

Spiders & Angels

Revised: Originally published as "Patting The Air"

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Dennis Ciscel

www.ciscel.net

Spiders and Angels was originally published, in 1993, under the title Patting The Air. That book was an expansion of a chapbook, of 1992, of the same name.

Here, in this e-book, I have rewritten it and deleted some of the individual pieces. If you want the original version, it is still available at Amazon or Borders.

Everything went wrong when I published Patting The Air. I went on a major promotion effort, and after about nine months of readings and getting reviews and telling people how to order it for their bookstore, I found out the distribution company had gone bankrupt and almost all of the copies of PTA were frozen in a warehouse. Virtually no copies were sold.

But far more importantly, I found that I had misjudged my emotional condition compared to that of other human beings. I thought the book to be very tender and caring and, although sometimes very sad, also somewhat humorous.

But the reviewers were overwhelmed. They went on in both positive and negative ways. I found myself both being compared to the greats and being labeled very disturbing. One reviewer said it was a masterpiece but told people not to read it because it was too emotionally devastating.

I didn't understand that for quite a while.

I finally got the message a few years later when I gave a copy to a friend who was a retired Special Forces soldier. He too was way too familiar with death and pain. He and I had spoken several times about our experiences with death and pain and misery. And he had once told me that he had never met anyone who had as much exposure to death as I did. He found poetry to be the work of sissies, but he asked to see Patting The Air because we were friends and he was interested in what I might have written.

Later, he told me it was the funniest book he had ever read. He laughed broadly while even thinking of some of the characters I had made. It was high praise. But it was also my proof that this was not a mainstream collection.

In rewriting the collection here, I have not tried to soften any of the edges. I have deleted some pieces that I thought a bit flat and rewritten some pieces that I, now, feel were not truly finished before. And I changed the title to both reflect the changes in mood and highlight the individual poems that time has made my favorites.

It is still about living and dying in iambic pentameter.

Enjoy,
Dennis Ciscel
April, 2002

1 Love rises from my roots, for you

Sleep. Dream. Wake. Walk on
down the street. Lay your body
against your lover
wet with sweat and juices. Kiss,
and say good night. And sleep. Dream.

* * *

Leaves

hung on the branches of trees

like Christmas Tree Ornaments
shading and coloring the gifts of the days:

Motorcycles

kids on bikes

ladies sipping tea in their yard chairs
you

and me,

you and me
and the ghost that protects us
and laughs with us all through the night

and gives us the leaves on the trees.

* * *

Every Spring, like saplings
in the blight, love rises
from my roots, for you.

2 Two Strangers

I still don't understand why he shot me. I mean we got into some little argument, and he said, then, that he didn't want to give me a ride. And I said "Cool, man. I can dig it." And he pulled off the Interstate at the very next exit even though it was still out in the middle of nowhere. And he pulled over at the side of the service road in the grass and told me to get out. And I got out and was just about to close the door after grabbing my stuff from the back seat. And, out of nowhere, he had a gun pointed at my belly, and he shot me. I fell back into the grass just as good as dead, and he just drove away.

A friend of mine in prison, said, in Nam, he saw a lot of killing. He told me once that men don't die too easy. He said that all that shit about being shot and falling over dead just lying there was bullshit out of Hollywood. I'd never seen somebody die before, but he said men would step on land mines there and blow off both their legs up to their balls and still would drag themselves around for 50 (maybe 60) yards or more, through mud or jungles, (just with their hands) screaming for someone to help them. And, sure enough, after the car drove off, I lay there for a moment, aching from the being shot, and then I stood up. Kinda bent over standing up, but still standing, and I looked around.

I was in grass up to my ass in the middle of the night in this field out in the middle of nowhere, off on the side of the freeway. And in the moonlight I could see a little house a ways away. So, I figured, "Fuck the bag," and I dragged my young ass over to the house to ask for help. And there was no one there. Just an empty house in a field. But it was open, and I went in and

lay down in the living room kinda sitting up against the wall holding onto my belly and caught my breath. And once I caught my breath, I looked around and there on the floor a few feet away was this telephone. And sure enough, I picked it up, and it worked.

I guess the place was too far out in the county for the phone company to bother driving out to disconnect it. Or maybe the folks just moved away and just didn't tell them they were leaving. But, anyway, I dialed the operator and told her I'd been shot and wanted help. All she did was call the hospital, where some guy spent the rest of my life trying to get me an ambulance.

I didn't want no goddamn ambulance. All they'd do is take you to a doctor. And all he'd do is call the cops. And all the cops would do is find the warrants. And I didn't want the trouble that I'd had before, again. And I kept trying to explain that too him. But he didn't get it. So, finally he got it that I didn't know where I was anyhow (cause this guy had just shot me in the belly and left me lying in the weeds thinking I was dead.) He was such a pain to talk to that finally, I lay down on the floor, with my head on the phone for a pillow, and, while I was trying to talk to him about how I did not want a doctor or the cops, I fell asleep.

* * * * *

It was very late at night. Two or three AM.

I waved and mouthed to the orderly to get me a police officer. Then I scrawled him a note (with all of the medical abbreviations) that said, "Trace this call -- Gun Shot Wound to the Abdomen."

"Can't be done," he mouth/whispered back. "They only do
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that in Hollywood."

Alone on the phone in the night, a stranger told the tale, with fading breaths, of being shot by someone who had picked him up hitchhiking and had left him in a field for dead. He didn't know where.

Punctuated by the smattering of moans and groans, he talked of how he made it to this house. "White house in a field beside the highway. I don't know what highway. The highway into town from Dallas, dammit." And even though no one was there the phone still worked, and he had asked the operator to help him find some help. "But no Goddamn Doctor. I got enough trouble without a doctor too."

It took over an hour before he died.

I talked with him about landmarks he might have seen along the highway or might be able to see from the little white house in the field. No luck. We sent out patrol cars to look for a house in a field somewhere along the highway that came in from Dallas toward town. No luck. Slowly his talk became too garbled to communicate with him. Then I simply sat there, at the phone in the nurses station in the emergency room, listening to his breathing. After a while it stopped.

In the light of morning, the officer and I drove out the highway towards Dallas until we saw a small white house way back off the highway in a field, surrounded by weeds to the waist. Slowly taking the black and white car up the dirt tracks between the weeds, he gave me a few pointers on walking into the scene of a crime. We stopped at a window and looked in. There were red stains on the white walls and the wooden floor. He drew his gun and, telling me to wait there, went on in the window.

After a while the field of weeds had been crushed by
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tires and feet from ambulances, police cars, and the medical examiner's vans: All of them with flashing lights. I sat on the small front porch, looking out across the little bit of land that made the final view for this young man, thinking how it might have looked for him at night beneath the stars and moon.

Oh to have had those flashing lights light up the night, instead of cluttering the day the way they did.

3 All the way home, at night

All the way home through the country the fog builds.

Fog lamps can't cut it.

Slower and slower I drive.

Twenty - Five.

Twenty.

Building and slowing.

Fog bank on fog bank.

Glare upon glare.

Rabbits run by like snowballs.

Slower, then faster, then slower.

Creeping past driveways and dirt roads and sign posts
that usually blur.

Crawling through corners I usually fly in.

Inching through valleys and hills.

Finally rounding the last curve and out through the night is the glow of
my light.

Home.

Cat in the yard. Bumps
of the driveway. And inside,
the tick of the clock.

