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(Selected poems for this preview)

Each Day

Each day I get up take a breath,
brush cobwebs from my spirit;
I try to recall broken dreams
That drift away somehow

Seems half the time I ache for death,
the other half I fear it;
I can't make up my mind it seems
I guess I'll live for now.

The Day My Fingers Fell Off

The day my fingers fell off....

I was at the pharmacy

my thumb rolled down the counter

to the digital scale

and rang up one cent

my index finger fell on the floor

with some of my change

I picked them up with my other hand

and put them into my breast pocket

and counted out clumsy coins

the cashier looked annoyed

and people behind me sighed

and clucked their impatient tongues

I walked quickly to the automatic door

leaving a trail of rolling digits behind

like breadcrumbs in the forest

shading my eyes with one of my stumps

bent at the wrist like a caveman club

I fell

and bumped my nose against a

stop sign
knocking my right eye loose
landing like an overripe grape
bouncing off athletic shoes

My elbow pinch-twisted
like melted glass and broke
pirouetted against buckling knees
kicked ahead of me
as I began to run

no one noticed as my trembling legs
gave way
and my head dropped from my shoulders
kicked like a hairy soccer ball
in some macabre slapstick gag
in an old silent movie

No one saw as my chest collapsed
crumpled like newspaper trash
stomach splitting open
like a soggy sack of beans
No one stopped, or glanced,

as I came undone

like a house of cards
caught by a sudden breeze
on a cold day's dry picnic table
a pile
of loose limb fragments
and tattered torso traces
bloodless
painless
puzzle pieces

trod
into cold cement cracks

by passing hurried feet
worn down
like sand dunes

in a desert
storm.

Frozen

My bed sustains and numbs the pains when
everything's frozen

I kiss the ball that holds the chains when
Everything's frozen

The days slip by from crying eyes
I take another pill
I imagine that it's pointless now
to even use my will when
Everything's frozen

My courage turns to ashes now 'cuz
everything's frozen
there's nothing I can think of 'cept how
Everything's frozen

I will not leave the blankets
I won't be tricked no more
I do not want to know myself
or find out what's in store
Everything's frozen

Don't want to think of what I saw 'cuz
Everything's frozen
my trembling nerves are red and raw and
Everything's frozen

Don't care if there's an answer
Don't care if there's a thaw
Don't care about the world outside
Don't care 'bout nothin' at all

Don't want to have you pick me up
and dust me off today
Don't want to have you look at me
Don't want to hear you say

It's what I've chosen

Everything's frozen.

Times Like These

Times like these.

When reality rushes up at you
suspended in the last few seconds
before you hit the ground
without a parachute.

Times like these

like walking past the vending machines
and a sudden explosion of darkness
ends as soon as it begins
like the opening note
of a demonic symphony soon to follow.

Times like these

kind of frightening
and exciting
when the ground's about to drop away
from under your feet at any moment.

Times like these

when you think that you're going to die...
fearing it, wanting it,
trying not to think about it,
never being able to,
wondering if you need to,
thinking that you shouldn't.

Times like these

when you care too much,
and not enough.

When the fabric of existence
gets snapped like a bedsheet

Times like these

when the only thing worse than being alone
is having to put up with other people
and worse than that:
being alone.

Times like these

when you smoke an incredible three packs a day
and you wake up with the worst hangovers in the world

every

single

day

and you don't even drink

Times like these

when it all comes in and it all goes out
and it all goes up and it all comes down
and you can't stand being in the same old places
but there's no where else to go
and you can't stand staring at the same old faces
but there's no one else to know

Times like these

when laughing children
are laughing at you
when colored lights blink
mockingly at you
from bolted doors
and barred windows

Times like these

when wreaths turn into nooses
and brittle ornaments glitter
like the manicured teeth of a frozen corpse

Times like these

when you got yours
and you got mine
and each and every day
the world's dark weight
sticks needles in your spine

and your tear ducts have the empty heaves
and your trembling on your knees

and it seems like times
have always been
and will be...

Times like these.

The Monkeys Are Asleep Today

The monkeys are asleep today:
I saw them down on Fifth Street,
bumming cigarettes and staring
at the cracks there in the floor.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're sending out their resumes,
auditioning for plays we've seen
a thousand times before.

The monkeys are asleep today:
I see them laughing nervously,
their bare-teeth painted smiles
they just don't cut it anymore.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're trying to walk upright,
but the lives upon their backs
won't let them quite fit through the door.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're getting laid in restroom stalls,
their backs are up against the walls
with nothing in their hands.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're crawling in the sidewalk cracks,
they're much too tired for fighting back
they fill the shopping malls.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're sitting in their cubicles,
I saw them crossing Market Street
with briefcases in tow.

The monkeys are asleep today:
they're getting stuck in traffic jams,
they haven't figured out quite yet
they've got nowhere to go.

You

are a tree on a leaf
and a welcome relief

are a voice out of view
and a barrier reef

are a wall, and a bridge
are just over that ridge
are a fortress of mirrors
and concrete beliefs

are a giggling child
playing hide and go seek
in a graveyard at midnight

an elusive slow leak

are the bite of a needle
and a tickling feather
are a painting of sunshine
in cold rainy weather

are a bank account balance
that's more than its sums
are the peppercorn stuck
way down deep in my gums

are tomato seeds flying
from slick fingertips
are a hurricane coming
from whispering lips

are a naval fleet made up
of unmanned ghost ships
crying mayday

in uncharted waters.

