

# Plan B

By Matthew Rose

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"Behind every great fortune  
lies a great crime."

-- Honoré de Balzac

To Whom It May Concern

## Prologue

# Twelve Suicides

## One

Cutting along a dotted line he'd drawn with a ball point pen, Von Spatzl sliced through the ink and the seven layers of pale skin on his wrist, pushing his father's dulled razor blade towards the vibrant blue veins.

"So blue, so blue, so blue," he whispered to himself. It was quite an achievement for a boy so young to cut himself so deliberately. The incision, deep enough to draw blood, now yielded a surprising squirt – bloop, bloop, bloop – and blood began to flow, gathering in the cup of his palm. It was not, however, a serious enough cut to penetrate the artery.

"Red, so red," he whispered. "Reddddddd."

Secreted in his musty attic "Winter Home," Von Spatzl felt safe and strangely comforted in the cold silence. Slowly bleeding to death, he turned on an old transistor radio, tuned to a talk station; it whispered and crackled on about the postal carrier strike. Von Spatzl moved towards the small window and surveyed his dominion. This perch above his family's house looked out along the line of tree tops; he was above and beyond the world below, and his solitude was a proud vector, over and against the distressing social life he'd inherited. Yes, he was safe.

Just 15 minutes earlier, Von Spatzl rummaged through old storage trunks where he found dozens of yellowed family photographs. Slipped into rotting cardboard frames with the name "Swanson Photographers" emblazoned in dull aging silver script on their covers, these unfamiliar faces within

were bathed in sepia and mold. These people were all dead now, of course. Yet the cast of antique characters stood in full relief in wedding outfits, arranged in studio chairs, or holding caught fish like small frying pans from their handles. Some were sinking their toes into the sand at a seashore, or standing, proud of themselves in front a small brick house; one boy hung upside down with a big grin from a tree. Now these antique people encircled him in his big ceremony, and gazed at Von Spatzl in their aging frames as witnesses to his farewell party after only six years on the planet.

One of them was most certainly his mother's father (1889 - 1954), but Von Spatzl didn't recognize him at all. His grandfather was all of 17 in the photograph (the fellow hanging down from a tree). He wondered what his grandfather thought just as he died. What words passed through his lips? (He had heard that a brick building collapsed on him). Oh, it hardly mattered. Von Spatzl liked the company and he imagined their lives, the horse drawn carriages, putting black cars, and in some of the pictures, the jovial family all standing together. They did seem pleased with themselves, didn't they. Did they lead happy lives? Would Von Spatzl have recognized himself among them?

The pressure from below the Winter Home was too much, and rising; but that was being taken care of - for Von Spatzl's rising glee at supervising this veritable spring of his fluids -- different than urine, obviously, and thicker -- was matched by his lowering blood pressure.

"Take the pressure off!" demanded a singing advertisement for Redux Relaxing Pills on his scratchy transistor. "Redux Relaxing Pills take the pressure off..." sang the man, full of confidence...Here was someone who was most certainly relaxed.

Blood continued to pool into Von Spatzl's little right palm, and his head, draining slowly, felt light. He felt woozy, and then, he tumbled off his little white chair in his nest above the trees and crashed softly onto the floor.

"I'm probably dead," he said to himself. Just like those people in the photographs. But his last words were: "Swanson – who was he?" – mumbled before he passed out.

## Two

With an umbrella an oatmeal raisin cookie and a white wooden chess pawn, Von Spatzl climbed outside the window of his "Summer Home," the overheated attic that this July was also home to a colony of hornets. The hornets didn't bother him much and he didn't bother them. They were not very interested in his sweet young blood. Flies, though, feasted on his skin. He knew flies laid their eggs all over the place, and thousands, maybe more, were already in his body. When you died, the fly eggs hatched and the maggots ate you till there was nothing left, and then they went looking for more food -- on some living menu.

Von Spatzl took a firm grip on window ledge and sat, his ankles crossed, the umbrella resting across his lap. Just over a line of badly trimmed hedges he could see the empty Wallenby's pool. To his right, the tree tops that provided homes for squirrels, sparrows and a nasty family of red cardinals were swaying in a gentle breeze. Below, on the ground, Von Spatzl saw Vic and Tim behind the tool shed smoking Chesterfields stolen from their mother. Hiding.

He ate half the oatmeal raisin cookie and gazed into the sky, a blue heaven. It was like a song on the radio. This wasn't the first time he considered taking off for the sky, but this was the furthest he'd got. His plan, in its simplest form, was to open the umbrella and lift off, leave, and never come back. But at the same time, Von Spatzl, who at the age of 8, fully understood gravity (he'd read the biography of Newton) as the force of attraction,  $F$ , between two bodies of mass  $m_1$  and  $m_2$ , Von Spatzl here being  $m_1$  and the earth,  $m_2$ , and  $r$  squared the distance between him and the ground (well that would give him the acceleration... ). He was pretty good in pyrotechnics as well but that was not today's lesson. Von Spatzl knew that the moment he extended that black rounded wing into the blue, and edged off and away from this house he'd suffered in,

he would be more or less planted in the garden, like the roses below him. Or, if he got lucky, a breeze would catch him and he'd be able to fly like...deep down, however, he was aware this Mary Poppins aerodynamic was utter fantasy and he was most likely to be impaled in the rose bushes. He slid the chess pawn into his pocket.

Falling, he had a sense of exhilaration and a profound sense of the world in his gut. It was all there, the entire world and the history of the world: He felt alive in this freefall moment, and it was the first time, albeit brief, in a very long while he was happy outside his rooms. Von Spatzl crashed through the atmosphere into the thorns.

Yes, he was able to walk, or better limp, away, though his arms and legs were pretty scratched up. His ankles took the brunt of his wager against the earth. His oatmeal raisin cookie had crumbled in his hand, but it was still edible. Was he disappointed? Mostly stunned. Obviously he was either Superman, an indestructible unit of life, or just simply incapable of killing himself.

### Three

A girl named Valerie, who had long golden tangles, wore a training bra when her physiognomy deemed it unnecessary, and was good in math, was the young object of Von Spatzl's pubescent desire.

Von Spatzl's particular fascination focused on the short suede skirts Valerie wore to school, and her head, adorned with freckles and a pair of coke bottle bottoms that enabled her – incredibly – to see. Her head bobbed up and down when the science teacher, known for bad skin and strange habits like drinking Bromo Seltzer during class, gave longish explanations of various causes and effects, chalk flying and breaking into pieces. Valerie's eyes followed the bits of white as they exploded and arced sharply to the floor punctuating the rhythm of scientific explanations on say, evaporation.

Von Spatzl found himself observing Valerie's effect, and while he longed for a cause to brush up against her in any possible way, his timidity prohibited it. In fact, Von Spatzl was rendered effectively catatonic, a result of his long-running emotional collisions with Vic and Tim. Vic and Tim, the twins who, among other things, had one autumn afternoon doused Von Spatzl with lighter fluid and set him on fire.

"Holy shit!" they cried as Von Spatzl was swallowed in orange flames, a preview for later years.

His hair singed and hands blacked, Von Spatzl was finally doused by a neighbor (Mr. Wallenby), who dragged the boy to wet leaves covering the ground and rolled him to a smoky stop, then plunked him in his pool for good measure.

On the outside, Von Spatzl was okay, actually, but inside he felt carbonized. It took a good month for him to look normal, if that's the word. Certainly Vic and Tim apologized, but not to Von Spatzl. Rather, to their mother- they said like alterboys: "We're sorry for playing with matches." Apology accepted, a clear conscience was reinstated for the twins while Von Spatzl was caged off as his hair grew back. He could hear them muttering at him through the walls: "We'll get you next time."

What is odd, as much as the young Von Spatzl dreamed of escaping the forces of gravity (and Vic and Tim), being killed by them was not exactly his preferential way to do it. While Von Spatzl hadn't lost the ability to speak, he simply refused to do so. But he did want to speak to Valerie...if only to get her to speak to him, and help him with his plan.

Von Spatzl, wounds healed, finally did attempt to speak to Valerie that winter, when Valerie fell ill with mononucleosis, a contagious infection that originated and promulgated about the lungs. Mononucleosis was known as the "kissing disease." Von Spatzl's goals were not to live out his fantasy of suede skirt heaven, but rather to obtain the sweet kiss of death.



Though quarantined in her home, Von Spatzl made it his business to deliver some school papers to her directly. In order to put himself in direct fire of the deadly monococcus.

"It's on my way," he mumbled the teacher with the bad skin and the Bromo Seltzer addiction, adding the useful lie that he'd already had mononucleosis. "I am immune."

Yes, he wanted to share the disease with Valerie, and in such a union, Von Spatzl saw a fitting, and romantic way to exit this life and move onto the next, if there was one.

So he rang her bell, sweating, nervous. There was no answer so he rang it again. He expected a dog to bark. Everyone seemed to have dogs, and at 3:30 in the afternoon, with someone ringing your doorbell, surely a dog would bark. (Von Spatzl's family had a dog named "Dog," but they were not on good terms). Valerie's mother apparently was not home -- possibly out on an errand to purchase medication or the ingredients for some kind of healing soup for the invalid girl. Valerie would be forced to leave her sick bed and come herself to the door. *Unless she was already dead.*

But she didn't and she wasn't. So, Von Spatzl, moving with purpose, for he did have a real mission -- to deliver a truckload of homework -- turned the doorknob and gave a twist to his fate. Indeed, it opened. There was no dog to attack him as he stepped inside the foyer. The house, though, seemed packed with germs. Perhaps he'd catch it just standing there?

"Hello?"

No answer.

"Hello?" he said a bit louder. His voice, a squeaky flute with all the power of small pair of scissors, died just a few feet away from him.

Hearing a faint, wheezing cry from upstairs Von Spatzl called out "Hello" again while he followed the echo of his voice.

"Who's there?"

"Hello? Valerie! It's me! Von Spatzl! I've come to bring you your schoolwork."

His heart raced and he bounded up the stairs, stairs he'd never bounded up before, but which welcomed him nonetheless. He anticipated a pale dying girl, suede skirts folded on the bedspread.

"Where are you?" he said, looking around on the landing. There were quite a few doors. The house looked old and run down. The walls dirty, the carpet beneath his feet worn and stained -- with blood? How could those suede skirts walk through these decrepit hallways?

"In here," cried the voice, a weak breathy sound.

Certainly she was very very ill and Von Spatzl, terribly excited, entered a room ready to trap the heart of Valerie's disease. He nearly trembled when he saw a shape buried beneath covers. He scanned the room. It certainly didn't look like a girl's bedroom, not that he'd ever been in one. There were no stuffed animals, no posters, no little bottles of perfume, no suede skirts, and the room itself wasn't even pink.

Von Spatzl had fully imagined a short reverie before the disease set in to demolished him. He saw himself sitting on Valerie's bed, looking at her lovingly, and receiving kindness in the form of her big blue eyes return. Then, he'd touch her forehead as if checking her for fever, and kiss her forehead, something she would not protest, then look into her eyes. And kiss her on her monocused lips.

"Thank you," he would say.

The lesson, which had to do with memory, might be something he could explain to her. He could explain, for example (as the kiss was working its way into his system) why some memories, even for an eight year old are stronger than others, and how we forget things, as well. (But not a first kiss.) And

remembering that memory creates a synaptic intersection, a chemical configuration.... He could even draw a synapse! "Understand?" Or, using another metaphor, a memory can be like a snow ball, and the more you remember it--or roll it in more of itself, more snow – the larger it grows, and it soon becomes a snow man. He'd say many memories tend to disappear as well; some are quickly forgotten. Some we don't want to remember. But sometimes memories come back to haunt you... "Ha ha ha!" they would laugh.

Hmm. Von Spatzl, knowing Valerie was good in mathematics might think Von Spatzl was not mathematical enough for her just Von Spatzl, someone she barely knew who'd come to bring her a week's worth of schoolwork.

"Thanks, I'm tired...."

"I'd better go."

But before I leave her in her weakness, I kiss her! On the lips. Von Spatzl's plan unfurled like a pirate's treasure map: Too weak to protest, she accepts, kisses the bandit on the lips. Leaving the assignment on a night table, he exits her room, slips out of the house, and finds the street where, walking the mile home feels the infection taking root. He's dead in time for dinner.

But much to Von Spatzl's surprise, and the surprise of Dorothy Smitts, an elderly ex-postal worker recuperating from a bladder removal and would celebrate her 80th birthday in the cemetery, it was not Valerie under the covers. Von Spatzl was not at all Wynn Gaylord, the aging Dorothy Smitts' nurse.

"Oh!" he whispered, terrified. "Oh, excuse me!"

Von Spatzl turned and scurried out of Dorothy Smitts' sickroom, scooted down the stairs and out of the house, walking quickly and steadily, clutching the papers to his healthy pink chest. Did he just not see a vision of hell? Yellowed skin like a chicken, red blotches. Did the Smitts widow have teeth in her head? Was that pus coming out of

her? As he neared his own house, he reflected: I should have stayed and caught that old woman's disease. But the moment had passed...

While exciting in retrospect, the "Valerie Episode" remained a source of deep embarrassment for Von Spatzl for many years to come. And felt only partially relieved when he read in the local paper that Dorothy Smitts was buried after a long illness. He returned the next day with the homework papers he'd promised to deliver, and placed them silently on the science teacher's desk, next to her Bromo Seltzer kit. He took his seat without uttering a word.

The failed suicide attempt, for that's what it really was, took its place in Von Spatzl's tiny but expanding hall of shame, a source for a lasting and rich self-hatred. He should have known, not only Valerie's address, but also that the disease he wanted so much to make his own, is limited to contagion by bodily fluids, and is not air borne. Yes, he'd been correct in one respect: He would have had to kiss her. Really kiss her.

Von Spatzl sat crying fitfully in the family basement. His face a red and puffy expression of misery. He longed then, as he did when he returned home from "not Valerie's house," for an oblivion, a now without a past. If only he could have no memory. If only he could contract Alzheimer's disease, or some other atrocious illness, that would paralyze and snap the life out of him. In his waning moments, he would gather the world around him to pray for his life and watch as he drew his last breath and eked out a word with it to all his supposed loved ones.

"What did he say? What are you saying little Von Spatzl?"

"I said," he whispered weakly... "I said, 'Fuck you'. I said, 'Fuck you all'."

Yet like many young boys, Von Spatzl soon retreated to the simpler realm of childhood, complaining both that the food is awful and the portions are too small.

Unable to kill himself with infection, Von Spatzl would later plot unsuccessfully in having himself arrested. "I'll just kill my social self, the others will follow." But this new plan was delayed by his discovery of pills.

#### Four

At an early age Von Spatzl fell in love with pills and the fine and small glass or plastic bottle containers they came in. You could shake them and make percussive music, or open them up and let them spill out, their perfectly smooth machined-shapes and their bright reds, blues and greens enraptured him. Seeing his parents gobble these colors up, he considered them food, too, but more efficient, they were so small and compact. He couldn't understand their mood altering capabilities, but everyone seemed to be swallowing quite a few of them. And Von Spatzl, too, joined in the fun. Sometimes. He was given small orange ones, usually after he cried out in the night, a stomach ache or a headache at first, and then, simply he screamed to trigger the reward of those orange pills.

As he got older, Von Spatzl helped himself to the orange pills. Soon, the neat little glass bottle went with him wherever he went. Better than candy, more precious, too, he'd slip one underneath his tongue and let it dissolve. At the very least, it made him happy. Particularly as Vic and Tim were always making him unhappy. So he ate more and more of them. And when those ran out, he tried others. Some just made him sleepy, some gave him energy, while others made him talk funny. Since he spent most if not all his time alone, only he knew he talked funny. He'd never taken too many of them because the colored capsules and shapes were very wonderful and he always wanted to have some in reserve.

By the time Von Spatzl was 8 years old, he'd understood that the pills his parents were eating were not food at all, but a wide range of medicines for their various ailments. Some for swollen muscles, others for big headaches, others "to relax," and others "to sleep." He collected these colored remedies and stored them in a plastic case in his Summer/Winter Home

in the attic. He'd become quite knowledgeable at this point about the world of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

So when Vic in a fit of rage at Von Spatzl told him, "I wish you'd just drop dead," – a comment that broke Von Spatzl's drawing of the inside of his radio – it was taken seriously.

Tim chimed in: "Yeah, Von, why don't you?"

He couldn't do anything right, could he?

Von Spatzl closed his book, packed up his colored pencils and retreated into the house. His mother was watching the Match Game on television and trying to play along. She didn't notice the tears in his eyes, nor did she pay much attention to him as sullenly mounted the stairs. She didn't hear Von Spatzl as he ascended the pull down ladder that led to his attic hideaway. He was above and beyond the numbing world as pulled out the colored pills he'd secreted away. He swallowed a number of them at once, knowing that the combination would certainly have the desired effect of sweeping him away, dropping him forever into unconsciousness. He'd once heard on television someone say "Goodbye cruel world!" as they threw themselves off a cliff, and he intoned those same words as he choked down his medical rainbow.

They were, in a word, dry. His throat had swollen up trying to swallow them. So he chewed. And chewed. Trying to generate enough saliva to get them down. The taste was a disaster, but he kept chewing, determined to do himself in.