4 Edward

It was a good life.
Five, six, seven, maybe even
more times I got down on my
knees and told God He could
take me whenever He wanted,
told Him I was happy with my life
and wouldn't care if it were over
then and there. And
He let me live on.

One day I walked past the
old clock in the hall and
it had stopped (all wound
down and stopped),
and I asked God then,
"Is that how it will be for me?
Standing in the hallway until
I wind down, and then
it will be done?" And
one of the grand kids ran
up from behind me
with their arms out
and hugged me round my
leg with their cheek squeezing
against the side of my knee.

And I thought, "God,
it has been a good life."

5 Harold

I stood upon a cliff above the water
calling out to God to toss me off
and spare me from the time
that I would have to live alone.

He answered me with silence.

After a long wait on the high cliff,
I noticed a column of large black birds
flying down from the north toward me
along the ridge of the mountains.

As they approached I shook a bit in terror.
"Here at last is coming the long answer to my prayers."

But the flock of buzzards flew over me
and on down the ridge southward towards the
meadows of the war.

None of them had even looked back to see
who or what they had passed by.

None of them had spiraled above me waiting
for the odor of
my degeneration
to rise up in the breeze.

All of them had flown away,
and I stood on the cliff
looking out across the water.

It was sunset.

Colors washed the sky.

6 David

I was fourteen.
I was bicycling at dusk.
While on a bridge,
a passing truck did not allow me enough room
and hit me
throwing me off the bike
and up over the guard rail towards the river below.

The back of my head bounced lightly off the rail
and as I drifted off upward toward the evening sky,
my body fell back toward the river.
I felt different and looked back
to see it land on its back in the water.
It did not sink,
but floated rag doll limp,
looking up at me,
until some good Samaritan
waded out into the water and dragged it to shore.
He thought I would have been drowning
and began to do CPR,
but I was not drowning.
And he quickly realized it
and stopped.

The back of my skull had shattered on the rail
and he and I could both see the back of my head
was hurt bad. Without a cut,
the flesh was pushed to one side,
and my brain was clearly sagging there as well.

I've learned since
that it sometimes takes
a couple of days to lose interest in one's body.
So, still interested, I tagged along to the hospital.
There, they were aware that I was dying.
They told my parents that there was no hope.
My father stood over the bedside and tears
ran down his cheeks without sobbing.

It was as if he were not crying at all, but
the tears had somehow been left on
like a soaking hose in the garden
forgotten in the night when everyone went to bed.

Because I had been in the river,
I was wet and dirty, so the doctor
told the nurse to clean me up.
A young man in green pants and shirt
cut off my clothes with scissors
and bathed me with a washcloth,
gently cleaning behind my ears
and between my toes
the way my mother did when I was a boy.

Later, two nurses stood next to me
talking about what a shame it was,
and how serene I looked,
and how pretty my young body was.
One of them wondered aloud
if I'd ever gotten laid.

Had I still been in my skin
I might have tried to take
her up on that,
but floating in the air,
I knew it was time to go on.

7 Richard

It doesn't matter to you why, but I gave up.

My girlfriend and another friend and I
were watching TV,
and I said, "Excuse me,"
and I got up my rifle from the bedroom,
and I walked across the street
to the parking lot in front
of the roller skating rink
and shot myself.

When someone's heart stops,
they separate quickly and float away.

But people who've been shot
crawl around and ache and
wonder what is happening to them.

I remember there was much crying about me,
an ambulance, and police cars,
and a fire truck for some reason.

I remember lying in the twilight
in some emergency room
with my heartbeat fading
and fading to one beat
and then another
and later on another
until they were all gone,
and I could fly away.

8 **Jim and Hazel**

We did not see the sunsets.
Waves of purples and orange reds
washed across the sky
and twilights faded into nights,
and we just glanced at one another
and saw the constant hues of each other's eyes.

We did not hear the thunder.
Though wind and rain and flashes of lightening
shook our neighborhood,
we heard each other's breathing or,
the head upon the other's chest, heartbeats.

And we did not grow older.
Down through the seasons
though others saw our skin droop
and hair turn gray and thin,
we saw glimmers of hope in each other's smile
that life had a purpose
that we were living in.

9 Steven

When the bullet entered my forehead,
it did not jerk my neck
the way a bump in the road might have.
I turned my head back forward,
applied the brakes and slowly
pulled my big black Cadillac
off to the side of the road.

But once off the road,
I could not lift my arm to
put the car in Park or turn off the key.
I was limp all over except the foot on the brake
and my chest and neck holding my head up.

Howard reached across from the passenger seat
and turned off the key.
I turned and looked at him
and he said, "We shoulda stayed at the bar.
He was too good a shot to pick a fight with."

He had blood leaking out of the side of his head
down over his ear, neck, and collar.
I thought for a moment how odd it was that
there was no blood leaking down my face into my eyes.

Then
 my neck went limp as well
and
 chest
 collapsing
 sideways,
 I fell into his lap.

I think
my foot
was still
holding the brake.

10 **Martin**

Gazing off into the nothing (while I tried to look into it as well over his shoulder) the angel slowly splayed his wings apart and stretched them wide as if a human stretching in the morning. Then, bending forward, he pulled and flexed the muscles running down between his wings from shoulder to behind, and arched his body 'til he turned his head to see me standing naked and erect behind him, underneath his wings.

Smiling, he reached back his hand as if to help me forward. Although I let my hand reach out to his, in fact it was his eyes that pulled me forward into him: Into his serenity and his forgiveness; and into streets the Lord had paved with gold.

11 Martha

After the surgery, and
the months of healing,
and learning how to walk again,
and learning how to dress again,
and learning how to do my makeup again,

after the months of
only being able to
let you hold my hand
or just kiss me gently
(as if we were two old people),

when the night finally came
when I could take you back
into me again
and hold onto your waist
with my legs wrapped around you
and deeply sigh into your ear again,
I could no longer restrain the tears.

Thank you for holding
my body in your arms that night.
Thank you for staying
in my arms,
though weakened by the years
and the illnesses.
And thank you for,
 as if in our youth,
 rocking into me
 until both my tears
 and your semen
 washed us
 away from all that was around us
and back into our childish promise
that we would stay for each other.

12 Barbara

Long, long lazy little
ribbons blowing in the wind.
Flags upon the wind.
Plastic Bags upon the wind.
And high above, a dozen tumbling
buzzards in the wind.

The trees and brush and flowers
wave with wind, but I have
stopped my breath. I have
laid among the staid and shallow
and been buried with the rest.

And even though it blows through me
and shakes the little bits that grow through me
I cannot ever feel it like I could when I
was in my skin. How I miss the wind.

13 Sean Michael

I flew reconnaissance in Vietnam: Forty foot wingspan; unarmed except for cameras; just above the treetops, I would sweep across the countryside with cameras whirring in my nose, my tail, my wing tips, and my belly.

I got so I thought I was forty feet wide.

It was supposed to have been a twelve month tour, but when the new guys arrived, there was a new offensive. And all of them were dead when it was over. So, I had to stay another year until some more men were trained in flying cameras through the jungles.

Two years forty feet wide and without a warm water shower except when it rained. I remember Vietnam.

Once I flipped sideways and flew through a village with my wings on end. My belly camera took pictures that were so clear you could see the children eating in their rooms. My down wing tip recorded every footstep in the dirt along the main street of the village. My up wing tip recorded clouds and birds and other planes that I was passing by beneath.

