

The Gristmill

The gristmill it lay rended
From the way the tree was felled
Heard the newborn foundling
And the nascent mother yell

The snow had fallen heavy
From the weight the birches swayed
He was born on Christmas morning
And she died on Christmas Day

The millpond it sat frozen
Through the ice we fished with twine
Built a crib from broken birch
And a pall of yuletide pine

The soil was set and stony
Dug through frost some two feet down
We nursed him from the calving quey
And placed her in the ground

Round, round well then from this world we're bound
For unknown shores on seas of gray
Sing, sing, can you hear them echoes ring?
That's the sound of our Lord's confounding way

The Millwright was a shepherd
Self-described man of The Word
Sang the boy's baptismal
As he wept for the interred

The Journeyman, a preacher's son
A boy of just fifteen
Stared with his strange countenance
At all that he had seen

Clean, clean as our spirits slowly wean
From night and its dark addled fray
Sing, sing, can you hear them echoes ring?
That's the sound of our Lord's confounding way

The table it was set
With all the blessings we could bear

A Christmas feast and funeral meal
A bitter-sweet affair

To the child his life was given
And though his mother's took away
It was true a Christmas wonder
In the Lord's confounding way

Say, say as the final trumpet plays
The song of our never ending days
Sing, sing, can you hear them echoes ring?
That's the sound of our Lord's confounding way

The Rise And The Fall Of It All

Well I roamed along latitudes, like a kite on a tether
Flew out over the heather and went chasing my tail

And I took all of them platitudes, yeah strung 'em all together
With bailing wire and leather and honey it just don't look right
'Cause when the roads are real, they'll buck and they'll bawl
I don't care for the blacktop in town
Well 'cause my shocks are shot, and I wouldn't know it if not
For the rise and the fall of it all

Well I've honed all my skills to impress fellow brethren,
Still ain't no feather in my cap

And I traversed heaps and hills, went searching for heaven and
Found me a reverend just speaking in tongues
'Cause when the roads are right, they'll kick and they'll crawl
I don't care if the camber now sags
Well 'cause my struts are shot, and I wouldn't know it if not

For the rise and the fall of it all

Well I've known you my dear in the sweet altogether

Depending on whether you were up or were down

But with you so near and the sun way down nether

Can't depend on the weather to blow you my way

'Cause when the roads are rough, you'll whine and you'll weep

But at least you'd be here by my side

'Cause my suspensions' all shot, and I wouldn't know it if not

For the rise and the fall of it all

Second Longest Day Of The Year

I met her in Panola at a Black Dutch Caravan pulgas vestidas side

You should have seen the way she smiled when her chariot crossed the line

And she had this old soul you could tell from the way she wore

Them Goodwill shoes and that estate sale patchwork affair

She played alto clarinet in the Nome Community Marching Band

And taught Sunday school in a Pentecostal store front fold

And she was born near Houston when a line-storm tempest blew

And she would die in East Texas on the second longest day of the year.

Oh Lord, I guess y'all just can't afford a little man like me, my reverie.

Just pain cold bought in miles

One leaf blown night, paced the boards of the wraparound

Then I proposed on the porch swing with a bluegrass band serenade
In our little place we would laugh and roll ourselves to sleep
Side by side in the bed we made from hand-me-downs of family and friends
But after awhile she would tend to commiserate
As she watched her stories in the middle of the afternoon
And on the evening news another flood plain breach, up Nacogdoches way
She would cry herself to sleep and drown in the pale blue light

Oh Lord, I guess all you can afford a broken man like me is pale misery
On and on from womb to the grave
Oh but don't count on me in this life of penury, I'll forsake this, your tear-sown world

Laid her down to rest on a barrow-topped hill taking shade from Spanish moss
With strains of a brass band and "Just A Closer Walk With Thee"
A rose in full bloom with acanthus grace the alabaster headstone cross
I visited three times a week for the better part of six long years
I used to run a Brush Hog through on Saturdays
But somehow, I think, she'd like to let them little Bird's Eyes grow
Then I moved to West Pensacola with the weight on my shoulders and ballast in a U-haul tow
And now I only come to visit on the second longest day of the year