## Five

After failing to pill himself, and instead ending up with a puddle of narcotic vomit on his favorite cowboy shirt, Von Spatzl found himself exhausted, and he took a break from his suicidal program.

He fell in with one boy, Johnny, and together they escaped the hazards of sibling violence. (Johnny Rodino, too, was regularly

bashed but not by his brothers, he had none. Rodino's sister was the villain (raping him in fact), and later his father took over the abuse once Johnny was a big enough target. Johnny was sent flying more than once down their basement steps). Von Spatzl liked Johnny and the smart way he wore his cast. Von Spatzl even wrote out a cheat sheet for Johnny with all the basic laws of physics he might need for school, as well as the nuts and bolts of algebra, signing his name, "Your friend, Von Spatzl."

The two spent a good two months together studying the wild biology in a nearby pond. They trapped fish, turtles, ducks, baby birds and later crickets, snakes, red ants and once, a squirrel. Johnny even aimed a chunk of asphalt at a water rat and killed it, earning him high regard in Von Spatzl's book of contemporary heroes. Together they cut its head off and Von Spatzl performed an autopsy removing the heart, liver, lungs and gall bladder, laying these miniature items out on a slab of rock to dry in the sun. Von Spatzl made a series of color drawings of the organs, labeling them with accuracy in a script that was underlined, each numbered for further reference in the private shorthand journal Von Spatzl kept. When they were done, they tossed the parts into the lake, and Von Spatzl signed his medical drawings, "Dr. Von Spatzl." He had Johnny sign as well, "Forensic Specialist, Johnny Rodino."

Unfortunately for Von Spatzl, their collaboration didn't extend beyond marine life once Johnny's cast came off and he returned to the sports fields. That left Von Spatzl to return to his solitary ways, where he became once again a target of wrath of Vic and Tim. He renamed them, if only to himself, Vice and Time.

The twins, particularly when his parents were out on the town, took turns babysitting Von Spatzl by threatening him with lit matches (again!) and smoldering cigarettes. Sometimes they tied Von Spatzl down on the bed and operated on his little dinger with a pair of their mother's fabric scissors and a pair of tongs.

"We'll just cut here and you'll be fine," they snickered.

Von Spatzl (who'd just barely eluded the clip clip clip), raced to the kitchen and instead of calling the police, drew out of one of the utencil drawers a large serrated steak knife. Naturally, Vic and Tim followed him, giggling, anticipating the fun.

"Stop," was all Von Spatzl said.

The twins considered briefly that Von Spatzl was threatening them and this of course, deserved punishment. But as they stepped closer to our hero, Von Spatzl turned the knife on himself, sinking the point through his cowboy shirt and only an inch from his rapidly pumping heart. The boys froze in their place, and a look of worry crossed over their faces. It was a classic stand-off. Vic and Tim could hardly risk letting their "ward" kill himself - it would look like they killed him.

After some 15 minutes of this heart-pounding play of the sword and the stone, (pushing it in instead of pulling it out, was the contest), Vic made Von Spatzl blink, literally, by yelling "Boo!" Von Spatzl lost his concentration. Tim grabbed for the knife, and it tore a hole the size of a dollar bill across the Cowboy shirt. It skittered along the kitchen tiles and the race was on after it. Dog was in the lead to grab the knife, but Von Spatzl slid head first and pushed Dog out of the way, grabbing the knife again and bumping up against the wall. The boys approached him once again, like a pair of wolves preparing for a meal of lamb chop. But Von Spatzl had another idea. Where he was sitting on the floor, an electrical outlet was just to the side of his little bottom. It beckoned him and without a hesitation, Von Spatzl inserted the knife into the wall socket and said, simply, "Now."

Indeed, the attempt at self electrocution would have gone off without a hitch if the steak knife, bought via mail order, wasn't one of those new Ginsu knives, with its handle a very tough plastic. The electric current stopped almost immediately as it sang out from the tip, but not of course before it shorted the house's entire electrical circuitry and the whole of the block's



power grid as well. The entire neighborhood was thrust into darkness.

Dog began to growl, and Von Spatzl, sensing his chance, crawled out of the kitchen and ran upstairs to his Winter Home, pulling the trap door shut after him.

## Six

Von Spatzl, ever creative in his bid to end his life, endeavored to find a different more efficacious strategy to sever himself from the living. He would starve himself.

At first Von Spatzl imagined he would simply play with his food, and if asked, respond with the socially acceptable, "I'm just not very hungry." And this indeed is how his starvation undertaking set out. At dinner, one night when Von Spatzl was 11 and the twins a pair of pudgy 14-year olds, our hero nudged aside his ham sandwich, sipped some water, wiped his face and said, "Excuse me," getting up to leave.

"But Von, you haven't eaten a thing," said his mother.

"Oh, I'm just not very hungry... I have some work to do anyway..."

The twins pounced on Von's ham sandwich like a pair of hobos, and Day One was over and dealt with. For breakfast the next day, Von made as if he had to rush out, so he hadn't time for toast and milk. Away at school, he could sit and read during lunchtime, and for dinner, he did take bits of hamburger into his mouth, only to dump the chewed bits into a napkin, which he then handed off to Dog.

His technique more or less perfected, hunger – as it loomed larger and larger in Von Spatzl's life – seemed to replace the adolescent death wish he'd sculpted. His will battled his stomach. At the same time, having not eaten, except for

water and whatever food got to him by chewing, Von Spatzl began to see more clearly. Hunger had sharpened his vision.

It was an odd and thrilling side effect. Colors announced themselves – the blue of the sky, for example, seemed to reach down to Von Spatzl and wrap him in blueness. A cardinal vibrated with redness and a yellow drop of mustard that dotted a plate of hotdogs he would not swallow was the most perfect yellow he'd ever seen. Color combined with hunger made it all bearable.

After a week of water, Von Spatzl, noticeably thinner (even for an already skinny boy), had absolutely fallen in love with lime green and canary yellow, hot pink and ultramarine blue. Color became his newest addiction and he would lie in bed, now clearly dying, and thumb through the paint charts he'd picked up at the hardware store. But he was weakening. He was too feeble to stand up to Vic and Tim, but they seemed sense his lack of resistance and took less interest in him anyway. Which was fine. Sort of.

After eight days, Von Spatzl was definitely in the Buddhist category of body types. He was weak, very weak, too weak to go to school, too weak to lift his head. But no one seemed to notice. Vic and Tim had left for school, his father was off to work, and his mother had gone to an early bowling game, the league quarterfinals. Von Spatzl, starving. Von Spatzl abandoned.

"My death will be meaningless."

And with that stark revelation, Von Spatzl lifted himself out of bed and padded downstairs to the kitchen where Dog, eating last night's garbage, growled at him. Too weak to push Dog away, Von Spatzl took out an egg from the refrigerator and boiled it for four minutes. He ran the cooked egg under cold water, then cracked the shell and stood barefoot and in his underwear pecking at it in little bites. The brilliant colors of the world began to fade, and Von Spatzl went to find some salt.

## Seven

Suicide is not very common amongst pre-adolescents, so upon reaching 12, Von Spatzl's odds of actually killing himself improved by upwards of 45 percent. He had a greater awareness of the methods and the means of doing himself in, and typically, like most scholarly ventures he embarked upon, he drew up a list.

Alone and moderately content in his Summer Home up above the world, he scanned the tree tops and was struck – not by the idea of jettisoning himself from his window towards their green, bushy tops – but of finding a branch strong enough to hold his 102 pounds. This would be a death he could be proud of, and one that would in some way be aesthetically pleasing as well. Surrounded by the green wealth of nature, his bird friends, Von Spatzl would swing in the breeze, his silhouette cutting a distinctly religious shape at first in the shade, then in the moonlight. There's dignity in that. Von Spatzl had come to learn that most people on the planet who succeed at doing themselves in, hang themselves; in the United States, most suicides (roughly 60 percent), are the result of gun shot wounds.

Von Spatzl also considered allowing someone else do it for him. Someone else to kill him. Two birds with one stone, so to speak. For indeed, his guilt was so thick about his head from the consistent threats of "Let's kill Von!" issuing from Vic and Tim, this seemed to be an efficient way after all, of managing the arduous task. Plus, he realized, Vic and Tim would probably be sent to jail where they'd rot along with all the vermin the world could muster. They'd be at home – that is, if the jailers put them in the same cell. Could he write a suicide note that would allow them to be together in jail? He could barely imagine them apart – that was his generosity (and guilt) working there, no doubt. In fact, he'd even seen them fooling around with their little penile stubs. ("Let's kiss dicks," Vic encouraged Tim. "C'mon!"). Von Spatzl, surprised, amazed, jealous and terrified after spying the two boys in their weird embrace, saw them properly as a married couple.

Murdering him, Von Spatzl believed, would bring them closer together.

Von Spatzl had also begun to read extensively about suicides, some of the more famous ones. He pulled a quote or two from his growing library of suicidal literature.

"Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know," came from Hemmingway. Joseph Conrad intrigued him with his German-English logic: "Let them think what they liked, but I didn't mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank, but that's not the same thing."

Von Spatzl wrote this in his Medical Journal: It's from the heart transplant doctor, Christiaan Barnard. "I believe often that death is good medical treatment because it can achieve what all the medical advances and technology cannot achieve today, and that is stop the suffering of the patient."

The warning signs were interesting, too. Suicidal types tended to put their lives in order. Check. They kept their things neat. Check. They were isolated. Check. They were in pain. Check. They felt the only way out of the pain was death. Check. They'd attempted suicide before. Check. They thought about it a lot. Check. Suicidal types gave away their most precious things. Not check, but that's a good idea, Von Spatzl noted. But to who?

Von Spatzl also created a profile of the suicidal prospect. He commented that Freud saw suicide as hostility against the self. Menninger diagrammed a three-pronged theory of revenge and hate, depression and hopelessness and guilt. All very unconscious, and Von Spatzl underlined the word "unconscious," three times.

"Yes, just look around," he scribbled in his Mead lined notebook, the one labelled "The End of the World." "Everyone is crying out. It's all symbolism."

Perhaps what truly marked the precocious boy was his diligence: Make a study of the phenomena (suicide in this

case), and experience it. "Or perhaps experience it and then study it," he wrote. "Either way, the point is, in getting older simply killing yourself isn't the whole point of suicide, is it? It isn't enough. People want to send a message."

Lots of people killed themselves, and they had good reasons too, Von Spatzl understood. But their messages were replaced by the everyday. It was all too soon worn smooth and invisible. Like the names on gravestones. Suicide was about "now," it was about "real time," the present tense, and he understood, as well, that most people killed themselves because they lived in pain, too much pain. And had to get out. Lift the roof to the house.

So he decided. He'd let Vic and Tim kill him. In their daily beatings he'd encourage them and give them ideas.

It didn't take long. As soon as Von Spatzl had finished writing up his list and stashed his *The End of the World* notebook along with others in a neat shelf, (each book numbered and dated), he looked around his room. Not a thing out of place. Check. He went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth, combed his hair, washed his hands and looked in the mirror and into his eyes.

"Yes, that is me," he mumbled glumly. "Check."

Stepping out of the bathroom (which he'd locked), he was met with his two eternal accusers who immediately accused Von Spatzl of "masturbating," and then accused him of "using all the water, you selfish jerk." Vic gave Von Spatzl a shove, snapping his head back and moving his body forward right into the waiting open palms of Tim, who knocked Von Spatzl back to Vic.

Von Spatzl took a breath and then said quietly without tears or exaggeration, "So just kill me, just do it. I want you to. You want to do it, so do it. Kill me."

There was a bit of the masochist in Von Spatzl; but the boy wasn't interested in simply going to the brink and coming

back, only to lick his wounds in contentment. Von Spatzl implored the twins to beat him dead. (This served him well in chess tournaments in Eastern Europe, scaring his victims by offering up the jugular of his Queen early in the game, and thereby generate a combination of guilt and glee with which Von Spatzl used to disable his opponents quite easily).

Vic and Tim pretty much tried to kill Von, now that they had permission. Knocked to the floor, Von Spatzl's head hit the linoleum and Vic climbed on his shoulders and began slapping his face.

"Face!" he slapped. "How dare you tell me to kill you!"

Tim meanwhile was whacking Von Spatzl's feet (now bare) with the scratch end of a large wooden hairbrush, then Tim turned it around and used the solid end in an attempt to break some bones.

Von Spatzl didn't protest. Not even when Vic, tired of slapping Von Spatzl with his hand (it was getting all red), balled up a fist and clipped him on the jaw, then on the side of the head, then directly into his nose; blood gushed out. Instead of frightening Vic into stopping, the blood seemed to urge him on. Von Spatzl's redness was spread all about his face, on Vic's right fist and growing puddles on the floor.

Two more shots in the face and Von Spatzl was unconscious and thereafter actually didn't feel a thing. His head fell off to the side, lifeless, blood draining out of him, pooling on the linoleum.

If not for Dog, Vic and Tim would have continued their savage beating. The animal, thinking it all a regular Vic and Tim game, jumped headlong into the tussle and typically began tearing at flesh. The boys ran, and left Von Spatzl for dead. With the door to the boys' room shut on him, Dog returned to Von Spatzl and spent the next 20 minutes licking his bloody face clean, then mopped up the floor with his tongue for good measure.

No, unfortunately, Von Spatzl was not dead. Yes, unfortunately he'd have to live through another day like this one. So close, yet so far.

## Eight

Von Spatzl had long known that suicide was relief from pain... but relief, being a feeling, is not something you'd be able to feel when you're dead. So went the argument in many social service prevention brochures, and in numerous books he'd thumbed through in the library.

"Wait 24 hours," they suggested.

Von Spatzl also conceded that killing yourself generally meant passing through various stages of increased--though, bodily--pain.

Hmmm, he said to himself, weighing the trade off between bodily and spiritual pain. He'd had plenty of physical pain, and it was nothing compared to the other pain. He spent a week making calculations, with charts and diagrams. He arrived at the conclusion that he could combine sleep with disappearance and thus exit his conundrum.

Rising early the next day, a Saturday, Von Spatzl found a rusty shovel in the tool shed, and, wearing his favorite cowboy shirt and green dungarees, he tramped to the far corner of the back yard. He stopped and looked about in the small wooded area. The yard, with its trees and squirrels and birds now all coming out to find a meal or chat, hummed with life.

He thought, this seems like the right place – the same thing he said 25 years later, in Zug, when some distressed Swiss beauty launched herself from her hotel balcony, five floors above the Bundesplatz. He even attended the mass for her at St. Oswald Kirche. Von Spatzl understood the why, even as a pre-teen, and even if he didn't know the specifics. (She was pushed).

Von Spatzl kicked away some stones and then planted the shovel's edge into the ground, pushed in with his heel and was abruptly halted, thrown back. The earth was a tough, mostly rocks and pebbles, and not only did it resist but the earth gave him a kick. He kicked back, spiking the shovel into its heart. "Mother," he grumbled. The tip of his tool broke off. But some dirt came loose. Progress. He scooped it out. Von Spatzl discovered that if he decreased the angle of the shovel his work would become easier. And it was, although he managed smaller scoops of dirt. Over the next two hours he'd dug a hole large enough to bury a hatchet.

By this time his mother and father had left for Mixed Bowling Night, and Vic and Tim were vandalizing their junior high school with rocks and spray paint. Von Spatzl trudged back into the house, found a large bucket, filled it with water and then poured it into the hole. By watering the dirt into mud he could move it more easily. He labored at his project for another three hours, watering, digging, emptying the hole until he could descend into the pit up to his knees. He'd have to come back.

He did. That night. Another three hours in the dark, Von Spatzl's progress greatly accelerated, largely because he'd hit a vein of clay and sand. The digging went rapidly. He'd lengthened the hole and now, nearly 11 PM, he was able to actually lie down inside his excavation, which he did, falling asleep until dawn. When he awoke, muddy and smelling of earth, it surprised him no one found him; Vic and Tim, who hadn't given him a good beating in nearly 24 hours and were probably going through withdrawal.

Inside the house, Von Spatzl sped past his family, all four of them busily gobbling up glazed donuts in the kitchen. He ran up to his room where he fished out some clean clothes, and washed himself up in the bathroom. It was all a show, for the quick appearance he'd make at the kitchen table, taking a piece of bread, perhaps a banana. Then he would head back outside to his underground retreat.



With his parents' faces were buried in the Sunday newspapers, Vic and Tim were learning how to read via the comics page, Von Spatzl felt a certain anger at all of them this morning. For ignoring him completely. As if he were already dead.

His grave was finished around 5 in the afternoon. He could comfortably get inside the hollow and using the shovel cover his entire body with dirt. He would do so after dinner.

He went back to his room, fetched his favorite cowboy shirt, washed up – and found his place at the kitchen table, where he was served a grayish meatloaf and dulled potatoes that had been boiled senseless. He'd rather eat crickets. Not a great last meal, but he couldn't really choose then, could he?

"Where you been, Face?" taunted Vic.

"Probably wanking off," said Tim.

"Now boys," said his mother.

"Don't you kids have homework?" asked his father.

Silence.

"Go do it," he said.