Once they shot me down, but I was rescued. The helicopter hung above me in the air a moment, and gunfire came from all around. I knew that I was lost, that we were all going to die there in a rice paddy surrounded by my parachute flopping in the mud in the wind. But the chopper fired its Gatling gun a second and dropped down in to get me. We walked around in the sun smoking cigarettes and talking.

Everything in sight was dead from that one burst of fire from them.

Then, later, I was shot down at sea. I was just out of range for my radio signal to help them find me. I floated in my raft for three days before I died. Then a Pan Am flight heard my signal and help was sent for me. Bleached and burned and drying up, I was taken home in a large plastic bag and laid here to rest with my mother and father, and later on a brother who died of old age. And I soar above these trees, more than forty feet wide, unarmed, recording nothing with my cameras because it all goes on forever, and waiting for the opportunity to grow again, as if a seed.

14 William

You've had me once before. Once, when I was
a sunflower and you a butterfly,
you landed on me in a field much as
you have done today: Crawling over me,
your feelers and tongue touching both my heart
and stamens before our god out in the
sun. Dressed in breeze and leaves and shadows from
the trees, ecstatic touches driving all
my petals wild, your wings would stretch and fold
and slowing stretch again until you'd had
your fill and, breathless, jumped into the wind
and flew away. Just as you have done this
day, leaving me to sway among the weeds,
and wonder when you'll fly my way again.

15 Christopher

Everything in my life had gone sour.

Wife gone.

Child gone.

Job and friends and family,
gone.

Even one of the cats had been biting me
too much and had to be given away.
And I was living with the other cat
in this small shack in south Austin
beside a creek that might have had
some beauty but did not.

A shack beside a muddy wash,
alone, except a tomcat for my friend.

Even my drug dealers had
suggested I get help
and wouldn't sell me anymore
hallucinations, peace, or dreams.

My tomcat was a tomcat and
often would tomcat for days
by fucking all the females
and kicking ass of all the toms
that thought that they were
half as bad as he,
and he'd been gone tomcatting
for some days and finally
returned one afternoon
as I was sitting on my bed
(or cot) (or mattress on a sheet
of plywood on some cinder blocks)
and he pawed at the door.

I stood and let him in.
"Hello my friend," I said,

"how are you today?"

He made the loop inside the room
and went back to the door.

Stopping there, he looked at me.
It was a look I'd seen in other faces.
Without a word, it said that he
had had enough.

And he slapped at the door,
and he pushed it open.
And he walked away.
I haven't seen him since.

My guess is that that neighborhood
is littered with his kittens
and his grand kittens,
but I don't go there any more.

I needed my hallucinations,
peace, or death. No one there
would sell to me, and
I knew he would not be back.
And so I moved away.

And from a crumbling city street
someone picked me up and carried me:
Carried me against their belly.
Head against their shoulder
or the curve of their warm arm,
they carried me away from all
despair until the time had come
that I could walk again.

God, I'm tired and I'm scared and I'm lonely,
and I need someone to hold me:
Carry me against your belly,
head against your shoulder
or the curve of your warm arm,

please, just carry me.

16 Duet

We only touched each other. Only.

Down through the years
through all the folds of joy and tears
we always turned to each other to guide us through our fears.

Oh,
we were often tempted,
by the other ones who wished to taste our lips
and lay beside our sighs
but somehow we remained
beside each other in the end
without our actions touching
the temptations.

And laying here together
sometimes as we hear the
tales the others tell of
all of their adventures in the flesh
we lean against each other and
confess how much we always loved
each other and were only
slightly tempted to betray the
long held love we made throughout
the years in skin.

17 **A Young Widow**

I will never feel your orgasm again.
Never feel you hard and limp at once against me.
Never smell the scent of semen from within you.

Never see you spray your cum again.
Never briefly gasp at watching it above me in the air.
Never hear its silent sounds among the darkness and
the breathing and the rubbing sheets and flesh.

Never hold your thigh in times of wonder and
with other hand and arm wrap around your back with me.
Never lie beneath you with your chin against my shoulder
as you wait to stir again.

Other men will offer these to me,
but they will only be with them and not with you.
For I will never be with you again.

I caught this young man
looking at me longingly.
And it felt so good.

18 Abraham & Marta, Abraham, and then Marta

Once he had decided that he truly loved her more than anything else in the world, he took off his clothes with her in the night, and gave her everything he had to offer. Having found him to be circumcised, she called the police the next day and reported him to be a Jew. They came for him in the night and took him away. In the cattle cars, and in the showers at their destination, and while losing consciousness after the gas had begun, he wondered how she would ever know what had become of him. Taken in the night, he had not been able to say goodbye.

She was the only woman I ever really loved. And I only loved her once. The very next night they came for me and took me away. I thought I had hidden myself pretty well. I had moved and changed my name. No one knew that I was Jewish. So I thought. But somehow they had found me. And they killed me within a matter of days. I died thinking of her. And I died grieving that I had finally found her and now was going to die for being Jewish, and she would never know what had become of me. Probably better for her not to know. Still, I ache that she worried for me or was thinking that I didn't care. I have waited for her, here on this side, hoping to find her passing by on her way to the light, to tell her I loved her and apologize for leaving without an explanation. Although, it has been many years, and I fear that she has died by now as well, she has never passed by.

One of my purest moments was turning in that Jew. He had tried to hide from them. Pretending to be normal. But then I was enchanted with his eyes, and taken by his arms, I gave myself to him one night. And in the night I found he was a Jew. Next morning I walked to the station and reported him to them. Imagine him pretending to be one of us. And they agreed and said that he'd be taken care of. I went back home and boasted to my friends, and they reminded me that I should stay away from home in case he might come by. And so, in the evening, I went to have a beer. And there I met Hans. The love of my life and the father of my children, Hans. And when I died, after a good life, a practicing Christian all of my days, they said that I did not belong in heaven. For turning in the Jew, they sent me to the lowest ring of Hell. Oh well, it was my purest moment, if you ask me.

19 Donald's Song

By colorless moonlight in the night,
or by the afternoon's brightest sunlight,
or by some faded pastel candlelight
rubbed across the evening sky,
may my chameleon lips
always crawl along your thigh.

20 **Adult and Little Child**

"What's the matter, honey?"

"Mopsey died." Mopsey was her pet rabbit. "Mopsey was supposed to have some babies.

But she couldn't, and she died.

Mama said that she's asleep, but

I know that she died, because she didn't close her eyes."

21 **An Old Man**

When I was in my late eighties,
I was visited one time by my Granddaughter
and her husband and
my seventh great granddaughter.
She was three.

As usual, my wife was a bit more spry than I,
and she fed them and showed them the pecans
falling from the pecan tree while I
sat in the living room in my chair
waiting for them to pass my way again.

When they came back into the living room,
I smiled at them and they stopped
and sat and talked with me a while.
My granddaughter was as pretty as my wife
had been when she was young.

I fancied that this boy who'd married her
must love her quite as much as I had loved
my girl. I hoped that it was true
so they would stay together tenderly
even in the hard times that would come.

And I fancied that this great grandchild
reminded me of all my boys and girls
when they were young.
A small blond bubble of reflections
passed through generations into life.

As we were sitting talking, she
ran up to me, grabbed my leg
as I was sitting, hugged it,
and then kissed me on the knee.
I reached my hand to pat her on the head,

but she was gone away. She'd run
on to the next room for some reason.

And I patted the air where she'd been.
As I look back on life, from here beyond,
sometimes I have seen my great

granddaughter sitting with her
grandchildren. Sometimes as the children
have run around she has had to pat the air
where they had been. And I fancied
I was with her then, underneath that hand.

