortgage.
And then I might add that your kids are weird looking.
Because they are.
This poem is called:

**Hold the elevator?**

If I am honest
I did see you
holding those two coffees
a file wedged under one arm.
Jill, right?
So let me explain what happened there, Jill.
I was kind of in a rush
to get back to my desk, I mean.
Not to a meeting or anything.
Just to eat my lunch
and simply space out
and watch YouTube.
So I had been standing
in that elevator
a good seven seconds
which can feel like a long time in an elevator.
And I’d pressed the close door button
a few times
(maybe ten?)
when I saw you shuffling towards the elevator
smiling
eyes wide
as if to say
*Hold the door?*
Please don't take this
as a criticism
but you are a slow walker, Jill.
Also the doors had started to close
in large part because I
was pressing the close door button
but making it look like I
was pressing the open door button
while making a face like
How do these crazy buttons work?!?

This is so complicated!

Get the next elevator, Jill.

This poem is called:

A review of the office holiday party (from the police report)

The food ran out.

That was the problem.

The booze didn’t, though.

That was also part of the problem.

Kissing people was another part of the problem.

In all there were a lot of parts to the overall problem.

Another significant problem was that

I was dancing

alone

(according to eyewitnesses)

and spinning

and singing a song I had made up

Take your pants off!

C’mon everybody take your pants off!

And then, according to depositions

I performed a spinning move of such force

that I somehow flung myself

off the dance floor

and into a table

of several women from accounting
who were chatting with the CFO
breaking the table
and then throwing up on myself
and the CFO.
I think that was the main problem.
Still.
Prior to that it was one of the better holiday parties.