The twins moved in unison, as they always did. A regular Punch and Judy act. Leaving the table, Vic slapped Von Spatzl's right ear, and Tim his left. Von Spatzl, as usual, said nothing, suffering them in quiet anger. Inside, of course, he was broken, but the pieces, were too small and too many for him to reconstruct in any meaningful way.

"Now boys," said his mother.

Once they were gone, Von Spatzl, as was his habit, cleared the table, rinsed off the dishes, placed them in the dishwasher, and took out the garbage. He was happy to be outside again, and anxious to enact his plan. To escape today and obliterate tomorrow.

He padded across the yard to his great hole, his brilliant plan, and without hesitation, lay his body inside. He used the shovel to slide mounds of dirt, first over his feet, then his knees, legs, stomach and finally over his chest, so that his arms were just able to operate. With his hands, Von Spatzl covered his face, and then dug them as deep as they would go underneath his body. He realized he would be unable to pat down the dirt, but Von Spatzl figured with luck rain, leaves and time would eventually make a solid roof over him.

The boy could still breathe. He hadn't thought about the suffocation aspects of self-burial, but now he contemplated it. His face lay only about four inches from the surface – that was probably enough. Babies drown in an inch of water. Four inches of soil would probably do the same.

Von Spatzl's mind drifted over the images of his short life. He thought about his books, his notes, Valerie and her short suede skirts, he thought about Sam the Hamster, who'd died mysteriously and who, unable to go down the toilet, was buried not far from where he now was awaiting the great beyond. He thought about his mother, and imagined her bowling. He thought about his father and imagined him in red shorts with a white belt, coming off the golf course. He thought about Vic and Tim and thought: "Vice and Time."

"So this is life," he mumbled to himself, some dirt filtering into his mouth, and a bit now getting into his nose. When would the maggots appear?

Well, this must be it, he mused, getting cold. He was also feeling a dampness. Stage two? He'd been in the ground for at least two hours, and was still breathing, which surprised him. He was terribly alert as he fought off sleep – or was it death? He very much wanted to be conscious of his death.

"Just let go," he coached himself. And he tried to; he tried to just swim in his mind towards death. And he was nearly there, painlessly, quietly....Was that light the beacons of Heaven? He couldn't tell. He fell asleep.

Around midnight, Vic and Tim, who should have been in bed, stepped outside with one of their mother's Chesterfields in order to get sick smoking it. They took Dog with them around the back of the house, where they lit up and sucked in the tobacco.

"I think I'm getting high," Vic said.

"Give it back," said Tim.

"Go take a crap, Dog," Vic told Dog. "Shit! Animal!"

Dog took off into the recesses of the yard, looking for a place to dump his own meal of gray meatloaf. After five minutes, when the cigarette was burnt down to the filter and Vic and Tim were turning green (but who could see in the dark?), Dog starting pawing at the dirt of Von Spatzl's grave - first slowly, then madly, as if he'd found a meal. Then, as dogs do, Dog started barking, which alarmed Vic and Tim.

"Shit, we'll get caught."

"Let's get back inside."

The twins ran inside and left Dog in the yard to continue barking. Indeed the barking alarmed Von Spatzl's father, who came to the back door and called out to Dog.

"Come on, Dog, come here boy. Come here."

By that time, however, Dog had pawed away at Von Spatzl, and was licking his face. Then tugging at his favorite cowboy shirt, Dog ripped it attempting to pull him out of the hole like a big bone.

"Hey!" said Von Spatzl.

It was a strange moment for the hopeful suicide prospect. Von Spatzl began to cough as cool air found its way into his lungs, choking him, bringing him back.

"Go. Go."

"What's going on there? Come here boy! Here! Must be the moon."

Dog studied Von Spatzl whose face shone in the moonlight. The animal whimpered, licked his chops, and stepped toward the voice of Von Spatzl's father.

"Come here, Dog! Come here! Now! Fucking Dog!"

Dog looked back once at Von Spatzl, and then bolted towards the light.

## Nine

The day Von Spatzl buried himself alive and was, hours later, unceremoniously wrenched out of his own grave, was one of the principal reasons Von Spatzl had ambiguous feelings about domestic pets, mostly dogs. Yet his youthful commitment to suicide remained, although the boy's further attempts at it were half-baked at best.

He tried to stay awake continuously for month, thinking he'd die of exhaustion, but he just couldn't. And after 56 hours he plunged into a deep sleep that lasted two days. In that sleep Von Spatzl had a series of deathwish dreams that were literal as well as colorful.

One involved preparing his own body for burial. There he was in the coffin, stiff and pale, wearing his cowboy shirt, green dungarees, his parents with their hands on the lid of the small box, and his twin brothers standing outside the chapel smoking their mother's Chesterfields. But Von Spatzl was there as well, both inside the coffin and standing behind his parents: a witness to their grief.

"The tie has to be cut," said Von Spatzl's father.

"Cut?"

"Yes, cut," he said, and handed him an instruction manual.

In this 24-page booklet, a list of instructions was neatly printed; a diagram of how and where to cut the tie of the deceased demonstrated the final act of departure. It wasn't odd, was it, that suddenly Von Spatzl pulled out of his back pocket a pair of scissors. Placed there, apparently, and precisely for this purpose. He studied the booklet while holding the scissors aloft, his mother and father looking on with interest that the thing be done, the tie cut.

In order to cut the tie, it meant that Von Spatzl had to mount the coffin as if it were a horse. Astride the coffin, Von Spatzl noticed the varnish, giving the white paint beneath a warm glow. It was smooth to the touch, and the boy ran his hands over the object in pure aesthetic fascination. It was the most beautiful white he'd ever seen. Pure, even holy. When he finally crept up towards the opening, where he saw himself stiff with formaldehyde and drained of blood, he was clearly shocked but not scared.

"How thin you are!" he said.

Von Spatzl touched his own face. It was smooth and unblemished, hard and grey. Not happy, but not sad. Youthful, and in a way pretty, wasn't he? The tie was familiar and a good one; it was in fact his father's tie, and so large it nearly covered his chest, obscuring the pearl snap buttons of the cowboy shirt. It was a pink and turquoise paisley design, made of silk. It fairly glowed.

Von Spatzl took the tie in his hand and in three deft clips, cut the silk tie in half and held it in his hands, and examined it as if it were a trophy fish. Sitting on the coffin and turning round towards his parents to show them the clipped bottom half of the tie --had he done it correctly?-- Von Spatzl saw that they were gone, and that he was alone holding the tail, asking for approval from people who were not really there at all.

He knew that it was a suicide that killed the boy in the coffin. As he sat on top of his corpse he began looking for the suicide note --when in each of his own attempts he'd never left. For his own wakeful suicides, he realized then his notebooks would just have to suffice--to explain the reasons why. Yet, he was convinced in the dream that there was a suicide note, and his job was to find it. But he had! There it was – in his hands. The cut piece of tie – a fairly obvious phallic symbol.

When he awoke, Von Spatzl was hardly alarmed he'd dreamed this scenario, but he was surprised that he held in his hand – as if it had passed from the dream – such a note. Written on yellow, lined legal paper, not his usual notebook material.

“My name is Von Spatzl,” it read. “Remember me.”

## Ten

Years passed without Von Spatzl launching another suicidal scheme. He continued along with his writing, reading, and drawing in his notebooks, spending hours on end in his Winter/Summer Home in the attic teaching himself Morse code, listening to broadcasts from overseas on a shortwave radio he'd built and staring out at the tree tops. He counted the birds that nested in them and the clouds they danced through. When he found himself on the floors below, Von Spatzl submitted to the daily antagonisms from the twins, the routine ignorance of his parents and the strange though estranged friendship he had with Dog.

He went to school, observed and recorded all the formulas submitted to him, did all his schoolwork (and quite a bit more on the side), and was generally quiet. Few in fact knew he existed; he avoided “friction” of all kinds. Even his teachers, none of whom impressed him, paid little attention to him. He never talked in class. Outside of school, Von Spatzl played no sports, (not even showing interest in the chess club), rarely dawdled after school, and would walk home alone. He was resolutely focused on his notebooks – and in the flurry of his

writings what he might discover in his scribblings. He did like the marks he produced on the page. His scratchings, whether they were numbers, words, sentences, entire blocks of writing, or calculations, diagrams or combinations of all of the above, yield a certain elegance for him. He also was fairly impressed by the beauty achieved as each new book, filled end to end with his ball point and pencil notations, slid onto the shelf in his safe house library.

But a period of quiet is often a period of gestation, and at the age of 15, on a warm June night, Von Spatzl acted.

It was junior prom night, a promising evening of new polyester suits and ankle-length chiffon dresses in absurd colors, alcohol mixes (Singapore Slings, Wallbangers, Long Island Iced Teas) harbored in small flasks inside sport coat pockets, as well as bongos of all sizes and shapes and, of course, cars-- begged, borrowed or stolen.

Von Spatzl wasn't going to the Prom. He hadn't even considered it, and made no mention of the event to anyone, although Vic said to him "What'll you wear Von? Y our birthday suit...?" Tim chimed in: "No, he'll spread shit all over his body and go as a turd!"

While Von was too old to be beaten up, Vic and Tim still slugged him routinely, and that day was no exception. His arms were black and blue as the twins played out a punching contest with Von Spatzl the bag. All this abuse continued, in spite of the fact that Von Spatzl steered clear of the twins. He asked himself why such aggression? Why didn't they just go out and let him be? They were obsessed with him, he concluded.

Indeed he believed that there was hope some years back the three of them could reconcile, that Von Spatzl could perhaps maybe even tell the twins about his suffering. But that was dashed one Saturday afternoon when their mother, in an effort to give the boys a lesson of responsibility with a reward of fun, handed Vic (who was older by 30 seconds than Tim), \$30 for a day at Funley's, the amusement park.

"That's \$10 each," she said.

Funley's was two hours away by train. She'd gone off early for a marathon bowling tournament, and their father was out of town on some mysterious business trip. Not expecting great things from a day-long journey with his brothers, Von Spatzl packed away three books for the trip: *German Level 4, II Paridiso* (bilingual edition) and a clean lined spiral notebook (he had the idea to draw Ferris wheels, mechanical toys and other machine entertainment devices).

It was 9 am when the three boys set out. They had to walk half a mile to the train that would deliver them directly to the gates of Funley's Amusement Park. A light drizzle dampened their clothes but not the twins' spirits; the sun was attempting to break through, which Von Spatzl took gullibly as a sign of hope. But to the skeptic's mind, the day did not seem promising with so many confusing signals. Especially when, not more than five minutes from the house, Vic and Tim started in on Von Spatzl.

"We're going to leave you once we get there," jeered Vic.

"Alone, with no money, just your face, Face," said Tim, laughing.

"You'll get beaten up," added Vic. "Or maybe you'll get lucky and someone will slash your throat."

"Yeah and that'll mean more money for us!"

They both laughed at the threat and promise; and they meant it.

Von Spatzl stopped dead in his tracks, refused to take another step. The twins kept on walking, laughing, plotting.

With tears in his eyes, Von Spatzl turned around and walked back to the house, which he knew was locked and empty. The twins never called back to him, never offered even the baiting



lie - "Hey Von, c'mon, we were just kidding." He was crushed, isolated, hated and he didn't know why; and he never would, would he?

His entire world, or rather the entire world, emptied out, replaced by a vacuum. The sky, the clouds, the trees, the dirt beneath his feet all seemed to disappear, drained of purpose and meaning. Von Spatzl parked himself on the front steps of his house and stared out at the street for hours. Finally, he walked the to the back yard where he surveyed Sam the Hamster's grave, and envied him his peace. Eventually, Von Spatzl, his tears dried, climbed up and into one of the smallest windows (a bathroom on the side of the house). He was greeted by the menacing growls of Dog. Dog perhaps sensing Von Spatzl was no burglar and something else about the boy-- that he was utterly defeated - stopped, licked his hand, then went to find a piece of rug to sleep on.

Von Spatzl climbed up the stairs to his Summer Home and sat looking out over the trees wondering where all the color had gone, for his world now was truly black and white and gray. He counted clouds, then trees and in one of his notebooks, began writing down all the numbers from 0 to 1,000,000 in pencil, falling asleep as he wrote out 85,450.

At 11 PM when the twins returned home, they didn't call for Von Spatzl to see if he was there, but instead helped themselves to huge bowls of ice cream. At 11:30, when his parents came through the door, Dog barked happily. Von Spatzl heard the mumbled chat all four had in the kitchen about how much fun Funley's was. None mentioned Von Spatzl, how they got along with him that day, what sorts of fun he had, what kinds of things he ate, what he saw. If everyone assumed Von Spatzl was asleep in his room, no one checked in to see if this were true or not. And when he descended from his Summer Home in the attic after 1 am, the house was as dark as a wax museum and just as friendly.

The days passed, the weeks passed, the years passed, Von Spatzl living more and more in his silent world than ever before. It was the event of this prom, however, that finally

made some noise in his head. He was 15 and he knew a few things. He knew, for example, how to drive. Not that he had driven, but he'd been in the yellow Cutlass enough to understand the basics of its operation. On junior prom night, a Saturday with everyone finally out of the house, Von Spatzl took the keys to the Cutlass and started the engine.

At first he wasn't quite sure where he would go. But within minutes he discovered himself driving towards the beach, the windows down and the car heater blasting. It was a pleasant sensation – the cool June air and the warm heater on his lap. The roads, abandoned to the seagulls and rabbits, were a joy and he pushed the accelerator to the floor. He was happy, had discovered a way to be in the world – glide through it at 90 miles an hour. He turned on the radio. A country tune came on and a lilting, ironic voice sang out, "If the phone don't ring, it's me." Von Spatzl had a good laugh at that and zoomed towards the stars. He loved driving! While tempted to park and take a walk along the beach, he enjoyed moving in the Cutlass so much, he didn't want to stop. He turned into the parking lot and there, drove in circles, figure 8s, and drew out trapezoids and spelled out his name, "Von Spatzl," writing, he imagined, with the infrared heat of the Cutlass. Only he knew it was there, written for all time. "Remember me! Von Spatzl."

He'd been driving for nearly two hours when he headed back home to put the car away and lay out some new ideas in his books concerning travel and speed, as well as jot down some notes on the concept of standardization -- how that changed the ancient agrarian global economy into a modern one, capable of mass producing items such as screws, and of course 8-track tapes (like the one in the Cutlass) that could be played in players anywhere in the world.

His head was brimming with so many ideas as he found himself driving in front of his school. He spied the crowds massing by the front gates, smoking cigarettes and pushing back flasks of booze. Von Spatzl pulled over, parked, killed the lights and scrutinized a group of his schoolmates, none of whom he knew. Yes, there was a part of him that wanted to socialize, a part of him that was eager to seduce Valerie, for

one, drink beers, smoke Acapulco Gold and laugh like the rest of them...but that part was either trapped or dead inside him. Yet he had discovered driving, and driving was, he realized, one of his favorite things.

And then he saw her: A blondish girl with a white cotton dress in a green button sweater. He'd never seen her before. And, as it turned out, he would not easily forget her.

She was alone, off and away from the crowd of revelers. Looking at the stars, perhaps counting them, or most probably wondering what she was doing on this planet – like him! Then, she looked into the street and saw him. Perhaps thinking Von Spatzl was someone she knew, the girl in the green sweater walked towards the Cutlass. Von Spatzl watched her as she closed in on him, and then piercing the wide and extensive barrier he'd set up, largely because she didn't know it existed.

"Hi," she said.

"Hello."

"This sucks," she said giggling. "I'd rather be doing geometry."

He could hardly believe she was talking to him. Von Spatzl in the yellow Cutlass. And she likes geometry!

"I like geometry," he answered. Then some girl, the public relations director of the group, called out: "Hey gang, let's blow this pop stand..."

The girl in the green sweater turned towards Von Spatzl. She was leaving him she indicated with her eyes. She pirouetted and waved, and then walked towards the group, then pirouetted again, looked back at Von Spatzl.

"Hey I've got to go..." she said. "See you around."

The girl with the green sweater skipped off to join her friends, and just before she was absorbed by the gaggle of chiffon dresses she looked back once... and then Von Spatzl *acted*.

He waved back at her.

Von Spatzl didn't even know her name.

Driving away from the school Von Spatzl felt an odd mix of exhilaration and dread racing through him. As he approached his neighborhood he accelerated. He hardly knew what he was doing, just that he was going faster and faster. If he went any faster (and he did) he might kill himself. He tore down the boulevard, the windows open, the heater going strong.

"I'm driving, my favorite thing," he yelled to the wind, to the trees, to the houses whizzing past. Yes, he realized quite suddenly, he might very well kill himself. But that was only a fraction of a second before the car went over the curb and snapped off the short stubby torso of a fire hydrant, which launched all the dogs on the street into a group barking fit.

The Cutlass now completely halted, water spraying up at least 30 feet in the air, Von Spatzl wondered, "Am I dead?" He wasn't sure. He touched his face--it was all there. He touched his legs. His legs were fine. He pulled at the door handle. It opened. He got out of the car and under a dense rain from the fountain of hydrant water, he inspected the damage. He couldn't tell if there was any.