22 David

After years of meditation
and eons in Purgatory
and working my way up through the circles of Heaven,
I finally had my audience with God.
I asked, "Why was my father so cruel to me?"

Because he was jealous of you.
That's the way some fathers are.
He was jealous of your youth and your
mind and your brand spanking new penis with which
he feared you'd have more fun than he had had.

"Oh. And then speaking of sex, why was I ashamed of sex?"

That's the way I made you.
You should have thought nothing of it.
Remember the way that dogs looked
when they took a shit?
Kind of bend up in an arch
and eyes wide nervously glancing about
as if someone might catch them at it.
That's the way I made you to feel at having sex.

"But why would you do that to me?"

So you could overcome it.
So you could learn that fucking was good
and your intuitions, like your father,
were wrong sometimes.

"Thank you, God," I said, as I withdrew.

Think nothing of it, He replied.
Come again sometime.

All those years of hearing He would get me
lost down on the earth,
and here He was
asking me to come again.

23 Dana

You do not penetrate my skin
tonight.

I wait (silent and alone) on the
other side of town.

And I wait for you.

When the night is fully in.
And you and I have nothing more to say
except those little noises in our sleep,
will you please keep your hand on me?

If I should turn away,
tossing in my sleep
to find that moment's comfort,
reach after me and draw me back or follow.

Please do these things for me
so I will know you're with me still
and this is real.
Were I to guess this were a dream

or you had gone,
I might not wake.

24 Erin

Archways in the hallways and
the entrances of heaven
echo with the songs of angels,
and the blessed souls about, who
sing in praise of your soft kiss
on my old lips. The archways
echo from your kiss.

25

As the morning sunlight chased
the dew away, standing in the
yard, I thought of you the day
that I first touched you and how
everything that had been night before
was day and in the full light
of the sun. No wonder that we
ran away and hid.

26 Angel

Honey, I used to be a prostitute. I know how to make more money than this lying on my back smoking cigarettes. But I stopped doing that. Those men were all such dicks. All drunk. All smelling of whatever they'd been drinking and whatever work they did that day. And so scared. John Boy would squeeze my tits and stare at them and get so all-turned-on and never even notice if I hadn't shaved my chest that day. And they'd be so busy wanting to get their dick inside of me that they wouldn't even look down there and see my dick and balls. I would just guide them on in and they'd jerk

around awhile, and then they'd either fall asleep or need to get on their way. Dicks. All of them. I've had to act like I was cumming too. I've had to steal their watches because they decided they didn't want to pay me. I've had to make up stories so Mama wouldn't have to know what I was doing down in New Orleans. I've had to stick needles into my arms so I wouldn't feel a thing. But I don't do that any more. One day I said, "Fuck this," and I got up out of bed and got dressed and walked away from that old life. It seemed as if I had fucked every man drunk in the

universe, and I still didn't have enough money for the surgery. So I just said, "Fuck it," and I put on my best-dressed outfit and went out and got myself a job. Now let me tell you, honey, it is not easy having a job. Working is a bitch. And there have been plenty of times that I wanted to make more money, and

I thought about going back out and turning
a few tricks to get that money. But
I don't do that any more. This may not
pay for shit, but I get to wear nice clothes,
everybody treats me like a lady,
and I still get to smoke while I'm working.

27 Blessed belly

I cry myself to
sleep over you: Over your
departing eyes, your

cursed tenderness,
smile, consecrated bottom,
blessed belly, the

birthmark on your wrist,
and how it felt beneath my
idle fingertips.

28 **Martin's Song**

I know that I am dying.

Those who would cajole me needn't bother.
I have known about it for months.

And even though I don't understand the exact nature of the ailment,
I have followed its progress through my body
as one might watch a drop of color in a clear glass of water,
its fingers sliding in every direction
on currents no one even guessed were there.
absorbing its way through the body until
all of it was shaded (tinted) with impurity.

Though I am still alive, I have become discolored by death.

I have considered the alternatives
and decided to go sailing,
to let the wind blow me where it will.

It was a simple decision, and I will follow it.
And when the pain gets too great, I'll just
sail off the edge of the earth.

May the winds treat us gently and kindly,
filling our sails and our hair
lifting the sea birds higher and higher in song
and caressing the sail days away.

But if I die before I get back to you,
before I've had a chance to kiss you
and drink wine from your navel
and lead you about like a blind man,
may I send one extra night in oblivion
after I've paid for the rest of my sins.

29 Mark

My name is Mark,

I live in Newport Arkansas
and go to Newport High

I work at the McDonald's
on the main road out of town.
It's, "Yes, Sir. Yes Ma'am.
May I help you," all day long.

I wait on friends and strangers,
and on girls who stop to eat.

Someday some woman there will see my smile
and take a chance and talk to me.
And I'll learn where she's headed.
I'll learn where she's been.
Maybe she will let me touch her skin.

30 Blue

I see the leaves moving
slightly as the breezes go
by. I hear the birds
singing in the trees about
Spring and all the blossoms there.

I smell the smell of
you and taste the remnants of
you too. I do not
have your touch against me
doing what your touches do.

31 **Bob**

It had been a long illness (almost two years since the doctors had named it, and four or five years since I had been at my best) and I came home from the hospital and, in the afternoon, was standing at the refrigerator looking for something to eat. There was nothing that I wanted.

I closed the door and looked at the photo I had kept on the refrigerator door of the fattest man in the world: There to help control my weight problem, now gone all away to illness. Thinking of the sad irony of it all, I began to laugh at my struggle to stay slim. I laughed until I lost my balance, and I fell against the counter and down to the floor.

Wayne came in and helped me up and over to the sofa. "I hurt myself," I told him. "I'll just call the doctor," he replied. "No," I sighed, "just sit with me and hold me."

So, sitting on the sofa, I nuzzled into his arms and slowly drifted off.

32 Ned

I dreamed of you last night
my little brother,
all pale and naked fourteen year old,
standing there just waiting
not sad but not happy.

It has been 3 or 4 years since I last saw you
and you are not fourteen
or pale
or naked
or a student in a school.

And it has been longer since I wrote you
and told you if you ever needed help
while growing up,
back home with the fucked-up family,
I would try to be there.

I'm sorry,
but I couldn't help when you wrote.
I couldn't write or call
or say good luck.
I was frozen in my own bad luck
and poor excuses.

I am not now,
and have sent off reindeer to spy on you,
see if you are well.
And they have returned with the news
that you are not sad but not happy.

So this evening I will send off a lion
to give you strength,
a bear with a gift of endurance,
and my sole remaining harpsichord
to sing you a blessing.

Beware of them,
Spiders and Angels

for they are my most powerful agents
and will fight off all enemies
no matter how long it might take
to restore you to happiness.

And they will smile all the while
in the knowledge that for you
the air has been filled
with the song of my love
and my sorrow
at not coming sooner.

It is sunset.
I will sit here and do my meditation
in the quiet changing world.
When I open my eyes there will be no more sun,
only the stars in and out through the sky,
and there will be a silver moon on the horizon
behind me.
But first I have a message
for my pigeon to carry to you:

May this evening's purple sunset
Caress you all evening
Wherever you are
As I wander these desert hills.

33 Bill

I tried to kill myself several times.

I took an overdose of pills
and woke up later on.

I tried to hang myself
and broke my ankle falling
cause I couldn't tie a proper knot.