Oh Lord, I guess I just can't afford this old man's lament or the marrow spent
In this life, it's all that remains
Oh but don't bet on me, cause I'm just a man and men will be tossed and torn, in this, your tear-sown world

Just about every day, goin' on every night
The road forks, bridge bends, the path starts to lose its light
So go ahead and listen to what your momma said
Take your dreams to sleep and put your bygones to bed
I know, I know, things don't seem to work that way
Well, but it's a numbers game they told me
And I ain't ashamed to say I'm playin' to win
It's right there on the bill they sold me
Just the same it'd be a shame to go and cash it on in

Ain't nothing new, the things people say
Times may change but in the same old ways
Shouldn't be too hard in this world to get things done
So tie off that sheet, tell the boys to row
Reckon out a course and stow your worries below
I know, I know, you hate to hear it from me
Well, but my faith never felt this safe
I can only hope that you learn to see as I do

'Cause it's a numbers game they told me
And I ain't ashamed to say I'm playin' to win
It's right there on the bill they sold me
Just the same it'd be a shame to go and cash it on in

Just about every year, right up until the end of this life
Light forks, time bends like the steel at the edge of a knife
So do me a favor, put the pillow on my grave

Stir the pot again for every memory you save

I know, I know, it's a numbers game...

Little Back Bedroom (Working Title)

Born into rough folk-worn prose

30 years too late and I'm still looking on ways of making my days seem long

And my nights grow still

Raised on south Kalkaska Soil

With the smell of cold, and kindled purple ash leaves culled from the eavestrough (piles)

And the wasted storm-filled afternoons spent watching lightning veins and snow-choked gales

And from my little back bedroom, I can hear the world outside

Hum of a freight train running, Air Chimes opened up wide

Sound of Four Winds blow rising and falling,

Crying and calling to me

Basked in a stark suburban din

Just marking time in places not on my own but somehow alone and tired

Of finding myself

A chorus of soft mew-flown wings

Took me far from home and now I'm sort of amiss about just where home is these days

But I see, by them roadside graves, a trailhead up the way

Might as well see where it's going

And from my little back bedroom, I can hear the world outside
Hum of a freight train running, Air Chimes opened up wide
The sound of Four Winds blow rising and falling,
Crying and calling to me...

Born into rough folk-worn prose
30 years too late and I'm still looking on ways of making my days seem long

I Am Undone

She's the last when a wick's turned low
And she's the first when day's harbinger crows
And I, oh I am undone

He's the last when a day's work ends
He's the first when a dark cloud portends
And I, oh I am undone

Orange groves and power lines shoulder the road
Off up a hill into nothing
A crow on a signpost, dust clouds at dawn
And my mind sees its way through the fight
To the soft subtle ways that I know

She's the one makes my lampblack bright
She's the one makes the wrong side right
Oh and I, oh I am undone

He's the one making late on time

He's the one makes the wrong sounds rhyme

And I, oh I am undone

Orange groves and power lines shoulder the road

Off up a hill into nothing

A crow on a signpost, dust clouds at dawn

And my mind sees its way through the fight

To the soft subtle ways that I know

Oh I, oh I am undone

Oh I, oh I am undone

The Steeplejack

Boiled on a rooftop, Steeplejack, saw as the sky was unfurled

Caught up in a blind man's gambit, trying to see a better man's world

Wire mesh pushcart living, a tabernacled sideshow hack

Slept like a black vine weevil playing possum in a cul-de-sac

Oh but I know there's something in me that wants to grow old

But I just can't seem to climb my way back on up again

And I never want to find out,

Find out just how

Just how far I can

How far I can... Fall

Sang in a chainsaw choir, played a bit of five to ten

Rooked marks in a three-card ballet, it got me sent back up again
Killed time in a bawdyhouse lean-to, paid for every single woman I loved
Stole alms from a Lady chapel poor box, told me not to push so I shoved