The dogs continued barking, but no irate or concerned neighbors came out of their houses. He got back in the Cutlass and started it. The engine turned over. Strange. Putting the car into reverse he pulled out, backed onto the street and flipped on the windshield wipers. The car was fine. He drove home wondering whether anything just happened, and at the same time wondering if he really did want to end his life, and if he really wanted to whether he was able to prevent himself from suicide after all. Was it now inevitable? Something in his DNA?

## Eleven

When Von Spatzl awoke in his room in the Hotel Zug, he thought seriously about killing himself again. Since his return from Paris he attempted to suffocate himself with the hotel pillow (impossible, the life reflex kicks in). He tried to blow out his brains with a pistol (it jammed). He'd already attempted to drink himself to death (he vomited). He was considering a return to Paris to do what he'd failed to do just three days ago there.

It was the worst weather Paris had seen during April in a decade. Cold and wet, black umbrellas were snapped up by the wind, and where Von Spatzl stood on the Pont Marie, a dozen of them sloshed about like broken geese in the fast moving waters of the Seine. He was ostensibly in Paris to compete in a chess tournament at Porte d'Ivry, and give a paper on "The Present Tense in Nietzsche" at Paris VII.

Unable to concentrate, Von Spatzl lost in the semi-finals, giving away pawns like pennies to beggars; he tried in vain to save his Queen. That was the end for him. She was forked in check by Bistрова, the flabby Ukrainian known for his taste in male pornography. That evening, depressed and smoking upwards of three packs of Chesterfields a day, he'd gotten so drunk at the Cloiserie de Lilas, he slept through the day of the conference. (An urgent telegram waited in his hotel mail box at the Esmerelda).

So having lost it all, Von Spatzl stood on the Pont Marie and watched the swirling waters push out to...the sea? Who knew? And who cared anymore? Since his childhood, Von Spatzl had never known such overwhelming pain, it enveloped him, took over every fiber of his being, everything hurt, even the plastic surgery he'd received in Switzerland. What did they do to him? He was afraid to look in a mirror since he removed the bandages.

His legs were worse, aching 25 hours a day in spite of the amphetamines he took. If you saw him, gimping along the quais in the cold rain, he looked more like a homeless clochard than a semifinalist in a European-wide chess tournament, or a leading expert on Nietzsche. Von Spatzl was not the boy wonder the European press wrote about, no. He was as hollow as he always was, and only now he was realizing its full force. How was it that he wasn't already dead? Maybe he was. Dead. That would be funny. But he was pretty sure he wasn't.

What was worse, and what drove him to the Pont Marie, was the persistent dark cloud that emerged upon him and pursued him since the accident. It grew larger and darker in spite of his oddly concocted freedom. Wasn't it easier with Vic and Tim alive? Now, there was no relief; there was no redressing the past – just reliving it behind bishops and knights, castles and pawns.

Von Spatzl's wasn't a melancholy emptiness, it wasn't a bad mood (as his semifinalist opponent, a 65-year old Polish woman from Bialystock suggested), it wasn't grief (as one Jungian in Zug proposed), and it wasn't latent homosexuality repressed (as another analyst in Zurich declared). No, it was an entire hollowing out of his being. He could hear his mother say: "It happens. You'll get over it." Or his father: "He's fine. Leave him alone."

He had believed upon leaving for Europe that perhaps he'd had a breakthrough, particularly when he consciously began seeking out the brokenness of things. Torn papers, discarded pens, stubbed out cigarettes, lights that didn't work in hotel hallways, worn carpets, cracked paint in his hotel rooms, blackened teeth, dirty fingernails. Yes! He seized upon the beauty of broken and rotting things, people places, the entropic reality of all things, the ocean of time pounding down relentlessly on everything, and like Frederick Church's Romantic poet he stood against it all. But when that pleasure had dissipated too, and in its place left a steaming pile of shit which, too, was attacked and removed by flies, Von Spatzl, champion chess player, novelist, philosopher,

mathematician...high-end connoisseur of the lowest common denominator was all alone with his nothingness. It grew worse and festered, because he was unable to fill the emptiness, switch off its power.

The rain lashed at him, and Von Spatzl cried from sheer exhaustion. His hair was wet, his clothes were soaked. He shivered.

"I am a creature of God, after all," he whispered to himself.

Dropping his walking sticks, Von Spatzl with the little strength left in him, hoisted himself up onto the stone wall and with a bit more effort sat, his dead legs dangling above the Seine.

In another life he could possibly have been seen as one of those adventurous American teenage boys spending the Spring semester abroad. Yes! Learning French, eating baguettes and chasing Parisian girls with their low cut jeans, their belly buttons tagged with a pearl ring, announcing to the world a joy in their own flesh. But that was not the boy-man on the bridge. Like thousands of others, Von Spatzl would simply --finally-- get lost through this portal. Slip into the ether, finally.

Hitting the water, the impact would stun him, render him unconscious; he knew his legs would not be able to support him, and his rain heavy coat would weigh him down. The current would take him, and if all that didn't work, the cold certainly would. Hypothermia.

Yes, he confirmed, everything was wrong. This was for Von Spatzl's glimpse at real time. The gap. He would enter into it.

"Hah, bonne nuit cruel monde and all that," Von Spatzl screamed into the wind, and edged off the wall.

In that free fall lasting a mere three seconds before splashdown, Von Spatzl saw, as is well reported by others passing from this life to the next, thousands of images, probably more. Wedged among these flash cards were

memories of his notebooks, the view from his Summer/Winter house, the lifelessness of Sam the Hamster, his self-burial in the back yard, the eternally blank looks on his parents' faces and the hateful ones on Vic's and Tim's (even in their own deaths in the Cutlass). He saw and heard that girl with the green sweater on. "See ya..." The Woman With No Name. The same woman who years later, running while he hobbled drunk and crying, then sitting, crying herself in some old turquoise chair. There was the bar, Horse Feathers.... He counted out quarters (3 of them) on the pool table. She was smiling at him....only three years, five months, six days ago! She never called. "See ya..."

It was a little late to ask, but who was she really? Who was she to Von Spatzl? Von Spatzl who was throwing his life into the Seine? Where and who was she if she was not there to save him now... in *temps réel*?

## Twelve

In the Hotel Zug Von Spatzl hid himself under a thick quilt, smoking up a pack of Chesterfields, and knocking back a bottle of Jack Daniel's. He collected writings of the Indian nationalist leader and statesman, Jawaharlal Nehru his only best friend. He thumbed through the pages anxiously, occasionally tearing them. He wondered if he'd hurt the feelings of the book as he did this, and then turned to the next page.

There was little of interest in the collected writings of Jawaharlal Nehru for Von Spatzl, except for one sentence. Indeed, it made him laugh for the first time in a week--since his life was plucked out of the frigid Seine by a barge man, cruising north with a haul of wheat.

"Most things, except agriculture," wrote Nehru, "can wait."

"Ha yuck," Von Spatzl guffawed to himself, taking long slugs of Jack and igniting yet another Chesterfield. Reading that



sentence again and again, he continued to laugh. He reached for the baby aspirin.

Von Spatzl muttered, swallowing a handful of the pea-sized orange tablets.

"Not bad, really."

The slid down his throat and poured a little sekt to chase them.

"Plan B," he giggled. "Most things, except agriculture can wait."

# Plan B

Von Spatzl's Secret Journals

I have not been sleeping.

And for a good reason. My legs hurt, my teeth hurt, my stomach hurts and my heart is breaking, spilling out black blood across the floor of my waiting room, my little house in Flushtown, America.

"Our hearts have a waiting room all their own," Von Spatzl lamented, wandering around his like a forlorn holy ghost.

"I would leave this planet but for gravity," he announced to the empty room. "But gravity doesn't want me to leave; instead gravity wants to drag me down, molecule by molecule into a mush of rotting flesh and diarrhea-tic memories. And keep me breathing here."

So I make a drawing now at 4 am of a plane, a boat and a car and write: Can't go. Can't go. Can't go. .... in my Night Journal Vol I.

My question: Am I a putrefying banana stuck here in Flushtown, in the middle of America in the middle of the 1990s throwing my guts up, or am I a kite without a string, on a cloudy Saturday afternoon? Where is that blue sky?

To help me think this all through, I open a new bottle of Jack, open a fresh carton of Chesterfields and turn on the television and my life is on Channel 9. This is the Suicide Channel, a

channel devoted to people who MIGHT be considering suicide, hosted alternatively by a Priest (Father Waverly), a Rabbi (Rabbi Katz), a Muslim cleric (Muhammah al-Fahrad), and a parade of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and those unholy "guests" who've come back from the brink to talk about brinkmanship without a paddle.

I am Von Spatzl, still, after all these years, without a paddle, playing tiddly winks.

"Hi," he says. "I am Von Spatzl."

"Nice guy that Von Spatzl... did you catch him on Jenny Jones?"

"Poor shit that Von Spatzl, did you catch him on Jenny Jones?"

"Say did you see Von Spatzl? He once had it all and now he has nothing. Not even a paddle. At least that's what I saw on Jenny Jones..."

"Von who?"

Von Spatzl was found dead today, swinging from the lamppost outside his little three-room Cape in Flushtown, America. Talk about a power nap. He was buried alive in his Rambler... et cetera, et cetera. A lot of fleshy babes turned up for the funeral but none of them had a name. All wore green sweaters. They tossed roses into his hole and whispered tearfully: "See ya Von, we hardly knew ya."

Across the bottom of the Suicide Channel is a line of flashing text silently pulsing out new words: "There is a reported a suicide death every 17 minutes." Sputter, sputter, sputter. The pot calling the kettle black.

It is now 4:16 am. Wonder who the hero was at 3:59 am? If I make it 'til morning people will say: "Von Spatzl's like the rooster taking credit for the sun rising."

Yesterday I called Flushtown Lumber and ordered eight cut pieces of one and a half-inch pine, along with four brass hinges, screws, a hammer, a quart of rabbit glue, a Phillips screwdriver, a stack of sandpaper, a box of 10 p nails, and if they could, would they pick up two quarts of Jack, a carton of Chesterfields and a dozen eggs, if possible thank you very much, goodbye.

The wood and fixin's delivered, I got right to work and built a casket that was a perfect fit for my misfit life. I hammered away putting my home away from home together in about an hour. Any fool with a set of tools could do it. When it was all finished, I spread the rabbit glue on all the joints and sat in my Old Brown Chair watching it dry. (It took two hours). Once set, I pushed the screws in through the holes of the brass hinges and, suddenly, had a very convenient pine wood top. I wrote in black grease pencil on the cover: "Here lies Von Spatzl." And then added: "Please do not disturb." From my hall closet I yanked down my old Cowboys and Indians sleeping bag, a crumpled cotton affair I'd had since I was six and camped outside in the backyard beneath the trees in total harmony with the sparrows, the squirrels, the night stars and the soft rosy fingered dawns. I tossed it in and laid it out. Then I got inside and began to more fully realize what this life was all about. It was 5 am, I took a nap, and fell asleep. Finally.

When I awoke, I wrote in my Day Journal, Vol I the story of my home away from home, and then this profound revelation:

"The world is principally composed of two things: desired effects and undesired effects. Know and understand this and the moon is yours. Ignore or misunderstand this and you'll have good nights and bad nights. This is the conundrum of the 20th Century: Good nights and Bad nights. It's the days that kill us."

I MUST REMEMBER THAT VIC AND TIM DIDN'T KILL ME, they just toasted my face and broke my legs. Did I say they almost killed me?

My problem: How does one treat post-partum depression?  
From the point of view of the child.

"Thanks for the ride," I should have said to my mother. "I think I'll walk with my mood stabilizer. Whoa! Trigger!"

Von Spatzl did a watercolor of the words "20th Century Conundrum" in red, outlining the text in No. 2 pencil. This, like all his other drawings went into one of his 60 journals which he kept lined on a shelf and which he pulled at random to record The Days and Nights of Von Spatzl.

Von Spatzl, our hero, kind editor of the collected secret works of Von Spatzl, stood standing alone in his mildly dusty one big room and snatched a piece of paper from the floor with his grocer's arm and gently glided it into the plastic trash bin.

"Mood stabilizer!"

You see, Von Spatzl, kind lost soul, a hobbling, limping, gimping, slipping, staggering, wobbling boy fell into his late 20s as a self-described orphan and lover-philosopher-chess player-stock trader. He has a bit of trouble walking. Did I say his face was burned as well? Just a touch, on the left side (plastic surgery mended most of it). When he slides his hand across the area just below his left eye down to his jaw as he often does, he thinks of the word leather. Then he wonders if Jenny Jones might have him on a guest on a show entitled "Burn victims and suicide prospects who still fuck great nonetheless and have made incredible fortunes day trading tech stocks."

"Well Jenny, I'm a great fuck, actually, in spite of my concerns about my health....Did I tell you I once tried to kill myself?"

My health is a growing concern so I obtained via mail order a grocer's arm paper picker to greatly extend my philosophical reach. I can now reach a good five feet across the room for a Kleenex or a cigarette, then spike it if it falls to the ground. (I can also pull down my philosophy journals and my Jeremy Bentham).

"I call this unit Bruno," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal, Vol I, adding a page later that reported on his most recent phone call with his Mother:

"Disguised my voice as an old Austrian librarian, then called my mother, asked her if she had Prince Albert in a Can."

On another page, in the same Night Journal, Vol I, Von Spatzl wrote "Forgive her," 1000 times for a total of 2000 words, cramping his hand and burning through a pencil and a half.

He followed this up by writing the words "I do" twice. Once in black and once in red, for a total of four words. He considered the unimportance of the verbal pun "I do two." Below this, Von Spatzl taped a scrap of paper where he'd typed two years earlier in a public library: "I hate the 20th Century." He was happy he'd finally found a use for this particular piece of paper. He fondly remembered the library and a drink of water he'd had at the fountain there. It was fresh, he recalled.

In patriarchal culture, we are not worth enough. How many experimental mice am I worth? Never enough. Never. We're never the right shape, never the right sound, never the right size, color, taste. We don't look right. We limp into our heroic journey, genetic sequences guiding us to war, to business, to mechanical reproduction, to church, to temple, to play, to eat, to sleep, to death. The desperate search for love, which we mistake for Rice Krispies, is denied to us... the work at home, never done. Peace is an illusion. A necessary one, and so therefore:

I am a Keepitalist, nothing more.

Cutting to the chase: On one of the last few blank pages in his Night Journal Vol XXX, Von Spatzl reported these facts:

"Today: Closed all my brokerage accounts, one after the other. E-trade, Datek, then Schwab. Transferred it all: Everything out, into cash.

Five o'clock today I held it all in a dull brown briefcase-- \$2,375,125. I slipped it underneath my bed. Went to Ace Liquors. Bought a bottle of Jack and a carton of Chesterfields from the corner grocery store, the Fat lady there singing. Everything looked different, like the lights were turned on. A day at the Opera.

Back home, I sat in my Old Brown Chair, cracked the Jack and poured out three inches of the stuff, smoked two feet of tobacco and stared deeply into the future, my feet upon the cache of cash: inhaling, exhaling, thinking, exhaling again and thinking again, planning my next big move.

(My next move was to sit in the old turquoise chair, that I reserve only for guests.)

Five years ago, Von Spatzl rose out of his comic book conscience as a costumed superhero with a cane and a face baptized by fire. In rising (from his Old Brown Chair), his superhero being-- the one with the babes that shrieked: "Oh Brad!" and dissolved into the murky chalky abstractions of out-of-focus Polaroids -- Von Spatzl announced (as recorded in his Day Journal, Vol XXX): "Today I discovered that an aglet is the plain or ornamental covering on the end of a shoelace. Considered hanging myself with a shoelace. Did not. Maybe should have. Maybe still will."

Von Spatzl flipped through the then-mostly empty books and settled on one -- one that was no different than the others except that it was designated "Night Journal Vol XXX," and sat to the far right on the higher shelf of two that held these tomes. In this Journal, he wrote the word "Pathetic," 5,000 times for a total of 5,000 words. It took Von Spatzl a solid 60 minutes to scribble this incantation (using two red ball point pens), after which, he twisted open a fresh bottle of Jack, poured out three inches and sat back down in his Old Brown Chair feeling exhausted and smoked two feet of tobacco.

When *this* all started, Von Spatzl did indeed love the smell that rose up in him in the morning. And the name of the smell was the NASDAQ, which he lit up like his Chesterfields, one after

another. It stunk to high hell of money. The IPOs mushroomed into spondolas, tech was on fire, and so was Von Spatzl, again. But just barely: The only flame flickering in his freckled and scared skull came from his Chesterfields and his Jack. Light up. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. Trade! In fact, because he was like one of those abandoned Lighthouses, the keeper waiting for someone to come and fetch him long after his ward (the bay) had grown up and moved away, or died in a drowning, the light burning in Von Spatzl was the reflecting light reflecting in his bloodshot eyes from his NASDAQ monitors. The money accumulated as he dissipated.

"The smell of tobacco oozing out of me," he wrote in his Day Journal Vol I. "If they cooked and ate me, they'd all get cancer and choke on my mood stabilizers running through my veins... and pick their teeth with my Bruno Unit."