I tried to shoot myself
and spent six weeks in the
hospital recovering from surgery
and going through physical therapy.

Finally, I sunk into a bathtub
of warm water and released
my wrists into the sea.
And it turned red around me
and some coagulated on my skin
just like on the porcelain at the waters edge.

My wife came by to visit me once,
at this grave. She wept about
how she had learned I had cheated
on her after I'd promised not
to do it again. She said she didn't
know if she'd forgive me this time.

My son came by to visit me once, at
this grave. He told me that no one
had hit him since the day I died. And
he'd decided that my sleeping with him,
on occasion, had never been for love
but just really using him to my own ends.

And one of the girls that I'd had
on the side came to visit me once
at this grave. She told me that she'd

had a daughter by me and that she'd
put her up for adoption. She said she wished
that she had an abortion done instead.
That way there'd be nothing left of me.

No one else has ever come by.
Occasionally someone will pass
over me while walking to or from some
other's grave. But no one else has
come to visit me or say goodbye.

If you believe in hell, you're wrong.
There is no hell. I've laid here
in this ground for years and not
been licked by flames of punishment.
Although the flames of loneliness
have licked my soul from time to time.
The punishment has been remembering
the three who came to visit me,
here at my grave: All said that they
would not be back again.

34 Barry and His Sister

I was almost twelve.
My sister and I had been sent
for the day with my uncle
and his crew on his boat. In
the afternoon, sun high above
us all, and all the water
gently rocking us and sparkling
around us in the sun, Uncle
and all of the crew and
even myself having had
too much to drink so far that day,
my uncle told her to, "Just
shut up and lay there," and threw
her dress over her face and
pulled away her panties and
tossed them into the sea and
having dropped my pants below my
knees, and raised me with his fingers,
told me to, "get down on top
of her," and, standing back with
the others, called instructions
how to enter her and pump.

Calling out that that was how
to do it. Saying, "That's a boy."
Uncle smiled upon me there
that day and then called to the
others if they didn't all
agree that I was doing it
just fine. And all of them chimed
in about how fine a job that
I was doing there. Talking
about my "young ass bobbing
up and down", my "young balls aching
to let go", and" my "brand new dick
inside of her" until I
came and came and came. Then all
of them yelled a yell of how

I'd done it right and toasted
me with beer. And soon they started
up the engines once again
and we went on our way.

Uncle, all of my life I
remembered the voices cheering
for my ass and my dick and
the way I did it right. But
all of my life there was
another little voice inside
of me that kept repeating,
"Uncle, it's my sister." And
in the locker rooms, and the
office parties, and over
cocktails with the guys or in
gatherings of couples that had
somehow gotten out of hand, the
question would come up about
how each of us lost our virginities,
and I could never tell.

How do you say to the guys
in the locker rooms, office,
cocktail party, or even
whisper to your wife, alone
in the dark of the night, "On
the deck of my uncle's boat,
while he and the crew cheered me
on and repeated how well
I was doing the task, with my
sister, when she was just ten,
and I was almost twelve."

* * * * *

My mother said as children we were both
inseparable. But I do not
remember that at all. And by the time that
we were in our teens, he was only
interested in football, automobiles,

and speaking of girls with his friends. Then, while he was off in college, I met Martin, and we were married. And I moved away to follow Martin's call. We had a truly precious life together with Martin's ministry and raising all our children. Martin and I were joined as one in life and love and service. I wouldn't have thought of Barry if you hadn't asked me first.

I never really knew him well at all.

35 Eugene

I was asleep on my cot, in my tent, dreaming of sleeping back home in my own bed in my own room, only slightly disturbed by my mother's soft whispers as she and a friend crept by outside my door (and she said that she wanted to just let me sleep a while longer still) when suddenly I realized that my mother's whispers weren't in English after all. I sat right up.

At the time I slept with a 45 automatic in my shoulder holster.

I rose and turned around and quietly raised up the flap to my tent and looked out into the night beside my tent on the outside. There, crouched beside my tent, busy with their business, not noticing me in my shorts and shoulder holster, were two men in black pajamas (Cong) whispering as they prepared to blow up my old, green tent.

I pointed my 45 at the two of them, and I fired twice. Then I went back into sleep again. In my dreams, dozens of compatriots ran back and forth across the encampment of my dreams yelling about the enemy amongst our midst. Armed with rifles and patrolling long and hard throughout the darkness looking for the enemy, they ran about and called to one another well into the morning.

At breakfast, one of my buddies asked where I'd been in the night, having missed the shooting of two Cong outside of a tent.

"My tent," I said, "I killed them and went back to bed again." He looked at me with a mix of honor that I could be so coldly violent and horror that I could be so cold as to sleep after killing two men.

They had interrupted my dream of home and mother whispering outside my door. I wanted to get back there, if I could. But, once again, my dreams were of the war.

36 Clifton

I was captured early in the war.

Beaten and interrogated,
I have told them nothing
of our numbers, secrets, tactics,
weapons.

I know someday we will win, and I will
be returned to freedom once again.
But now, and for some time now, I have
lived within a bamboo cage
alone except when guards bring in some meals.

Through cracks between the bamboo
I have watched the world go by.

I remember girlfriends,
drive in movies,
french fries,
and parades of men and women
marching Main Street
in the sun, on summer afternoons.

I remember walking on the hills
outside of town
as grass and flowers
danced like skirts upon the breezes there.
I remember holding Jenny's hand,
sitting in the park one autumn evening.

Once, when I was ten or twelve,
Bobby Cambridge and I
stole some watermelons
from Old Man Miller's field,
and just as we were coming to
the barbed wire fence around his place,
Old Man Miller saw us and ran after us,
and yelled, and waved his arms, that he would get us

and we'd better run, "God Dammit."

Bobby and I dropped our watermelons, and we ran into the fence about as fast as we could go.

Sitting in this bamboo cage
inside this clearing wrapped
in barbed wire fencing, I can see
the narrow soft white scars
the barbs made down my arm and leg
as I went running from the
watermelon field back then.
And I pray as I lay down at night
that someday I might place my
hand upon the barbed wire fence around me now
and feel its soft wire bristles on my skin.

Anything to leave this bamboo cage.
Even if it cost me bullets that were tearing at my skin,
I would like to die out there, torn by the wire,
rather than return to spirit here, alone, locked in.

37 Paul

I was not a pretty man,
ordinary rounded body with
no high points or features
except the scarred mouth
left over from a childhood injury.

Without the facial scars
I might have done okay,
but even with external things okay,
inside I felt abandoned by my life.

I was lonely and beyond
friendship or love.

In my thirties I bought a teddy bear
to lay on my bed so that
when I came home I wouldn't be alone.

I would have done anything for you.
I would have done anything to
keep you with me just a moment longer.
And, in fact, I did do anything
that anyone would ask of me
to keep them with me just a moment longer.

But in the end,
color faded
and skin drawn down upon my bones,
and freckled with painless sores,
I lay in bed with my teddy bear.
And no one but my mother came to visit me.

Even she would not touch me then.
And all the men that I had tried to bribe
to stay were gone. Some were gone,
and some just stayed away.

And I passed over while embracing Teddy.

The one true friend, purchased for his service
and never failing.

I asked my mother to bury him with me.
Being a good Catholic, she knew I would
not be accepted for sanctified ground,
so she had me cremated.

And she kept Teddy out to
sew into my panel for the quilt, so
everyone would know my story and repent.

And I turned into ash and smoke alone.