Mea Culpa

Some day they'll have a chemical formula for guilt
they will write it out on a blackboard
and solve it like a mathematical problem

Like all those guys
who go around from city to city
confessing to crimes they didn't commit?

They'll make pills that will cure them.

Everyone will want one
so they can live guilt-free lives.

They'll give it a catchy name like.... **Culpaway™**

*Buy new **Culpaway™** Caplets
and kiss your guilt goodbye!*

Drug companies will make a mint.

Robert Culp Jr. will be the spokesperson
in clever commercials.

The only catch would be
If users stop taking the pills
the guilt comes back
10 times strong.

So.

People will become addicted
and turn into consciousless sociopaths

There will be treatment clinics,
detox centers, counseling programs,
residential treatment centers,
12-step and self-help groups
to help people suffering from
”**Culpaway™** addiction disorder”

CAD for short.

The rehab centers will make a mint.

Finally of course.... they'll make it illegal.
People will get busted and put in jail
for **Culpaway™** possession.

'Culpies' they'll call the addicts.

The dope dealers, and the police,
and the prison owners, the
prison industries, the parole officers,
the politicians and judges

will all make a mint.

And they won't feel any guilt!
Cuz they've got...

Culpaway™ !

(Take only as directed)

Doppelganger at the McD's

His was a station tuned solidly at
a different frequency

whereas mine was over-modulated
fading in and out

He noticed for example
that the placemats
advertised McDoubles™
even though they didn't
sell them anymore

and
he knew just how many hours
the Jack in the Box down the street
was open during the week
and where you could buy a
TRIPLE cheeseburger
in a combo, no less

He knew all about the new salads too

He was disabled, like me
We talked about being that way

He looked at me with his soft features
and said matter-of-factly:

*"I've been disabled since I've been born
and it ain't goin' nowhere!"*

*I envied his lack of torment
his lack of shame
his askew present-ness
his bright, and pleasant good-natured
and innocent awareness;
his simple, effortless
attentiveness to details*

All of which utterly eluded me.

Oh, to be safe in fortress of french-fries
than lost in a forest of fear.

Looking at him,

I realized how much he looked like me
even the way he held his head
tilted naturally
in a mirror image of my own

his hair the same color as mine
bushy-bearded like me too
I looked at his forehead
and it seemed like mine
flat, tall, pale and cliff-like
our glasses almost identical
even his name was the same
as mine; as fate would have it

For a moment I thought

perhaps he is not really here

*perhaps, I thought
he is a figment of my imagination
and passersby see me here*

*talking to no one
just another street crazy
in a downtown McDonald's
holding a private conversation
with himself
in the dark reflection of
the restaurant window*

not wanting to just get up and leave
I invited him to come
to the Kinko's to look at the web with me

but he looked down demurely, pausing and just said
"but Kinko's is boring".

And so I gave him all my change
so he could get something
fun to eat
and I said,
*"See you later, man.
I think we look a lot alike"*

And this made him smile
as I walked away.

Compassion

not too far from here
is a house I visit
now and then
a room and board
filled with casualties
of the system at large

there's a man
who gives me a hard time
just about every time
it seems

Something in my attitude,
my demeanor,
sets him off.

he yells at me as I come in
like I'm an outdoor dog
makes every effort
to make me feel that
I have no right to be there

he is a slouching weasel of a man
slumped shoulders,
ugly unshaved face
slicked back, dirty, greasy hair
filthy t-shirt

urgly as a mudfence stuck with tadpoles
he regards me like I am dipped in shit.

last week, for some reason,
he fell off the roof of the home
about three stories up

i must admit

i snickered a bit

when I heard

but just yesterday
I saw him.

His wrists had been shattered
and held together by plaster and metal pins
both his eyes were blackened
like a football player's
and he sat, sullen, on the steps
leading down from the back door

he cursed sharply at one of the residents there
walking by
and then raised his battered bulk
off splintery steps
looked over his shoulder and scowled
at no one in particular
then disappeared
inside.

and i sensed
from as far away as i was
a sadness
in him

and the moment struck me
like a bullet in my heart
and melted it like butter

and my jaw dropped

as i sat

shaken

saying the name of a man
who lived 2000 years ago
again and again

who himself
often felt the same

at least this time
it seems

it was not in vain.

god

god is great, god is good

god is rain, and god is wood

god is beginning, god is the end

god is the foe, god is the friend

god is the mansion, and I am the room

god is the womb, and god is the tomb

god is the one who, in sleep, dreams of me

god is the one who it seems cannot be

god is the one who cannot be described

god is tasted and eaten; smoked, and imbibed

god is what the mind soon becomes

when its own complex nature defies comprehension

god is the crux of Good Orderly Direction

god is the *I want to feel good* intention

god is the prisoner in halls of detention

god is the one thing missing from this list

god is what angers and clenches my fist

god is invisible and opens my hand

god is what science cannot understand

god is the body and I am the cell

god is the water and I am the well

god is a man sitting in the sky

god is the what and the where and the why

and the how

god is writing the words right now.