Interestingly enough, Von Spatzl, in his haphazard reading, came across this pertinent quote from *A Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan the 17th century preacher: "A man there was, tho' some did count him mad / The more he cast away, the more he had." Von Spatzl thus treated his post-partum depression with hundreds of attempts to throw himself away. And yet, like a boom-o-rang, life threw things, people and money back at him.

One such example was The Austrian Girl. The Austrian Girl, violin and accordion playing siren in hot pink lingerie, a dripping caramelized love nugget with golden hair, a Rapunzel with an Eastern accent and a taste for honey-flavored Weiss Bier, but who would drink a Bud if she had to. He admitted, however that "the Austrian Girl was/is just a pretty substitute with crooked teeth," -- writing in his Day Journal, Vol XXX. "She understands me, but fails to understand herself, like a dream trying to unknot and analyze itself *en plein vol.*"

By "substitute," Von Spatzl had something specific in mind. He constructed -- after many years of turning yards of cigarettes and inches of bourbon into protein and carbohydrates -- this pretty little equation: "Three minus two equals one plus zero," which he wrote in his Night Journal Vol



XX. It (at the time) synthesized his relationship with his world to date. One can, and in fact, one does substitute anything for ZERO. Fill the void with something. Abhor Hoovers, etc. All the time. Every day. Every minute of every day. What Von Spatzl hadn't quite figured out, but certainly drew circles around, was whether he was the ZERO or the one. He consistently felt his being disintegrate, like handwritten notes, washed out inadvertently when slipped into a pocket and marched into the sea for fun and pleasure...but that might have been the result of his diet of amphetamines.

He realized though, that there was the pee hole, the fuck hole and the asshole and his role was to not just to metamorph from a square peg... but to...How to get out of Flatland?

But we're skipping ahead. "Who is Von Spatzl?" you ask.

He gives us 101 clues:

1. My real name is Von Baker, but Von Spatzl suited me better.
2. I am not sure if I am impotent.
3. Most of my days are spent writing and drinking and smoking Chesterfields as I amble beyond the ROO-bi-kon.
4. My telephone is an old black rotary. Most of the calls I receive are from telemarketers.
5. My parents have no idea who (or where) I really am.
6. My brothers, Vic and Tim are dead as doorknobs; I am an open door to the breathlessness of the universe.
7. When I can, I sometimes sleep in my home-built coffin.
8. My favorite book used to be *To Kill A Mockingbird*, now my favorite book is a virginal blank journal.
9. I refused the Nobel Prize, twice. (I'm scared of heights).
10. When I walk, people stare.
11. My face hurts from time to time.
12. I worry about people feeling sorry for me.
13. One day something really important will happen to me.
14. I grew up largely ignored, but was good in math.
15. My shrink thinks I should stop all the amphetamines.
16. I picked Flushtown for its panoramic view of the industrial waste complex, the proximity of ACE Liquors, and the wildlife.

17. Most of my time is spent silently considering silence: Eternal silence.
18. The most tragic chess game I played was in Brattislava where the Bulgarian Sabatchka, in double check from my Queen on H4 and my bishop on G5, had only one move: To insert his Queen as a block. He refused to resign and refused to engage in this tragedy. Sabatchka, elbows on the table cried into his fists, and yet I learned he was happily married with twins.
19. My lifetime winnings from Chess: \$137,987.53. Most grandmasters earn the equivalent of about \$5/hour for their labor. The bulk of my winnings came from midnight games in bars in Zurich.
20. Vic & Tim's was the perfect crime.
21. I find myself intrigued by the drunks, the whores and the burn victims that wander through Flushtown, wishing I could talk with them, but never do.
22. My sense of touch is nearly shot.
23. I am often killed.
24. Nobody loves me.
25. I never killed anyone.
26. Sex interests me as a word. (I put the "ex" in Sex.)
27. One of my legs is shorter than t'other.
28. For some reason I can't sleep for more than 59 minutes at a time.
29. I remember enjoying chocolate as a child.
30. Color is important to me, though I'm not sure exactly why.
31. The town of Zug, Switzerland gave me the key to their city.
32. In Finland, I read that ice and snow evaporate directly into the air; one never finds pools of snowmelt. I am like that.
33. I am fascinated with the authors of the Bible: What were they really thinking?
34. God once talked to me personally. God said: "I've got you, Von Spatzl. He he he he he."
35. My mother doesn't recognize my voice on the phone.
36. My dog died of arthritis, unable to move, not even his tail.
37. I live in Flatland. Today I met a sphere: Nothing, point, line(s), point, nothing.
38. I've tried unsuccessfully to learn the game of golf and broke several windows in my Flushtown home.

39. My only ambition has been to recover from all this and get myself a car like most Americans and go driving on the weekends with my date.
40. Unlike most Americans, Bowling is a sport I've never quite understood.
41. Most of the letters I receive I've written myself.
42. Pi.
43. The Jews were right all along.
44. I learned German from a chamber maid in Zug, which is why my pronunciation is often sing-song.
45. When confronted with a naked girl I am torn between desire and shame.
46. When confronted with my naked body I see I am just torn.
47. After White castles, my knight captures the pawn at H2; and because White didn't lift its own knight to put me in check, my Queen sends White into exasperation and mate. My only mate is check mate.
48. Mothers are the only goddesses in whom the whole world believes. Clytemnestra is one of the exceptions.
49. A lot of people want to know what I do for a living.
50. I've taken a financial interest in ACE Liquors.
51. Yes, I do my own shopping.
52. I bought this house for \$22,500. Paid in cash.
53. I hemorrhage. You hemorrhage. They hemorrhage. We hemorrhage.
54. I bought a car, an old Rambler, and never drove it. Not even an inch.
55. I gave \$100 to a squirrel when all he wanted was a peanut.
56. Sometimes I wake up and find myself on the floor in my kitchen clutching a pair of hardboiled eggs.
57. Sometimes when I think of Vic and Tim my phone suddenly rings.
58. The Woman With No Name understood me, I believe, which is why we spent that evening in the schoolyard where she said she wasn't turned off by my scars. I said I didn't have a car.
59. Is it a miracle or a tragedy that I survived?
60. I can feel my father's form inside me; I have my mother's skin.
61. I haven't forgotten anything, ever.

62. In seven billion years there won't be a molecule left. But there will be the last bird, the last squirrel, the last dime...then my story will finally be told.
63. Part of the problem is that I think God picked me for something and I still don't know what.
64. I've never had a birthday cake in my life.
65. I looked up Ana Gram in the phone book and, finding her address, wrote her out a list of palindromes. That's the kind of guy I am.
66. The Smothered Mate traps the king in the corner with the Knight; the King hides behind his Queen. What's beautiful about it is the sacrifice of the Queen. Of course, chess is all Oedipal.
67. Morphy's Mate, which I used against Orlov in Karlsruhe was too much for the Estonian who gleefully took my Queen with his pawn and then stood up, quite offended when I severed him from his King with my Bishop and dark Knight. I never saw Orlov again, but read he accidentally shot himself in his Achilles heel with a bow and arrow.
68. I realize that very few people will give a damn about my injuries--unless I pay them.
69. When she touched my leg she said it felt like melted plastic. I said I couldn't feel a thing.
70. I was a virgin, wasn't I?
71. That game in Rome, which I lost by a pawn, effectively ended my career, didn't it? In spite of the fact that I continued to play for a year or more. I was consumed by Nietzsche, but ultimately got him all wrong, too, didn't I?
72. The Confessions: Get out your Kleenex.
73. I let Vic and Tim beat me once in chess because I thought they would like me better. It was hard to lose to them, they were the worst players. I even let them move their Bishops horizontally.
74. Cars should not move vertically.
75. I slept most peacefully on the train from Zug to Paris that time. I dreamed I'd died and gone to Heaven and God was there and he said "Hello," with a big smile and He hugged me and we cried in each other's arms.
76. I moved to Flushtown because I'd run out of places to go.
77. I haven't played a game of chess in years.
78. I find it strange to be here, all alone, shivering.

79. Vic & Tim once drew a Swastika on my stomach with a black marker.
80. Are geniuses happier than idiots?
81. Oddly enough I think my father holds the key to my problem.
82. I'm sure that in the end, none of this will matter.
83. You are bored by my boredom; so am I.
84. I often wonder who I should thank for all I have?
85. When I moved into my house in Flushtown I found a nest of dead squirrels in the attic. I buried them in the yard and covered their bodies with dollar bills and dirt.
86. I admire chess players who offer their Queen with a plan in mind to get another one by advancing a pawn.
87. I have always paid in cash.
88. With each suicide, I've tried to change, become a better person.
89. My doctors in Switzerland asked me why I didn't talk very much; they suggested I visit the Jung institute and I wrote on a piece of paper: "Nein."
90. I remember when I started drinking Jack Daniel's: It was a Tuesday.
91. My parents live in a retirement community in Florida. Every day, I imagine, one of their neighbors dies.
92. What I liked best about Rome was the ochre and yellow, plastered on buildings and baked by hundreds of years of sunlight.
93. I think most people would find me invisible.
94. I was astonished The Austrian Girl wanted me.
95. I'm the sort of person who believes in magic.
96. Today is my lucky day.
97. I have never fired a gun.
98. I tried to kill myself 12 times, and failed. Success is overrated.
99. I'd like to think my selfishness is a search for Truth and Love.
100. I don't want to live this way: "If only...."
101. I find myself sometimes waiting by the phone.

Back to our story:

When the markets opened at 9:30 am on 2 January 1996, Von Spatzl felt a long dull pain; it throbbed in his mangled limbs.

"Come kill me," he dared. When nothing happened, he said: "Oh for Christ's sake, just take me. Stop fooling around."

He wrote the words "God. Kill me. Take me," three times in dark black crayon, pressing hard and writing in script, for a total of 15 words in his Night Journal, Vol II.

But Von Spatzl wasn't taken, or even abducted, as he might have wished. He wasn't magically murdered and released, a crow set free from the teeth of a tiger. He barely moved from his seat, only shifted his weight to relieve the pressure. Von Spatzl was a pilot stuck on autopilot, plugged into the power grid of Flushtown. He electrocuted himself daily with stock charts, lit up in greens and reds, fractions littering the screens, kindling the desperate fire in the core of his being, something he was unable to put it out.

Von Spatzl traded a basket of tech stocks that morning and the mornings of the next five years with a rage that pulsed through his guts; he could taste its metallic zing pumping in the back of his throat. Swallowing back the rising bile, Von Spatzl watched his Level II for the one-, two- and five-minute charts on his Dell, hooked first into a 28.8 K modem dial-up, then, a week later into a mail order 56.6 K dial-up, then he'd plugged his entire digital world into a DSL line. On an old IBM he pulled up monthly and weekly charts on 100 different stocks. Most of these high fliers were the newly-minted frothy e-commerce ventures or their cousins whose ideas were worrisome. Untethered to real world business plans, these companies with their cosmic and enormous valuations were run by teenage visionaries with fantasies of covering the world in fiber optic cable or specialty boxes that, once implanted into the plastic arteries of civilization would make life that much more of what it was already. Jenny Jones is every room of every home.

Von Spatzl looked for – and found – “momentum,” as most Americans do. Inertia, really. He looked to go long for a swing trade, sell off, and buy back more for the longer push upward into Fantasyland. And, I might add, he was nimble as all fuck. Our hero would catch an upward wave of frenetic buying like a trampoline artist reaching for a cloud; he’d grab a handful of points, then sell them back to the earthlings like cattle feed. Then, and because this was the point, Von Spatzl would bounce back again to the clouds, buy back the shares with two hands, accumulating increased ownership in this vapor all on the rough and tumble of the fear and greed that shook and rattled and rolled America. Talk about a dead cat bounce! He understood the inherent poetry of pure play and poverty mentality, and created in the process of fattening his portfolio, a potent self-portrait of Von Spatzl: Von Spatzl constructing a war chest in the battle against himself. No, he was not smiling in this picture. There was no one to smile for...

So far so good. Because Wall Street, Silicon Valley, The puffy English at the FTSE, the stuffy Germans at the DAX and even the 2-hour lunch French at the CAC40 were singing the New World Order hit song of zillions --real or imagined-- which suited Von Spatzl quite well. Yes yes yes, he pounced on all them in pre-market, snagging their lunches while he ate a hard boiled egg for breakfast. Here! Have some naked calls, or maybe you’d like to put up with some puts! He shot the gap ups and the gap downs as only someone whose legs were still broken could.

He hand-picked the networking and software techs just as they ripened on the vine, and he knew (he knew, he knew!) he was at the right time and the right place (Cisco at \$5, Dell at \$3, MSFT at \$12, et cetera, etc.),. By massaging these fruity berries, his orgasm would explode in streams of cash across his shabby little American shack. Welcome to Flushtown! Home of Von Spatzl, Population One.

But what Von Spatzl dreamed of was Real Time in both the markets and his life --what was left of it. He made, as best he could, the stock tickers stand up and talk. “I’m lonely, connect me.” “I’m fat, put me on a diet.” “I’m wonderful,

worship me." But most of all: "I'm afraid of losing." And most most of all: "I'm afraid of winning." That was the American nightmare and Von Spatzl's fiction, extrapolated into real time across the global markets; he gave them the roundness to come to life. That 1/8th of a point was some hopeless romantic in Geneva; the 1/16th of a bid, a cretin in Los Angeles. In real *real* time, they could even be... well, real, regardless of their mental state. Oh sure, he had a Datek Real Time streamer (and another one from Schwab), and soon enough Level II screens where he'd pick off INCA and GSCO and the other market makers like a SWAT shooter. You become real when you bleed money. He was the silent Knight of the OTC. But Von Spatzl wanted Real Time to not only possess the magic of connectedness, but to enter into it, to see history and his life unfold in real time instead of couched in psychobabble and aborted dreams. If he could have everything in Real Time then finally he could lay down and die in his homemade coffin. Because of course, money, wasn't/isn't everything.

Von Spatzl had gone from mayonnaise to mustard, and before that - in his other life - he'd used ketchup for his fake wounds. Or were they? How quickly we forget. And this is the point.

He wrote the word "Mustard" 777 times in yellow on top of a drawing of a large pretzel, for a total of 777 words, in his Night Journal Vol III.

Von Spatzl did indeed think about pretzels. Particularly, their lovely, twisty shape, dappled with large grains of salt, melting warmly in his mouth. But that was well before his eggs, hard boiled and "secure." Pretzels, the big ones, obtained from short stocky smelly men on street corners with little glass warmhouses to show them off, reminded him of Melanie, the twisty salty girl he'd met...when? Certainly sometime ago...certainly before the money, before his hero status, when he was just Joe fucking-regular cripple- don't-have-a-job citizen-standing-in-his-dusty-house-and-colliding-with-the-furniture. When?

It was when he was considering getting a goldfish for 25 cents and naming him Goldie but instead bought 1000 shares of



MSFT at \$15 1/8 that Melanie came rushing into the house. Melanie blasting right through the old screen door, unsettling the flies gathered there, plotting to eat up (and spoil) Von Spatzl's food supply --his eggs, his jelly, his butter. But mostly his eggs. Melanie was her name. And in she charged.

"Where's the phone?" she shouted. "Where's the phone, Where's the phone? Where's the phone ? There's been an accident. An accident! People are dying! People are dying!"

Melanie had short yellow hair and a red bandana that tied it up -- Melanie, the one with the sweaty smell and the twisty body. And the bloody hands: Bursting in, bloody hands. Melanie.

"Can I use your P-H-O-N-E?" she shouted, spelling out the word, as if I were S-T-U-P-I-D. She carried a bloody bicycle seat and had a pocket full of bloody change. Von Spatzl snatched the shares of MSFT, then savagely went after 1000 shares of DELL at \$12 and 1/4 (the bid was still \$12 5/8), when she seized the old rotary phone on his Old Brown Desk and rapidly dialed a number and even more rapidly, spit out a river of words in Spanish. She dropped three bloody quarters, two bloody dimes and a clean nickel on the Old Brown Desk as Von Spatzl in his Old Brown chair reached in to take the Dell shares from a panicked trader who was reading a news report about "oversupply." ("Gimme those!" he shouted silently). Von Spatzl who hadn't uttered a real syllable to anyone face-to-face in months, (more likely years), just had time to look up.

Melanie rushed out and I never saw her again. She left a trail of blood on the floor. The salty taste of blood, bodies in the shape of pretzels, unrecognized by their parents, and never loved to begin with; their options (their puts and calls) expired because no one wanted them. This was, as it turned out, Triple Witching Friday.

Melanie --still twisty and leggy and wearing a yellow-mustard colored bandana--came back the next day, Saturday, as Von Spatzl was surveying the production output news from Japan and the prospects of a rate hike coming from the Germans and the French (in bed together again). The British were on the

sidelines. Then she burst in through the door, scattering the flies and waving helloooo? But without blood on her hands. Melanie.

"¡Hola!" she said finally, although, Melanie wasn't Spanish, it was obvious to anyone who'd traveled the world, like Von Spatzl.

"I was in the hospital," she said. "They are D-E-A-D... dead." Melanie began to cry and her 150-watt smile went dark. Von Spatzl, silent as a Carmelite nun on a hunger strike, gave her a roll of toilet paper to dry up her tears. She said she didn't even know them, there was blood everywhere. Melanie began to hyperventilate, which made Von Spatzl dizzy listening and counting her breaths. Quite suddenly he thought he himself was bleeding.