38 The Window Spider

Many of my brother spiders have sneaked into a human's home only to be crushed or smeared or dried up in some corner from the hot and dry and hunger. I had the good fortune to find someone who wanted me. And when he found me crawling on his desk top, he explained he'd love to have me join him, but to please build my web over on the window sill away from his work, saying that way we could better be good neighbors, and he wouldn't bother me.

And my web became so woven and complex and well maintained upon the window sill, and I grew large and quick and wise (not fat, but large) leaping upon strong young flies that took my web and I entwined for life.

Not understanding the gender of things, my human called me Beatrice, and he would often speak to me (as I sat in the sun upon my web and he sat in his chair behind his desk) of readings from Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and Aquinas.

Many afternoons and evenings passed this way: His open meditations on confessions of Augustine as I spun my web around a fly or gnat or other thing to eat someday.

And when he died, his neighbors cleaned his things away and I was left alone, woven web of foods stuffed underneath me, sunshine shining from above, and echoes of the minds of men and meditations lingering inside me on the nature of mankind and spiderkind and all the broken friendships time has taken.

39 Mr. Martin

My parents told the story that when I was five I got up in the night to go to the bathroom, and, having dropped my pajamas to sit down, got up without them and walked naked down the hall, out of the door to the porch we had on our second floor, and off out into the air.

They say they wakened to my whimpering and found me crying, naked and asleep, in the garden below the porch: My bottom among the tomatoes as I wept about how mean the dirt had been to me.

The next winter, Dad said, "If you can jump off second story porches naked and in your sleep, you can take the big ski jump."

He offered me fifty dollars to do it.

Now, I don't know how much fifty dollars is to you, but when I was five years old, it was more than a bicycle and an electric train combined.

I said I'd jump. And I jumped.

I don't remember walking off the porch, but I remember skiing off the big ski jump that next winter. Leaning slightly forward into the wind, I flew above the white snow and the little people all around as they watched and pointed and called aloud about my flying up above. And I

was hooked.

I made the Olympic team in my teens.
I taught ski jumping all of my life.

I have wakened several times in the night
dreaming of having walked off into the
air and learned to fly and lean into
the wind and look upon the people all
below as they all watched and pointed and called
aloud about my flying up above.

And they have been sweet dreams for me to keep.

40 Gideon

No tears, no breaths, no sighs, my son came dead.
Some years ago. Things being how they were,
I never even saw him. But I still
remember how he must have looked. And how
he would have looked. And all the landmarks of
his youth, and how he grew and what he did
when he became a man. It was a good
life. Pity that he died as it began.

Not all time will come to those who want and
hope for it. And when it's gone, we creep into
our satins and our silks to rest unseen.
Denied of his time (given his satins
and silks) I cried myself to sleep that night
over the death of such an old friend.

41 **Thalidomide Man**

One time my mother apologized for having made me like I was. I was about five. I remember it because I had to climb up on the chair in the dining room to be able to reach my hand out to her, after I said that I knew that she loved me and she began to cry.

I remember standing on the chair, beside the chair that she was in, and reaching out my tiny little arm to grab hold of one of the fingers of her hand. She had both of her hands over her face and eyes as she cried, and I got hold of one finger with my hand and said it again, "I know that you love me and wouldn't hurt me Mommy." And she stopped crying and opened her hands from her eyes and took my hands in hers and smiled and said that she was glad.

Everybody else was always afraid of my little hands and arms. But she wasn't. She would hold my hands. But she's gone now. And I am grown and independent now.

I have heard other men with other disabilities compare themselves to me and talk about how badly they wish they had only my small hands to adjust to.

I've heard them talk about how they wish they could walk or see or have sex or have any kind of fingers, arms, or hands at all.

I understand, and so I never tell them, but I wish I could find someone else to hold my hands, now that she is gone and I am grown. God, how I miss holding hands.

42 Nathaniel

On the Day of the Dead,
men, women, and children,
dress up as skeletons and
ghosts and walk and dance
through town
(across the square
and to the church)
as if they were the
dead themselves and
not among the living.

Among the living,
we sit at the table in the
sidewalk restaurant,
(picking at our food
and sipping drinks against the
heat). My hand upon your hand,
as we sit side by side,
thumb idly rubbing against the bone
on the outside of your wrist
and my index finger
stroking across the knuckles
of your fingers.

Although we are in the tropics,
we have come here late,
and our tans have faded
since the summer,
laying by the waters
on our blankets,
walking on the hillsides in
the breeze. We are turning white
for winter
even thought it hasn't come as yet.

Knowing these are only
ghosts around us, I
could break convention

Spiders and Angels

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and (in public)
lay my head upon your chest.

There I would listen to the
heartbeats as they rose
in pace and stature. And
I'd feel your arm around my
head to hold me close.
Your hand upon my other ear
to break the din of dead who pass.

They are not ghosts though.
That I know. There are still
conventions. I live to lay beside you
in the silence of the real ones
and enjoy the heartbeats,
feel the tones,
and rush with turning white
to you.

43 Mary

On the highway between the
ocean and the hills, on a cliff
that jutted out below the
road, you and I once lay, and you
licked a bead of sweat that crept
along my arm and whispered, "There,
now I have another little
bit of you in me."

* * * * *

To store my yearning
deep inside of you. All night.
Repeatedly. Then
the birds would greet the sunrise
full of hope and flight and song.

* * * * *

Let me lie with you
upon your cross (naked to
your loneliness, your
quiet, and your perfect touch)
and then fill me with your love.

And I will cherish it,
recount it endlessly
inside my mind (and
openly to friends who,
having heard the tale
so many times before,
recall as well the
touches, surges, kisses,
tastes and smells, as
if they were along
when it occurred.)

But no, we were alone.

44 Tommy Miller

So,
I was driving down the roadway,
early in the morning
in the country,
cruise control just cruising,
songs upon the stereo
just singing loud and strong about the
loves and lives of other men and women
gone astray,
sun behind me rising to begin
another day
and, as it did so, turning
everything from nighttime gray to morning gold
and then preparing them to be the colors of the day;
and suddenly I saw this green thing
in the road before me.

Not wanting to run anything down,
I began to wonder what it was and think if I
should try to swerve to
keep from hitting it.

In milliseconds, I wondered if it were
a pair of silk panties
that had blown out of a window by mistake
as lovers had sped by
(I wondered about the barest bottom in the land
wishing it still had the panty
or something inside of it),
I wondered if it were a leaf
(lonely leaf who fell from some tall tree
and lay upon the ground in misery.
No, not a leaf - too big),
and I wondered if it were
a great green lizard in the road
with head held high
waiting for the morning and the sun
to bathe in for a while.

But then it was too late to swerve,
and I passed over it regretting my
destroying such a great green lizard as this was
who waited for the morning sun to shine on it and
smile.

Looking up in the mirror,
to see it as I passed,
I could see it jumping in the wind behind my car
(cavorting in the turbulence a moment)
and falling to the ground again.
It must have been a leaf.

Upon the wind it looked just like a leaf,
or green silk panties
looking in to see if it were I
who had passed by.

45 Esther

The meadows in the mountains
(mowed by winds and wings of birds) ache
of blossoms, cry of critters,
weep of rivers and small ponds, and
watch as we lay down beside
each other in the clearing
to embrace and kiss

and wet again the paths of
our beginnings. We don't notice
that they see. We are alone
in the meadows in the mountains,
with the blossoms, animals,
and rivers, on their knees in
worship of such things.