And I'd do it again, if I thought it would turn out different this time
But I just can't seem to find all that much good here in me
And I never want to find out,
Find out just how
Just how far I can
How far I can... Fall

Grilled on coal tar, Steeplejack, saw as the shine became shade
Met my match at a halfway house mixer, in a six foot tenement maid
Found peace, adopted a ward of the state, a little angel in a swaddling sack
Got saved on the day I died, reading scripture from an almanac

Oh but I know, there's something in me that wants to live on
'Cause it took so long for me to carve out a place in this world
And I never did find out,
Find out just how
Just how far I can
How far I can... Fall

A Day's Gap Keening

Oh take my fears and allay them
Oh lay them down in a barley wine

Wind me up and release me

Oh Death don't take me now

Oh watch the fields torn asunder

Oh under skies of smoke and steel

Steal away to our Eden

Oh Death don't take me now

Oh show me life everlasting

Oh the last sting of loved ones past and gone

Gone are the days of purpose

Oh Death don't take me now

When I sleep speak low

When I wake sing so sweet

When I die speak well of me

When I'm reborn sing loud

Oh tired conscience it pulls me

Oh to meet my maker and say adieu

Do not weep for to mourn me

Oh Death don't take me now

Oh Death don't take me now

Oh Death come take me now

Only If The Now Is Then

She's got 2 ply blue adhesive window tinting on an 84' Diplomat

And drinks her Fighting Cock neat with an apple beer back til there's just no mind to where she's at

And she hates when she gets too ahead of herself, starts talking 'bout way back when

She thinks she's living in the here and now but only if the now is then

And she lives in a bottom under loblolly pine in a cabin made from railroad ties

By the hand of an Allegheny bridge guard reveler that she once took for hale and wise

And she grew up near a town with no daylight savings and it's there that she's bound to stay

'Cause she thinks she's living in the here and now, but only if the now is yesterday

Well again and again she gets the fire bells ringing, Every time the margins' called in

Nighttime comes and she gets to thinking

If only the now was then, yeah if only the now was then

She keeps her civil war chess set manned and at the ready should one question all sharpness of mind

Keeps her mall portrait near and paints the mirrors all black

Cause the years have been so very unkind

And on the night she slowed as she drew a far breath and drew his Dubl Duck across her veins

Well, she waxed fond about the here and now, as her wish for the now did wane

Well, and she hates when she gets too ahead of herself and starts talking 'bout way back when

Well she thinks she's livin' in the here and now but only if the now is then...

Rust Belt Comet

There's a trailer in the parking lot, it's got a cook top counter and a fold down cot

Just waiting for us to climb up on it, hitch it to the back of your rust belt comet

And drive as far as these good feelings and them 6 tires will go

We'll spend our nights feeding fires, under pear-shaped culverts and redwood spires

We'll eat leftover meals from truck stop diners, siphon off wrecks and draft Freightliners

And steal what we need, but nothing anyone would miss

We'll take on highways, underpaid watchmen, and strip mall billionaires

And rummage yard sale bins for cassette tape road trip fare

And do our best damn take on original sin

And do our best to remain in all the places we've been

There'd be a shiver in my chest and you'd inspire it, take it all apart and then rewire it

And find every good idea that I'll ever have

We'll take on the back roads, overfed lawmen, and strip club legionnaires

And scour surplus stores for camouflage war-worn rags

And do our best damn take on a deadly sin

And do our best to assure all the kith and kin

There'd be a sliver in my step and I swear you'd make good

On pulling it out just to peddle for firewood

And turn all my doubts to downhills

There's a trailer in the parking lot, it's got a Panel ray heater and a fold down cot

Just wish we had it in us to climb up on it, hitch it to the back of your rust-belt comet

And drive just as far as them 6 bald tires would go