"K-E-T-C-H-U-P ?" thought our hero.

I never asked "Who?" and finally, she asked me, Von Spatzl, if I "had anything to D-R-I-N-K ?" spelling it out, again, and I said: "I like that very much, that you spell out your W-O-R-D-S."

This was the first thing I'd said in Y-E-A-R-S.

It was as if I were a child and I shouldn't understand the words she spelled out...or as if I were a child and this were a spelling bee and she was showing off. Or maybe she was just mad, as in "folle," or "farucked," because Melanie laughed and her laughter squeezed the last drops of river from her eyes.

So I'd spoken? I tried to say something else: I asked her if she ever used the word, "A-K-I-M-B-O ?" And she laughed and she said, "Let me love you like a baby from G-U-A-T-A-M-A-L-A."

I thought maybe we'd move into a tent one day on the muddy banks of the Rio Grande and count the birds we saw -- red cardinals, brown sparrows, blue jays.

But people I didn't know were really dead. D-E-A-D. They were as dead as people I did know.

I drew a picture of a tent on the muddy banks of the Rio where we could count the B-I-R-D-S.

"But now that I've put myself in the tent, and now that I am sleeping in the tent --something I am afraid to do-- and now that I hear the B-I-R-D-S as well, I know I am definitely at risk. Particularly because the F-L-I-E-S are after me, as well. What was next? S-Q-U-I-R-R-E-L-S ?" Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal, Vol I.

"What are you doing?" Melanie finally asked.

And then, like all day every day, Von Spatzl's deadening pain that began in his toes and worked its way up his knees covering his lower body as if he were a paralyzed victim, a victim of some unforeseen horse-related accident, rose up and he fell silent.

"Whoa! Trigger!" he scribbled on Stock Statement. He remembered a dream where he hit the branch from the Tree of Life, and fell off. Caught right under the chin. Now paralyzed for life. Like a tree, a fallen tree, dead wood. The birds come and sit on my branches, make fun of me while they snack on the termites in my ears.

"Oh, I can get around in this wheelchair, but this pain...yada yada yada..." he might have said, but said nothing.

He would have wanted to tell Melanie: "It wasn't just rolling downhill from here. There was the brutal work of enduring the sun rising... and the pain." The pain scaled his back in a Johnny Appleseed routine, but instead of seeds he was implanted with bees, a swarm of electric bees, a top soil of them, like a blanket, like the one his mother almost cooked him in one night when he was cold cold cold.

"Mommy, I'm cold," he whispered.

"We'll take care of that baby Von Spatzl. Now, buzz buzz..."

Emotional notation: Salty, twisty Melanie.

But now, some years after, the pain didn't bother him in the least. In fact it anchored him. Spoke to him. Reassured him. Of what? That it was his. It was his beeper: "I am your DULL pain." It stood up and gave him a sign: Buy another 1000 DELL @ \$13 3/8, breakout to the upside. Sell at \$15 and a nickel, buy back when it hits the 67% retracement. Solid support there, what with 6 million shares now slapping wildly against the tank. The float has to increase, sure, but until it does, we are talking flapping fish. Shoot 'em, round 'em up. The wild western civilization. And if it wasn't fish, then accumulating shares, to Von Spatzl was like buying and selling a dog paddling puppy. "C'mere puppy dog!" The daily gyrations was more like playing cat and mouse, playing support against resistance, selling just below the ask and buying just above the bid, only to dump them 5 minutes later when the hoards and the herds thought we'd broken through resistance! Break on through to the other side. That's what the market was for Von Spatzl, a way to impress his ghostly figure in relief. Sure, sure he would step out of the way when some fat dog splashed into the pond or wanted to unload in his pants or eat all the food in the refrigerator.... No need to engrave his face on Mount Rushmore. Who would want that scarred thing on a post card to send home anyway?

It wasn't always like this, as I've said, it was oftentimes worse. Much worse.

Long ago there were little Von Spatzl visits to the petting zoo with Vic and Tim. "Let's feed Von to the tigers!" Or the restless afternoons in the park with Vic and Tim. "Let's rocket Von off the swings!" Nights with the windows open and Vic and Tim plotting to throw him out onto the pavement, his mashed potatoes with peas and butter for dinner oozing out of him. "Yay!" When Vic and Tim had finally gone to sleep, Von Spatzl lay away, his head out of the window staring at the stars, the night, the trees and whispering to the breeze: "Get me the hell out of here."

Those torturous early days also included an occasional creamy blue sky and a velety night (when he did sleep), fashioned with sweet dark and delicious dreamy custard dreams. Long ago there was in a word: Possibility. Yes, even with the daily panic sessions from Vic and Tim – the time they said to Von Spatzl: “Hear the ocean, Von!” And put the nozzle of the Hoover right into his ear, nearly sucking his brains out. Von Spatzl found solace in the world, the world of pain. There was the prospect of hope.

“I hear you now, boys,” he said softly.

These days in Flushtown, of course, Von Spatzl was a terribly different creature. His initial recovery a failure, he receded into the dark crevices of Europe, then America and remained cloistered, like a smelly sock balled up in a shoe, the one he’d lost under his bed years ago...

“My dulling pain,” he wrote, “is eased by Dell.” He wrote this sentence 100 times for a total of 600 words. Von Spatzl decorated the page with the DELL logo, traced on Chinese writing paper and cut out to look like a child’s game. “There!” He wondered briefly if he should send the page to Michael Dell in exchange for a jazzy new model.

These days in Flushtown, Von Spatzl would just simply self-medicate with blues, reds and yellows and his Night and Day Journals.

“Judy was another one,” Von Spatzl scribbled in his Day Journal Vol I, in a vague attempt to recapitulate his past.

She came knocking on the door the days I used to open the door and said “Hello! Hello! I love America! I want to be a supermodel, do you want to buy a subscription to my magazine?”

“What’s it called?”

“It’s called, “I love America!”

"How many pages?"

"24."

"How much?"

"\$5."

"I'll take all of them," Von Spatzl said, paying her with three \$100 bills.

Judy America stepped into my house in Flushtown wrapped in an American Flag and flashing her American teeth saying, "I have no money! America is money, and I need money to be a super model."

"What's your name?" I asked taking the magazines and tossing them into his home-made coffin, closing the lid.

"My real name is Judy America," she said.

"Your *real* name?"

"Yes, I am really Judy America!"

She told me she could make really good lemonade.

"Do you have any lemons?"

"Yes," I said I did have lemons. "How many lemons would you need to make really good lemonade?"

She said five would be MAXIMUM. Then she asked me if I had any sugar, and I said, "Yes I have sugar, but only in cubes," and she said that would be "just fine." Then she wanted to know if I had ice.

"Yes, I have ice," I said.

Judy America took the lemons and the sugar and the ice all together in my kitchen while I watched and smoked from the

doorway as she made really good lemonade. Then we sat in my parlor -- me in my Old Brown Chair, and Judy America alternately on my guest turquoise chair and on the floor in her American flag, like a kid at a campfire, and drank the really good lemonade, and she boasted, "Only in America!"

Judy America came back one more time, I think. She wanted to smoke pot with me. She said we would "also" make love with me, because, she suspected I was a foreigner and she felt like she could be a good ambassador to foreign nations this way. I said, "I don't smoke pot," but she did and she smoked quite a bit of it. Then we made love on her American flag, and after 30 minutes her coccyx bone was red and she was perhaps even bleeding, so we stopped.

"Flag burns," she laughed as I applied mercurochrome to her wound and neglected to tell her about mine. "You don't talk much," she said. I liked her and I liked America, but I didn't love her, and I didn't love America, so she never came back and sometimes I say to my lemons, "What ever happened to Judy America?"

Dying in America is something I will accomplish without much effort. Which is why I no longer drive, of course.

Von Spatzl wrote the word "accident" 20 times and drew a Firestone tire through the agglomeration of accidents in his Night Journal, Vol I. On the following page, he produced the following list:

Being Born List

The Prison Song.  
Each Octave.  
Permission.  
Family.  
Rituals.  
Shoe laces.  
The Attorney.  
Each stripped away.  
The warden.

The chaplain. God.  
No one can share your uterine milk.  
Peel your peelings.  
Know them, kneel them,  
Unwritten rule: kill them.  
The Walk.  
Adhere to the rules.  
Daily assignment: Drink your milk.  
It's a process: the end.  
The cells that were once you.  
Tradition.  
Public statement?  
Utter the words.  
My present tense.  
Let's do it.  
It's being done.  
It's done.  
Career move.  
Anna: Did Otto peep?  
Otto: Did Anna?

Von Spatzl's thoughts drifted back to Zug, as they often did in his hours of need. Once back in his room in the Hotel Zug, his thoughts caught like a hangnail on the bad upholstery, a sign of the odd pleasure of his exile. He listened for the sounds of the hotel (the clattering cage elevator, the bellhop bells rung by guests, the sick siren on the street, some emergency he'd never know about, or an accordion playing beneath him, sometimes a solo violin!), the smells (melting snow, fried winer schnitzel, the carpet soaked with Gewurztheimer). Yes, the crisp sensations of those years, and for a long moment he could nuzzle the rich musky scent of The Austrian Girl and her s violin in its velvet case, her wheaty shampoo wafting off her curly head, and the taste of her crooked teeth in her luscious pink mouth. And just as quickly as his needs were proffered (in the wet shape of a probing tongue), they were slapped down against a dusty computer screen, the electromagnetic pulse zapping him. Sure, sure he knew --even then-- that she, The Austrian Girl, was just a substitute, a substitute who gave him his own body back. But boy oh boy Zug. The pain and the



pleasure married forever there, an empty bottle of baby aspirin on his night table.

“How does this feel, Von? Or this?”

That was before his health began deteriorating (not including the accident), and his heart began fibrillating, and the squirrels began stealing his essence in acorn-sized bits as they scrambled above his head in the attic. Yes, before.

It was a question of timing, wasn't it? Turning left on Maple instead of right on Mulberry. Leaving the house at 5:02 instead of 5:12. Getting a carton of something (Chesterfields) now instead of later. Possibility edged, rounded, downsized into probability. Was there always an inevitability? That's why they were dead and he was alive. Yada yada. Von Spatzl lay down in his coffin on a bed of I Love America Magazines and imagined himself driving: Von Spatzl driving! Imagine that! The possibilities exploding into a blaze of fire.

His mother called and said she saw a rainbow today, Von Spatzl noted in his Day Journal Vol X. It was a sign she was recovering, she argued: The ability to see color again. And Von Spatzl thought (and wrote): “Brine.” Although he couldn't imagine why.

Von Spatzl wrote the words “Event Horizon” 1000 times for a total of 2000 words in his Night Journal Vol I. Then he copied, in minute handwriting, the following definition:

“The event horizon is the gravity field of a black hole where space-time is bent such that light cannot escape. The event horizon creates a region in space where nothing can escape. Not even light. Thus when something enters the event horizon, it vanishes without a trace. Should the object emit something after being swallowed by the event horizon, not even the emissions that traced its existence will escape the black hole.” All wrong, of course.

And he footnoted the entry with this comment: “So, not even the memory.” All wrong, of course.

"Listen to me, Schmuck," Von Spatzl went on and on one day. He was yelling at a guest on the Jenny Jones Show who claimed he was having problem with his confidence--but who "just yesterday" wrote a letter to his ex-wife, explaining how he'd recently come to the conclusion that she was a real snit, the audience exploding in applause.

"Listen to me, schmuck, I have killed better men than you by accident," ranted Von Spatzl, unexpectedly finding his voice. "You probably never protected anything bigger than your one-room apartment against junk mail and your 10-year old Volkswagen against a bad paint job. I am Von Spatzl! Hear me roar!"

Moments later Von Spatzl acknowledged the general truth of his life and noted it in his Night Journal Vol XXX: "I am sick and dying." He then wrote: "Now that I am dying, what now?" 1000 times for a total of 7000 words.

Von Spatzl often wrote of himself in the third person. And often in the first person. Sometimes in the second person. Covering the bases. They were, after all, his journals, and this is, after all, his story. It is, after all, my story. It is after all your story. Just to clarify: Von Spatzl created several versions of the same story and, forced to use several narrative devices to pull it all together, he calculated that he had accurately reconstructed what might have happened.

"This *really* happened," he wrote 100 times for a total of 300 words in his Night Journal Vol I. He captioned this block of text with the line: "This never really happened, did it?"

Von Spatzl's journals -- his great project, the work that would launch him in Stockholm, and perhaps even inspire the sculptors at Mount Rushmore or the little Square near the Fritzenhoffer Strasse in Zug -- were after all "private" and "true." But also utter fiction, blatant lies and hysterical imaginings that cemented his fantasy with the assuredness that typewritten texts can. That a book can. And that volumes of books most absolutely can and will. The machine as truth;

mechanical reproduction as truth. The word "truth" as truth. Typewritten or carved in stone: More true. More real. But Von Spatzl's fabrications were handwritten, or collaged-- pictures or lists of words or phrases. Von Spatzl thought these items important and, with a bourbon in one hand, he scotch-taped, scotch-taped his madness to its pages. He fancied himself a bit of an artist as well (Oui, bien sûr!) and rendered colorful drawings of hearts, trees, houses, rats, hats, abstract shapes, and other obscure road signs all mapping out the savage territory of his mind, fairly trampling the pages like an unwieldy bunch of adolescent alpinists with muddy snow-clogged boots. It all amounted to a heap of Schlag, rising and thickening with repeated whippings: Most of these 60 journals were indicative of Von Spatzl's general tendency towards grumblings and ramblings of increasing decibels in his writings, while in person, he was mostly silent as say, a doorknob in a morgue.

Some (neighbors, family, postman, the fat lady at Ace Liquors, for example) thought (or believed) that Von Spatzl was indeed very ill. Perhaps unstable. A disease, like the first time they fell in love. Although they couldn't say what the fucker had for sure. And in any case they only thought about him for a moment, if that. Most hardly noticed him at all, couldn't say if they'd ever seen him. No one remembered him from Zug, for example. "No one remembers me from Zug," wrote Von Spatzl in his Night Journal Vol XXX.

And why not?

Von Spatzl reminds us with his repetitive phrases, his endless mind-numbing lists, his incoherent "collages" and his indulgent fantasies that he --as "artist" and "stock day trader" -- is "master" of his small and shrinking universe. They can't see or remember me because they can't see or remember what they ate for breakfast. And all this... to what effect? The Von Spatzl Effect. He existed in order to prove that he existed. And suffering is, even in its dilapidated entropic state, is more proof than the butterfly effect: Like the vapor of e-commerce stocks. Money is proof. That his enclave of despair that he clutched and held onto against all reason was pathological?

So what of it? That deep in his little house in Flushtown light and shadow play and don't so much ascribe to beauty as they do to terror? In this, his small proud and privileged state of suffering, it's all there plain as the face on your nose.

"Get real Von Spatzl!" I scream at Von Spatzl. "Go and do your dying quietly! Who gives a fuck about your mine their our his her story? Get it over with, please, Jenny Jones is about to come on and I can't be bothered."

"I've already died, so there's little need to kill myself anymore," he argued with himself one night in pencil in his Night Journal Vol XV. He erased the phrase, leaving trail of spent rubber.

"Yes, yes, yes," he confirmed, sitting in the comfort of his Old Brown Chair. He sat half in the dark, half in the light, smoking a Chesterfield and pouring out a healthy VBJD (Very Big Jack Daniel's): "I am/was a fraud, and moreover, there never was anyone in my life who stole my heart-- no Woman with No Name. Nope. And I can get around just fine with my Bruno Unit and these krutches...So, World--leave me alone."

Von Spatzl, insisted against the pounding surf of reason that he did have a "great love," and thus, necessitated (Necessity!) not only required the conflict of the private-public, but also the divine madness that kept him waiting by the phone where no one would call. (Except for Prince Albert in a Can and telemarketers and his parents, of course). This "great love" was and is his downfall, he reasoned. "It is what both kills me again and again, and sustains me. My resurrection! It is my event horizon in spite of the fact that there has been no event and there is nothing on the horizon." Memory just a memory.

*It is also the hidden mystery of his secret journals which I have dug up from his back yard.*

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Today Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol I: "Except for the fact that my parachute did not open...it was a good jump."

"Corporations," Von Spatzl further insisted, "are now intent on gratifying the last wish of the consumer." He reasoned that corporate America in particular was in direct conflict with nature, as exemplified by the following list (noted in his Day Journal Vol I):

## List

A murder of crows.  
A rafter of turkeys.  
A smack of jellyfish.  
A skulk of foxes.  
A knot of toads.  
A peep of chickens.  
A watch of nightingales.  
A muster of peacocks.  
A charm of finches.

A community of communities.

Did he/we ever tell you about the years and years spent staring at the ceiling? Sure he/we did. (Although he/we haven't described the horrible and violent deaths of Vic and Tim...and perhaps he/we won't, he's/we're not sure). But he/we will tell you this: Before carving out his/our days and nights in "secret" journals, Von Spatzl (& I) counted the cracks in the paint in the ceiling (3,597) and watched the dust accumulate.