Back before the meadows,
when the world was molten
flows and water was still
mainly steam and mist, the
clouds would give sometimes and
sunlight would sneak in. The
sunlight would sneak in, and
then the clouds would gather
back in place and steam and
mist and molten flows would
rule the world again. And
there would be no meadows
still.

You smile in the morning,
glad to waken with me,
glad that we're together.

I feel the way the earth
did, when the sunlight would
sneak in, back before the
meadows. Molten flows and

Spiders and Angels

mist and steam and clouds and
hope from sunlight sneaking
in, but there are still no
meadows.

46 Christopher Copeland

There was only a little light coming into the bedroom from down the hall in the living room. I was standing up by the bed (still naked and hot and sweaty) having just returned from the bathroom, and Dana asked if I would stay the night. I knew that I would not be back. I knew that I would never lie between those thighs or kiss those cheeks again. "Not tonight," I said, "next time." At the gates of heaven, they showed me that moment and asked if I had lied. "Yes," I said, "I lied." The angels forgave me in an instant. Still, I have all eternity without his smile or his eyes.

47 **My pet cat's paws**

My pet cat's paws
have long white hairs
between the toes.
When he walks the hairs fold back,
and he is not aware of them.
When I roll him over
on his back
and brush the paw hairs up,
he bites at me
and rolls back to his feet
and walks away with white wisps
dragging behind every step.

48 Little Andrew

The road to the house was through a grove of apple trees. Crab apples, green apples, Johnny Appleseed's grand red apples, apples of temptation and forgiveness all in trees to walk beneath and (if you were still young enough) to climb among until the owner saw you and called out for you to get out of the trees and then to run beneath back to the road or to the fields or to the pond and then around to where the other neighbors had their fields of corn or wheat or oats. Apples of temptation. Wheat fields of adventure. Blessed corn among the sowing oats. And then forgiveness, too.

49 A Sailor

The small Brown Cloud
tumbled through the sky.

Alone against the blue,
it looked more like dust than cloud.
Like a dirt devil in the desert.
Only it was laid over on its side spinning
out of the north without another
sign of weather anywhere about it
as it came.

It had been a perfect day.
Light breezes out of the south
gently prodded us across the lake
and back. Then,
sailing in the middle of the lake,
our sail went limp
while we were looking at the cloud and saying things like,
"I don't believe I've ever seen a cloud like that before."
And, "So small. And with nothing else around it?"

The sail luffed a moment.
Then it flapped once or twice
in the breeze as it changed
to be coming instead from the North.

Then it snapped full across the boat
damn near knocking Ken right overboard
and filled with a rush of wind the likes of which
I'd never felt in sails before.

The mast leaned over and the
hull heaved and the bow rose up out
of the waves ready like some thoroughbred
for racing. White wake waters
washed around the stern and then
suddenly were slipping in above the beam
and I was trying hard to bring the boat

about to face the wind at least
enough
to give us both some time to
change our pace,
but the mast
kept leaning
and the bow kept rising
and the water washed over until
we were washed under
and the wind just blew us down.

And the wind drove the sail down
deeper in the water until every
flap it made was beaten back with water.
And once white ribbons
sewn to save the wind
grayed and blackened deeper down into the
wet until the keel was sanding in the air
and Ken and I were clinging to the sheets
out in the water. Trying hard to catch our breaths
and floating in our jackets, cold and lonely monuments
to wind, and winter,
and the water,
holding on for all dear life
to the bottom of our boat.

"Well, God,
you've got this one,"
I said out loud between the waves.

50 Washed

Washed by your tears, and the years
of my searching for you, and the
yearning for you to be part
of my life, I cried when you cried.

Then I licked off your cheeks. They
tasted like yearning, and years
of searching, and tears.

51 Victoria

We had been to the theater. It had been an opening and we had had a wonderful time. I don't have to tell you, everyone was there. It was the event of the year and we all had just been thrilled with the performance. And I was in a new gown and John was in his tux and I was wearing all of my best jewelry. Even the eight carat VVS-1 blue white pear cut diamond necklace that John had gotten me for the twentieth anniversary.

It had been wonderful. And as we were walking away from the theater, to go for drinks at a little place around the corner where everyone was going to go to meet, this dirty young man stepped out of the alley way with a knife and told us to give him our money, and then he saw my necklace.

John was no fool, and he was already reaching for his wallet. But when that boy said to me, "The necklace too," I looked at him, raising both my hands up to my throat to cover it, and said, "Honey you will have to pry my diamonds from my cold dead fingers." I had heard a phrase like that from someone who believed that he should be allowed to carry guns. I had always liked the sound of it, but never understood the meaning of it ever in my life before.

And he lunged at me with that knife. And John screamed, "No," and all the animal in him came out at once and he and that boy were fighting and rolling on the ground and, finally, John won and stuck that boy four or five times with his own knife and left him lying there,

on the sidewalk covered with blood and moaning,
and stood back up, Tux all smeared and bloody,
and looked to me. And I too was lying
on the sidewalk bleeding out upon my
clothes. Fine white evening gown with blood all
over it. My hand still to my throat
upon my diamond.

John dropped down to his knees beside me, and
he said some things about how I would be
okay and how he couldn't live if I
had died, and I looked back at him and smiled.

"John," I said, "Thank God it happened this way.
Can you imagine me upon a death bed,
old and gray? Thank God it was with Drama,
in our formals, on opening night. Please,
just thank God, John. I know I do."

And I floated up out of my body
with him still there holding on to it. And
it was a lovely scene. Blood everywhere.
Anguish everywhere. Soulless punk kid cast
to the side in the shadows dead as well,
and me floating off to heaven.

52 Donna Sue

We'll listen all over the building
for creaking walls
and dripping water faucets,
or any mid night noise
that we can listen to:

a car on the street,
cats courting each other,
or wind on the trees
and the wind chime,

anything to keep away,
just a moment longer,
the end of this rose petal day.

53 **Joseph**

We trod on trails of
feathers torn from the wings of
angels. Angels who
(while protecting our love) had
been stripped naked in battle.

Surrounded by all
that naked, sacred flesh, how
could I resist you?

54 Monica

Where is
the naked
(you) skin tight
flesh beside me
in the night? Touching
me with fingers
that recall the
seagulls, and
the wind upon the lake,
and the
cat that ran across the street
in front of your new car.
And
when will it return
(Noah called
to it before he left
without it, but
it would not come)
and float my heart
again
on foam
and silver
sighs?

55 Nicholas

While gliding above the tree tops
searching for ferrets or fishes
to eat or take back to the nest,
for the young ones, does the eagle
idly think upon the arch of
her true love's beak, the stroke of his
talon, or the feel of his
feathers against her own?

And wandering in the mountain
streams, perusing everything that
comes his way, does the grizzly
entertain the passing thoughts of how
his love has looked or felt or pressed
her back against his belly when
they were together: The smooth hair;
the coat of golden brown enticing him
back home to their cave up in the hill?

Yes, they do. Just as I lean back,
at my desk, and think of you.
But, just as they, I sometimes am
a bit too wild to stay. I drift
away to chase some beauty I
have seen across the way somewhere.
Fear not. I do not lie. I will
return to touch you bye and bye

56 **The Dreaming Snake**

While I am curled within this woven straw basket, sleeping in the marketplace through the heat of the day, play your flute and call me to come out: Come out and dance for you; Dance to your sweet song. I will dance to your sweet song as if I were dancing along with the angels to the music of the spheres and all the sounds of the shedding of our many, many skins. And all of the people in the market will dance as well. All of us in motion with the music. All of us, with angels, dancing, at first to the sounds of your song, but later, to the rhythm of the shedding of our skins.

57 **Michael's Lover**

Now we are Dust
in the cuffs
of an old man's pants.

My father had come to America before the war.
He fled the old country because he was Jewish.
He was a jeweler there.
They told him he could leave
and take his family,
but nothing else.

Leaving behind everything and everyone
(most of whom died in the showers at Auschwitz
later on)
my father and mother
escaped to the new world
before it began to get bad.

Arriving by ship in New York,
he went to the bars
in the neighborhoods where
there were immigrant jewelers and,
ripping the hem from his pants and his jacket in alleys,
pulled out the diamonds he'd sewn into them,
and traded his way into business again.

I fled from my homeland as well.
I sewed my wild oats in the hem
of my pants and my jacket
and fled. And in the new city,
I ripped out the hem
in the alleys and restrooms
of bars in the lights of the night:
Trading my way into business.

* * *

When my cock was up inside of you,
Spiders and Angels

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even if it was just waiting
and neither of us was moving,
maybe not even breathing
but just looking into each others eyes,
or our heads side by side and eyes closed
simply feeling each other's arms
about each other and me in you,

you didn't care that I wrote poetry.

You didn't care whether the bills were paid,
whether it was day or night,
or whether the breezes blew.

You cared about the next slight twitch
of me inside of you.
Me too.

When I had your cock inside me,
even if we were just waiting
neither of us moving,
maybe not even breathing
but just looking into each others eyes,
or our heads side by side and eyes closed
simply feeling each other's arms
about each other and me slipped over you like a glove,

I didn't care that I wrote poetry.

I didn't care whether the bills were paid,
whether it was day or night,
or whether the breezes blew.

I cared about the next slight twitch,
with you.

And now we are Dust
in the cuff
of an old man's pants,
like diamonds,
me and you.

58 Susan

My parents said that I was too young to
keep you. And they said that they were both getting
too old to keep you too. And the lady
at the home for unwed mothers let
me hold you for a while the day after
you were born, and then she asked me if I
were still sure that I wanted to place you.
And Daddy said, "Of course she's sure. We've been
through this all before." And she took you out
of my arms and walked away down the hall.
Later on that day I signed the papers
just like they all said I should do for you.

The footsteps in the hallway still echo.
Repeating, hard, flat soles against the tile.

59 **Another Stranger**

It was lunch time,
and I had several errands that I had to run
but I needed more time and I knew it
but I was gonna try it anyway
because I needed to get them all done
and I figured that if I really tried to push it
I might make it
and I ran out of the office
across the street
and got into my car
and jumped it out into the
traffic and down the road
as fast as I could get away
and two blocks down the road
the light began to change
and I yelled at the guy in front of me
to "Step on it and
let's get through!"
and he stood on the brakes
and we both slide to a halt
(me right on his ass).
And the light was still amber
for ten, maybe fifteen, more seconds
and we coulda made it easy.
But no, this guy has to be so fucking safe,
and he pulls up way before he has to.
And I get to wait behind him as
the light goes through full cycle.
And once it finally comes around
to being green for us again, I'm
ready to just stand on it and
get on past this bastard
and get on with my errands, and
you know what he did of course.

He sat there as the other lane of traffic pulled away
and then, once I had blown my horn to get him back in gear,
he stalled his fucking engine.

I don't think that I can go into the details
of the errands that I tried to run that lunch.
Suffice it that The Guy Who Stalled His Car
In Front Of Me was only the beginning.

By the time I got to the post office
(only second on my list of things to do)
I was yelling as I drove into the parking lot, at God,
"God, why are you doing this to me?
Why the fuck can't you just let me run my errands
and get on back to work on time?
Why the hassles, huh God?
Why the fucking every fucking red light red?
Why not help me get my errands done
instead of pulling on my strings and
watching me jump all around like
a fucking puppet for your laughs?"

The parking lot was not too full and
I jumped out and ran inside and there I found
The Line.

I mean this was like a line you'd find at Christmas
for Christ's sake. And it was only August or some other summer
month and here in line stood half the town. It seemed.

But, I calmed down.

"No point in throwing a fucking fit here in the post office,"
I figured. And I took a deep-deep breath and
stepped up to the line.
At the very end of course.
And I began to wait.

But you know,
the line was barely moving.
Unlike Christmas time, the Postal Service
doesn't put on extra coverage for lines like this in August,
or whatever month it was.
And even though there were three windows open,

we were moving slowly.

And even though I realized
I couldn't throw a fit there in the post office,
I was feeling pretty weird about the way
the Fates had turned on me at every turn
and kept me from my errands.

And standing there,
long line still ahead of me and building more behind,
I quietly began to mutter (with my voice inside myself)
"Really God, What is this about?
I'm twenty minutes later than I should have been by now.
And You have thrown up every single roadblock
that You could have. What's the point?" I asked.

And standing in the middle of this monster line
just staring at the floor and
wondering how my errands mattered
in the wisdom of the universe
and needed so to be so fucked today,
my eyes were fixed upon the square of tile
three letters dropped upon.

Three letters from the lady in the line in front of me.
I'd hardly noticed her, of course: Plain, mid-thirties,
not dressed for show, just frumpy shirt and pants.
But then, I had been thinking of my own problems, you know.

And I thought I should bend down to get the mail for her,
but noticed her hand didn't look quite right.
Still in place beside her as if holding mail,
it had the slightest loosening. And I
looked up to see her face, still turned away
as if she were just waiting in the line, and
even before her neck could begin to draw back toward me
I knew it.

Grand Mal Seizure Time.

I looped one arm around her chest
Spiders and Angels

in under her arm
and the other in behind her shoulders
with a hand under her head
as she began to fall and seize.

Once gently laid upon the floor, she
broke wide open with convulsions.

I hit the stopwatch on my watch.
I looked around to make sure everyone was
giving her some room. And I waited.

I was vaguely aware of some ankles
around us for a bit, and once someone
ran up and said he'd called an ambulance
and ran away again. And she convulsed.

Kneeling beside her.
Resting her head in my hand still,
I still waited.

And when the seizures stopped I hit my stopwatch off
and waited still some more.

Slowly she began to rock her head a bit
from side to side as if to slowly shake
away the shaking she had done.

And then she turned her head toward me, and

two ambulance crew ran in the door
loaded down with suitcases of
medical and telemetry equipment.

They ran up to her side and
The Medicine began its Holy Toil.

One of them slid in between me and her
and began what he was doing as he
pushed me to one side. She had enough
recovery to hold her own head off the floor

as my hand slid away.

Over his shoulder I told the medic,
"Typical Grand Mal Seizure.
It lasted seven and a half minutes.
She is still postictal and has not begun to speak."
"Thanks. Are you a doctor?"
"No, I've just seen a lot of seizures."
"Thanks." "Your welcome." And I stood up.

The lobby of the post office was empty.
All the people in the line were gone.
And there stood three empty windows
with three waiting clerks waiting there
to serve my postal needs.
I stepped to the first one and bought some stamps.

Walking out the door I smiled. Half an hour
of every red light red. Maybe forty minutes
of frustration. All so this young woman
wouldn't hurt her head when she fell to
the floor. All so someone would stay with her
as she lay there shaking. All so someone
wouldn't run away from her in fear.

"Fair enough," I figured. "Fair enough."