"Smart Dust," he said aloud, a community of dust balls, and drew a cloud in his Night Journal Vol II that was smattered with German prepositions: Durch, gegen, ohne, mit, et cetera.

Anyway, before Flushtown he was in Zug, and before that he was in love. With the Woman With No Name. And after Flushtown. And well before that he was in the family dryer on "hot spin."

How is that possible no one knew Von Spatzl was in love? His mother never knew, his father never knew, and his twin

brothers... well, God rest their drunken mangled and melted souls, they never knew. Why hide such a delicious fact?

"I spent an hour practicing boiling an egg with the aid of my Bruno unit," Von Spatzl recorded in his Day Journal, Vol I. Results: 12 eggs broken. Suggestion: Practice. Purpose: Hiding delicious facts.

"All that plastic surgery and I look like this," Von Spatzl said, staring at his face in the mirror in his room at the Hotel Zug.

Years and years later, gazing deeply into his morning mud and stroking his carton of Chesterfields fondly, Von Spatzl saw his face reflected and a dozen others, male and female, clawing their way out of the java and Time and Space -- into his life! "Hey! Lemme out!" His shiny nicotine-grime face, spoke: "Coffee shapes the face, while the cigarettes punctuate it and uterine milk feeds it." Von Spatzl replied: "You can say that again, buddy."

Because it was a typical day, Von Spatzl convinced himself yet again, that he was/is missing not only a 'however' in his life, but a "whatever" as well as a "whenever."

"My addiction to amphetamines reminds me of when I used to seek out colors as a child. The perfect blues, the perfect blacks, the perfect reds, the perfect possibilities," he noted in his Day Journal, Vol I. He added: "I need a corporation," he wrote in his Night Journal, Vol II. "Unfortunately I don't have a last wish."

Von Spatzl doesn't wish: Von Spatzl writes. Von Spatzl draws. Von Spatzl rips. Von Spatzl glues. Von Spatzl cries. And no one sees or hears the dreadful whimperings that follow Von Spatzl like a neurotic Mary's little lamb--from his lucky strike of \$350 to his wild gusher of stock profits and down into the murky sorrow of his lost soul.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he cried when he cashed out. Being born again and again is very painful. Yet this time when Von Spatzl

cried no one heard: Imaginary mommy, imaginary daddy, imaginary brothers, imaginary profits, imaginary tears, imaginary consciousness, imaginary friends, imaginary amphetamines, imaginary imagination.

Von Spatzl drew a chart of his heart beat. It topped at 5,234 and bottomed at 1,548. It followed the NASDAQ's course over the past few years since 1996. He took a blue one, then a red one, then a yellow one and washed them down with a Jack.

Underneath the chart, in his Night Journal Vol XXX, he wrote: "Except for the fact that my parachute did not open..... it was a good jump." He continued thinking about people who make wishes and others who make corporations. Hope is not a plan, he shouted to no one, then took a tissue out of a box with his Bruno Unit and proffered it to an imaginary mommy. "Here, Mutter, I think you're gonna want this."

"I should get a secretary," Von Spatzl wrote 100 times for a total of 500 words. It was part of his campaign to start a corporation, get organized, seize life, live again instead of sitting around all day wishing upon a collapsed star. Then he crossed out the word "secretary" and wrote: "Canary, a yellow one." Then crossed out "Canary, a yellow one," and wrote: "Coronary." Then he added: "It is lonely in the heart of America."

Woman With No Name: How about a nice glass of Uterine Milk?

Von Spatzl: Sure, with ice and a splash of Jack.

Woman With No Name: I'm wearing a cow bell.

Von Spatzl: Like the Milkman.

Woman With No Name: Make a wish upon a star, Von.

Von Spatzl: Coronary? Is that what you died of?

Von Spatzl watched his watch and watched 16 minutes tick tock off and wondered who offed him or herself -- when, and where, and how, with what, but not, however why. He knew the why. And thought: Parachute. Was he jealous?

He could hear a cow bell in the distance: It was producing a metallic "Moo!" sound. It was the sound of the death of a young calf. Was Jesus a cow in another life?

Von Spatzl drank and drank and drank, then threw up on his T-shirt that proclaimed: "Baby!" with an arrow pointing down.

Then Von Spatzl had one of his great flashes, which he recorded in his Night Journal Vol I: Instead of cow bells, how about electronic beepers connected by GPS satellite, so the mother can always know where her calves are? And the calves can always get some fresh uterine milk. YUUummmmm! (If they are lucky enough).

Upon the death of his twin brothers, Von Spatzl had this conversation at the scene of the accident (recorded in his Night Journal Vol I):

Me: I will bury you under tons of soil.

Tim & Vic: We are our father's and mother's sons of toil.

Me: Oh don't worry, I'll have the hags flung out.

Tim & Vic: Oh? Why not the flags hung out?

Me: Twine, instead, you are dead.

Tim & Vic: Twain we're twins.

Me: 'Tween, you win. God rest ye. Checkmate.

"You see, I was in the car," Von Spatzl shouted. "I was in the car...going nowhere but here - I was coming here all the time. This was my destination. My great destination. Can you believe it, Von! You've arrived. And all this time you thought you were in the process of going somewhere else. Cheeze louise." He rubbed his face, he rubbed his legs, he made a note to get some rubbing alcohol and helped himself to another Jack: "I should," he wrote 1,000 times for a total of 2,000 words.

Von Spatzl was terribly sad remembering his life -- the one he almost had--and wrote in his Night Journal Vol XXX: "I am



your lover for gosh sakes! I love you and I don't even know your name."

Von Spatzl noted this note with a facing page of commas, each in red, with a bulbous pool for a head and a curving nose that ended in a pointed chin. Red commas on a field of perfect blue.

"That'll teach you, America!" he said aloud.

"I am a hasbeen never was," he wrote once in a fancy script in his Day Journal Vol II. It looked like this:

*I am a hasbeen never was.*

He penned the word "Flowers!" (exclamation his) in his Day Journal Vol. II and proceeded to list the one line list: "The Symbols Used Here."

Flowers = Death

"Rise and shine everyone! Can't lay around dead all your life, you know," Von Spatzl scribbled in pen in his Day Journal Vol. II. "I'll dig the kids up and send them off to school, you just get your rest, dear. Von Spatzl here, separator of night and day." And in order to justify his claim, he sat unmoving for a total of 24 hours.

Another day, in his Day Journal Vol. II, our Superhero wrote:

"Disguised my voice, called my mother, asked her if my mommy was there."

"Who are you little boy?" she said.

"I'm from the Well Jung institute!" And hung up. Ha yuck!

Psychiatric Care:

Did we say we were seeing someone--professionally? Yes, since the early days of Flushtown, after Zug, of course. After one session, Von Spatzl speculated gleefully that perhaps this man whose office in Flushtown resembled a pet store, received his degree from a mail order house. After three years, Von Spatzl noted in his Night Journal Vol. III, the doctor-patient relationship had evolved considerably.

### Shrink Dialog

Von Spatzl: I am trying to find the ethical antidote to a mythical disease.

Shrinkologist: Yeah, that's great. So what have you got for me today?

Von Spatzl: Hmm. Well, alright. EMC, go long, will split, storage is big, getting bigger. Need a place to archive all those senseless web sites. Bury Pet.com in the cyberspace museum.

Shrinkman: Okay, anything else?

Von Spatzl: So you think that my daytrading, the money flow, is really a kind of blood flow, the uterine milk? A way to nourish me, heal me, bring me back to reality?

Shrinkenstein: That sounds about right. I mean, look at you: You are fed by the box, the womb. The screen is your God.

Say, what do you think about utilities? Gas & Electric?

Von Spatzl: Oh dear... Utilities? Get real! Wait until the techs top out, we're in a bubble, no one gives a fuck about gas and electric now. Oil is \$11 a barrel for fuck's sake! When oil its \$18 the trend is your friend: Ride it to \$28 - \$29. If a Republican gets elected look for oil to top \$50. Just go long on tech, I'll tell you when to check out. Say, is that a coronary in that cage or what?

While his shrinkman punctuated his weeks, Von Spatzl's infatuation with the day-time talk show host, Jenny Jones, punctuated his days. He wrote her on occasion. Here is a sample:

"Dear Jenny Jones,

I've decided not to accept your invitation to appear on the show. In stead, I've decided to sue your ass off on Court TV. In fact, I'll separate your ass on Court TV.

Sincerely,

Mr. Von Spatzl  
Flushtown, America.

P.S. My health is continues to be a great concern. Who knows when I'll have a coronary and follow Vic and Tim along the highway of whatever."

In Journal entries marked atop the pages simply with "Earlier in life," for example, here in Night Journal Vol I, Von Spatzl waxes about family life, indicating an interest in broadcasting, and particularly classical music:

Von Spatzl: "Oh Papa can't I stay up with you and listen to the Cantatatatatatas on the raydio?"

Papa: "Go ask your mother."

Mother: "Go ask your father."

Von Spatzl: "Ba ba ba Bach!"

Another list, this one a "To Do List," was duly scrawled in Von Spatzl's Night Journal Vol II:

1. I have to wake my father from the dead, although he is not dead.
2. I have to wake my mother from the dead, although she is not dead.
3. I have to tend the flowers on Vic and Tim's graves because they *are* dead.
4. I have to fornicate with The Austrian Girl in order to perpetuate the Von Spatzl line.
5. I have to help the Tokyo boy with his cigarette addiction and get him to understand geometry.

6. I have to go bowling with Tim the Tower, help him through his divorce which is coming and he doesn't know it.
7. Secretly get a dog. Perhaps not a basenji (basenjis cannot bark).
8. I have to decide once and for all the difference between right and wrong because God is waiting for an answer.
9. I have to choose a last meal.
10. I have to make a final statement. Perhaps this: "You all brought me here to be executed, not to make a speech."

The Austrian Girl, (as noted, another vibrant fiction), is a frequent and total obsession of his letter writing. Here's a sample:

"Dear The Austrian Girl,

I'd love to have you over for some miniature golf. Then, if you like, we can drive to the beach so I can show you how wind and sun and sand combine to form complex architectonics. You can of course bring your basenji, but please note: I'm allergic. It is quite possibly, however, I will drown my self in the Big Mother today, so bring flowers....

Love,

Von Spatzl"

Emotional notation, noted in Night Journal Vol II: To the girl on the street selling flowers: How did you burn your face?

"Flies," he wrote in letters he cut out of the stock market page and glued down like a ransom note in his in Night Journal Vol II, "are contaminating my food supply and severely affecting my health."

Food: Von Spatzl existed mainly on a supply of eggs, which were hard boiled and then flavored with salt.

In a list recorded in his Night Journal Vol. III, he seems eternally fascinated with the pros and cons of various suicides:

## List

Poisoning: Positioning.  
Hanging: Easy wheezy.  
Shooting: Headache.  
Electrocution: Premonition.  
Starvation: The Word of God.  
Freezing: Doppler radar.  
Self-immolation: Julie Andrews.  
Crushed: Franz Liszt.  
Strangulation: NASDAQ.  
Suffocation: " !"  
Jumping: Judged.  
Falling: This morning.  
Cutting: Heart.  
Piercing: My greatest fear.  
The Perfect Crime: Vic and Tim.

When not watching Jenny Jones, or following the markets, Von Spatzl would sometimes punctuate his daily activities with biting humor and rhyming philosophical inquiries such as these in his Night Journal Vol III.

If I am sleeping, is the church weeping?  
If I am dreaming, is the rabbi preening?  
If I am crapping, is the universe napping?  
If I am dying, is the cosmos lying?  
If after my end, is the old brown chair still my friend?

A good many of Von Spatzl's notations recorded his purchases – never on margin – of high flying technology stocks between February 1996 and January 2001. Entries would appear like this:

Bought CSCO 2000 Shares \$16 3/4  
Bought NOK 1500 Shares \$13 5/8  
Bought DELL 5000 shares \$16 3/16  
Bought CIEN 3000 shares \$12 1/2  
Sold CSCO, 2000 shares \$62 3/4  
Bought: NTPA 3000 Shares \$2 1/4

Sold: NTPA 3000 shares \$87 1/8

Years later (today) when he'd converted it all to cash (Money, Money, Money, Money!), he methodically set about shorting the entire NASDAQ – the QQQs – (the cash backing his short position). He went after the tech-laden Nasdaq like a hobo on a ham sandwich, and ate his ex-best friends – the high flyers like the fiber optics, the genomics and the chips – for lunch.

Now he'd get on his sleigh and ride all the way back across the room like Père Noël or Kris Kringel in time for the Jenny Jones Show. By March 2001, he figured he'd made enough (he actually wasn't finished) and wrote in his Night Journal Vol XXV, signaling this change: "I am what I am. Big Bucks Von Spatzl."

One day Von Spatzl sat on his Old Brown Chair and looked about his house in Flushtown. The fly screen quivered, the curtains, stained by the sun and dust, jostled; an egg shell lay on the floor by his feet, the telephone, off its hook, looked ill. He stared at his line of notebooks. "I am getting old in this Old Brown Chair," he said to the egg shell.

Cheeze Louise! Indeed the rotten game of making money had only kept him interested in life enough to wake up each day after a few hours sleep and fearlessly connect to the cruel and dirty world of money. He ate a hard-boiled egg and tossed the shell at his feet. "Eternity," he declared.

"I am *in* the third person," he wrote 3 times for a total of 18 words in his Night Journal, Vol. XXV.

He noted a page later in his Night Journal, Vol. XXV: "Disguised my voice, called my mother, asked her if her refrigerator was running."

"Well I think so," she hesitated.

Burst out laughing: "Well you better go catch it!"

Von Spatzl hung up and wept, holding a glass of Jack to his lips, and, having trouble getting it down, spit a mouthful across the room, his booze mixed with tears.

"How lonely I've become! Oh, how I long for those days in Zug," he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. III

Von Spatzl paced back and forth, forth and back and then ran to his little oak table and dragged over his Old Brown Chair, sat down, and opened a fresh notebook – Day Journal Vol. XXV. This one, like the others, was bound in red leather, each 300 pages long, each page an off white, unlined rectangle of possibility with which he could fill in--in any imaginable way--with finitude. Each new book promised a new resurrection and an even fresher crucifixion.

"It's all show business," he scribbled.

"That was years ago, he remembered," he wrote on a fresh page as if attempting to reconstruct some critical moment from his past. But then he slid a knife into the groin of this thought, killing it by cutting off its nuts: "Of course it was all show business *then*."

The early days (in Flushtown, anyway) were in fact, busy: Build shelves. Build a portfolio. Rebuild your essence, and then build a coffin to put it all in, he recalled in his Day Journal, Vol XXV

But that was years ago, trying to restart his engine (for the umpteenth time) for a drive into the future: "The shelves are now laden with dust, and are empty. No, sorry, no cute little maid in a short black skirt thinking in French dancing around the house dusting away the emptiness. The books *were* filled, ever page marked, and it was done tediously, painstakingly--but years ago. Do you hear me, Mr. Future! They are now stored underground, dirt and damp eating out their guts."

That night, Von Spatzl wrote 1000 times "She was never mine," for a total of 4,000 words, in his Night Journal, Vol II,

his handwriting careening across 10 pages in red ink. Then, on the eleventh page: "Red ink, how poetic."

Later on his paranoia, which sometimes reared up like the Loch Ness Lizard it was, squeaked: "How many mice *am* I worth?"

A page later, the answer: Czechstockholmvakia, 152.7 liters per capita (1974)."

If "she was never" his, then in his Night Journal Vol. II, Von Spatzl, makes us wonder what interest she had in him – interest enough to merit this mysterious entry written in blue ink on a torn shred from the Zurich financial papers:

"I met...or rather, she claims she met me...in Zug. If I left her alone for five minutes, I would soon find her sitting at my desk, in my Old Brown Chair, farting out loud, which I felt a grave violation. Americans can be like that. She seemed so secretive and yet so public, and I wondered if in fact she could protect and honor my secrets so I left the room (again and again) to allow her to read. As a TEST. I could hear her from the kitchen, farting as she turned the pages of my life. Why was I letting her do this? And in my Old Brown Chair? My friend! But then, what harm could she do me anyway? I mean if she comes from Zug, really, what of it?"

This entry, typed and glued onto the page, appeared below it:

"Once she accused me of no longer being her friend. The indiscretion! She liked to imagine herself the friend who came back from the dead. Nothing came of it. She was after all, she said, from Zug."

It is unclear who Von Spatzl is referring to in the above entries. Clearly it's not The Austrian Girl. (Note the existence of another – or the same? – Old Brown Chair. Is the one in Zug the same as the one here in Flushtown?) And indeed, wasn't the Old Turquoise Chair the very one Von Spatzl dragged home the night he met The Woman With No Name – Because and only because...she sat in it, a tramp by the roadside, a



hoboesse, saturated with whiskey, taking a load off, speculating on the road before them both. "I think that goes East..."

On the bottom of the page Von Spatzl typed: "Oscar Wilde was convicted as a homosexual, and spent two years in Reading Jail. Reading in Jail."

Back to reality: Von Spatzl would let the phone ring until it stopped. He was off walking deep in his Wouldlands. "Hark! What's that?" He went back to chopping would. The phone rang again then it stopped again. He began to see the telephone as a fruit, and its ringing a sticky juice dribbling out into his house in Flushtown, spreading across his would floors (the carpet with Judy America's ass on it gone), forming puddles. It was organic, this juice, and it climbed the Old Brown Chair where he sat writing, writing, writing until it slithered up his back and into his ears filling them with an unholy and uncomfortable sensation. Duhrrrrrrrrrrrrrrring!

Someone even knocked on the front door, perhaps a neighbor, perhaps the police, perhaps even the Woman With No Name, but Von Spatzl wouldn't budge. "I'm a fuss budget." They eventually went away. This went on for days. He had plenty of eggs.

Was it the money that frightened him from going outside? He looked deep inside to find the reason. Was it to write in the Journals? Was this his great work? He started to drink heavy (if that's possible) during this time. And smoke upwards of three packs of Chesterfields a day. His lungs burned hot, and his tongue ached, he felt a fever and his eyes watered.

"I have set my self on fire," he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXI

Von Spatzl finally ambled to the door. Weeks had passed. There were flies caught in the screen. Birds pecked at them.

"What in the heck is this?" Von Spatzl wondered.

He replied to himself in his Night Journal Vol I: "Take the bus back to reality. Driver's license to kill yourself. Oscar was wild."

It was his birthday, suddenly. He wanted to tell everyone: "Hey everyone, today is my special day!"

He checked his e-mail. He received this message from some woman named Jenny Jones:

"Did you know? Here is what our survey of women revealed:

Over 72% Of all women need a larger and a thicker penis to reach sexual orgasm.

94% of all women agree a large penis is a visual turn-on and believe that size does make a difference.

68% Of all women are not satisfied with their lovers penis size.

93% of all women do not mention small penis size, for fear of hurting their lovers feelings.

Are you concerned that your penis size won't satisfy her?

Free info is right here, to learn how to safely enlarge your penis size."

He ventured to Main Street, the thriving heart of Flushtown, to check its penis size. Von Spatzl had the urge to say: "Hey it's my special day..." But Main Street was a deserted artery, and the only person he encountered was an old gray guy, a broken specimen at best, selling daffodils to no one.

"No, thank you," said Von Spatzl. Then he muttered only to himself: "The Dodo is a bird that cannot fly. Get back to reality and learn how to safely enlarge your penis size. Take the bus. This is my birthday. Perhaps my last."

Von Spatzl, in this marked celebratory mood, found himself at the Flushtown Bakery. A woman with large bulging eyes manned the place. She had a mustache coated lightly in flour and two buck teeth. A regular cookie monster. Von Spatzl surveyed the contents of the glass case.

"Whaddya want, honey?"

Von Spatzl frightened, closed his eyes. He almost muttered an enlarged penis, but didn't.

"Whaddya want, honey?" the cookie monster repeated. "Don't be scared..." She seemed to sense something, perhaps she knew that it was Von Spatzl's birthday! Of course! Our superhero opened his peepers and quickly pointed out a large upended cylinder in white cream with lime green flowers edging the affair. The cookie monster smiled, her teeth no longer menacing. Von Spatzl reached for a cake box top and wrote: "Happy Birthday! Von Spatzl!" He handed it to the baker.

"You want me to write this on the cake, I can you know, nothing extra, honey."

Von Spatzl nodded like a squirrel praying for nuts, closed his eyes and waited while she squeezed out the words in hot lime green. It wasn't easy for Von Spatzl to make down Main Street, Flushtown back to his little house, (with the cake and the three bottles of Jack and a fresh carton of Chesterfields), and he almost tripped over himself several times, but he made it.

"I made it!" he gleefully whispered to his Old Brown Chair. "I made it! I'm home!" He placed the birthday cake on his Old Brown Table in front of the bank of computer screens streaming quotes from the New York exchanges. His name, in sugary fluorescent green fairly glowed. And then, with a spoon large enough to kill someone, Von Spatzl inhaled the entire thing in a single breath.

"What is that horrible noise?" Von Spatzl, birthday cake caked on his face, reflected and wrote "What is that horrible noise?" with a fluorescent green crayon. "It might be reality knocking," came a voice out of the ether.

She was slamming a sledge hammer into a car parked outside his house. His car. The Rambler. He remembered. The front windshield was smashed and made a horrible noise.

While he didn't hear her say it, the attractive woman destroying Von Spatzl's car, secretly believed she was protecting him from a highway accident and muttered this belief as she crashed her hammer through the driver's side window. "I have saved your life." (This is what Von Spatzl came to believe months later when it suddenly dawned upon him that this very attractive woman was in fact, The Woman With No Name), come back from dead as a doorknob as a Saint, with a slammer.

"Obsessed with certainty, we see almost nothing," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. II. "Letting accidents happen, results in new ideas."

Then the noise, again: He seemed to have heard it from his mother. He was perhaps five. Dodo. Dodo. Dodo.

"What a horrible noise," she said, referring to the blue jay she heard but didn't see crashing through a kitchen window. But then she, his mother, and he, Von Spatzl busy eating his Frosted Flakes, turned to find the bluish bloodied wings sputtering in the family kitchen sink surrounded with broken glass and dead flies. Oh dear! Death flies into my house!

"I am saving your fucking life!" Another schla-bang!

This was the common denominator--the loud noise: "Someone blowing their nose or dying very publicly."

Von Spatzl hesitated and felt his heart sink. "Dodo!" he cried.

He wrote the word "However" 100 times in black grease pencil in his Night Journal, Vol. IX. It made him sad and so he smudged it with his hand, and then he stared at the smeared wall of "Howevers" and that seemed just about right.

The Rambler

Von Spatzl begins to refer to driving often, particularly in the Night Journal Vo. XVII and IX, but dear reader, note that Von Spatzl never does actually drive, as he is/was landlocked by an expired registration, and the old Rambler stuck in park and decorated with cobwebs. (And furthermore, it is unlikely he was ever more than a passenger in a car, in fact, and that his registration was something he cooked up on his computer.) And, as there was no one to drive him, he sometimes (though rarely) took the bus. (Mostly he walked). But the Rambler, which did anything but, its carburetor choked with dirt and fuel line dried and cracked in several places, had a special place in his heart. Yet Von Spatzl persisted in writing about motoring with the caveat emptor of the metaphorical Dodo.

This is a typical example:

"We were going to go for a drive," he wrote in his Night Journal Vol IX. "Dodo."

"I have a car, I like to drive, into the towns and the countryside." (Road music).

"I am connected at the hip with Wall Street. Don't Talk Don't Run, Drive."

"Get back to reality," he wrote 300 times for a total of 1200 words. "Open the door, get in the Rambler, start it up and just go back to it." But he failed to get beyond his front door. His escape never materialized, and he reasoned: Where would I go anyway?

But it could never be the same. They tried to kill me a dozen times, once with a toaster. "Here, Von, poke around with this fork!" And now the opening that death creates is drawing me in. An event horizon of all things!

So Von Spatzl sat in his Old Brown Chair and held on for dear life in spite of these facts: 1. His health was deteriorating. 2. He half-heartedly attempted suicide once a day. 3. He had a

good 'til cancel order to pick up 2800 shares of SUNW @ \$13 1/2. 4. He was going to die anyway.

"I should play more chess, I've lost too much time." Von Spatzl wrote the word "Opening" 1,000 times for a total of 1,000 words in his Night Journal Vol. II, and drew a picture of a blank chess board.

Von Spatzl's Rambler had spiders living in it. It reminded him of his mother's trouble with spiders, how once, a lady spider laid eggs in her cheek. She'd been sleeping.

Snore. Snore. Snore.

"You can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep."

Three days later she had a large and painful purple pimple on her left cheek. "Don't touch it," said his father, but she did. She couldn't help it. In fact that's all she would do. Touch it. Touch it. Touch it. "Don't touch it!" yelled Von Spatzl's father. A day later she touched it hard and, of course, it burst open. It felt good. But guess what? Thousands of tiny baby spiders broke through the skin and crawled all over her face. The next day she checked into a psychiatric ward. Put her in the E.B. White Wing where she reported she could no longer see colors.

Kwatiutl Indians ate White Men. They never went to University. Never sat in the cafeteria and debated religious experiences and their validity. They snaked on baby spiders and saw colors.

He wrote the word "cruel" 1,000 times across three pages for a total of 3,000 words in his Night Journal Vol. III. Then he wrote the word "gruel" in red on top of them. Gruel, gruel, gruel.

Von Spatzl first noticed her cutting across the parking lot. Von Spatzl was one observant guy: "I notice any woman wearing a dress," he wrote, showing that he did indeed have an awareness, however dim, and that perhaps he'd send away for that kit to enlarge his penis after all. He wore a dress once,

too – as a child – in order to scare his grandmother. She dropped a tureen of baked beans on the floor and the dog, a spoiled cocker spaniel who shit on the rug with regularity, lapped it up and farted for two days.

“Remembering,” he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. X soon after the girl-car-event. “How often I wish I could abolish my memories, wipe the slate clean, begin anew.” Remembering was, in fact, one of his pet projects--because remembering events with an acuity so sharp, so precise, frightened him with the structure of his life, and thus kept him alive. Without memory – and its frightening course carving a path through the canyon of his years – he would not even be a small event horizon, just perhaps a rainy afternoon in Flushtown. Von Spatzl remembered it all (and selectively edited his life here, of course). But he’d like to do without all those synaptic traps. His first memory? Sitting on a pile of bricks, their hard red edges cutting into his tiny tush. He went on, typically admonishing himself in the third person: “Von Spatzl, Just forget it.”

He should have spent more time in Trattenbach, climbing mountains. Achieving at least a point of view. Make his life more enjoyable.

Von Spatzl wrote the following numbers: “1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15... 99” in his Night Journal Vol. II. Then commented in red grease pencil below the block of black figures: “My days are numbered,” and laughed so hard he nearly peed in his pants sitting in his Old Brown Chair.

Afterwards, that is, after his good long hard ha-yuck, Von Spatzl examined his Will (which was/is feminine) to see if it were intact. It appeared it was. He considered buying lipstick instead of an enlarged penis kit. (He had his Bruno Unit anyway.) Lipstick? Maybe a fuscias!

He wrote three times in his Day Journal Vol. II: “She sat on the bed and cried” for a total of 21 words. Below that in turquoise Crayola crayon, he wrote: “Then she moved to the Old

Turquoise Chair and showed me her vagina, which made me laugh. 'You think I'm going back in there?'"

So. He'd never seen this woman before. Oh yes he had, he had! She'd cut across his lawn yesterday! Cut across his lawn. Von Spatzl should cut his lawn, make his lawn more enjoyable. Had he enjoyed looking outside his window yesterday? Was it fun? Did it add to the quality of his life? And if not, why not? Was he in denial--still? What was he seeing Herr Shrinkenstein for anyway?

Von Spatzl reconsidered what he'd seen. It was entirely possible she cut across his lawn all day long for weeks or months at a time. For the reason....? And these "several times" he saw her accounted for just a tiny percentage of the times she'd done this... this...this act of... trespassing? Perhaps she wasn't wearing a dress all those times. But for this most recent transgression, she wore a blue and white number with red plaid pockets. You could say she was attractively built.

He looked up to the tree on his lawn. The Great Old Mulberry Tree. "Hello Great Old Mulberry Tree," said Von Spatzl with a wave of his crutch. The tree of life for a dozen squirrels and three dozen or so brown-grey birds who called it home was also home to a red bird nesting in it, a bird that soon stood up on the brim of his/her nest to signal to his/her buddies that dinner was ready. Family life! Von Spatzl remembered his and wished he were a B-I-R-D for a moment. Did he enjoy that? That is, did he enjoy wishing he were a bird, or remembering his life when he, Von Spatzl was a bird (a bright red Cardinal!) and revisiting that sweet open windowed life as a child with his flying dreams? ("Get me the hell out of here!")

Emotional notation: Sherwood Forest Green. She was definitely a Kwatiutl Indian.

Von Spatzl wrote earlier that day in his Day Journal Vol. II: "Pauper," one thousand times with a green felt tip pen. Then he glued a picture of a snowman on the opposite page with the handwritten plea: Send me some mail, and a label: N©Man.



Some girl named Kay is dying on the Internet, Von Spatzl heard on the Jenny Jones show. She was recording her last days for the past four years in a BLOG. "What an excellent death!" Von Spatzl wrote jealously in his Night Journal Vol. XIX.

The girl, the Woman With No Name, in the blue and white dress who was attractively built and bent on saving Von Spatzl's life (what irony!) was letting loose a third blow, this one through on the passenger side window. Karash! Von Spatzl could hear Jenny Jones screaming at a guest from a neighbor's house. The guest screamed back: "I am too dying!" Yeah, prove it.

He wanted to go watch Jenny Jones but then he pictured the swinger as a guest and wanted to meet her personally, but of course, he was scared. She was probably an American. As he was frightened by most Americans. Von Spatzl thought of Roosevelt in his wheelchair and took heart, gathered his courage and the change in his pocket and stepped outside. "I'm out!" he muttered to himself. He then wished he'd gotten a dog to walk at his heels...

Because Von Spatzl sometimes thought of himself as a swash buckler, he often played the role that he was well out of his century. So in approaching the car smasher girl, he rehearsed out these lines, which he wrote down in his Night Journal Vol. XIX: "Von Spatzl drew his sword and musket. Tallyho! How much a swing?"

Obviously there were implications in speaking, particularly to another person, in particular. At Ace or the little grocery store, Von Spatzl barely breathed, but merely pointed and clicked with his Bruno Unit. This was decidedly different. Here was someone not unlike Judy America or Sally Moon, for that matter, who was speaking with something and to which words were NEEDED, verbs in particular. Plus, she was perhaps the Woman With No Name and therefore, he'd have to name her, wouldn't he? In anycase, Von Spatzl decided one, that is, Von Spatzl, that is me, had to open one's mouth, sounds had to come out, one had to signal, to another person

for seemingly undisclosed reasons, such as “Why the fuck are you smashing up my dear old Rambler?” Or more to the point: “Why are you trying to save me?” He had to ask “why?” in his own voice to get someone else’s why in return. You give and you get, eh? And not why they were killing themselves, but saving him, a typically American misconception. (That is what she said, wasn’t it? Didn’t she announce this like Gabriel?). And so, after all these deliberations, Von Spatzl’s words ended up in his T-shirt instead of in the air. He had barely spoken since the Twins hit the railing, stoned on Long Island Iced Teas, equal parts vodka, gin, rum, tequila and Coca-Cola (for the coloring), and then only to his shrink, and who was that? Judy America with a mail order Ph.D.? And now he’d spoken to this SAINT...directly into his T-shirt. Curious development.

So today’s lesson was spent on realizing. Realizing words, spoken or not spoken. He spent the whole day realizing. He practiced saying his name to the Old Mulberry Tree. “Hi, I’m Von Spatzl.” To a Red Cardinal: “Hi, I’m Von Spatzl, nice to meet you.” But this was different, this story with the girl here smashing up his Rambler. This was something actually happening. This was something actually happening in a slow whisper. A dog (if he owned one) would be able to read his mind and maybe fetch him a Long Island Iced Tea now and again. A dog would do better. And to think he knocked Slavonov out of the Budapest Tournament in 16 moves! (Playing white, however).

“Realized,” he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. II, “all day long.” He put the journal back on the shelf with all the others in their red leather covers. It was a big family. He realized this after he decided to number the volumes more ornately.

“I just put Vol. LI of the Night Journals back on the shelf,” he said aloud, practicing his voice. He later referred to this as an “Imaginary dialogue” in the following Night Journal, Vol. III. “I know perfectly well what I am doing.”

Imaginary Dialogue: Because I Don’t Speak Anymore

“What’s the dirtiest thing you ever did?”

--First line of the first page in Night Journal III.

"Me?"

--Second page in Night Journal III.

"It's difficult," he wrote. "It depends on what you mean by 'dirty.' If you mean dirty in the sense of messy and disgusting, then there's one story I have for that. But if you mean dirty in the sense...well...I'm not sure what you mean...dehumanizing. Perverse. You know... well, I have another story for that."

"She laughed." Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha.

--Third page in Night Journal III.

Von Spatzl walked to the bar (his kitchen with its 1950s pale lime green and faded yellow formica tops) and poured himself a large Jack. In the fridge to get some ice, he found only a small chip from an ice berg. Had to break it with a hammer.

"Later," he said aloud to himself, "I'll have puddles." He realized the puddles before they occurred, and repeated it again because it sounded so true: "Later, I'll have puddles."

Von Spatzl's mother, using her own super telepathic powers, called and complained of intense arthritis in her hip. It was an ongoing problem for her, and a soap opera for Von Spatzl, he reported in his Day Journal Vol. III. "I have puddles," he whispered, "in my hop."

Von Spatzl wrote the word "Kaycee" 1000 times for a total of 1000 words. He burst out: "Poor Kaycee, she'll never play ball again." He imagined Kaycee as a 59-year-old slob in a basement in Toledo, Ohio. So who was the girl on the Jenny Jones Show? Still, he felt a tear slide down his face.

It was soon night time (4 am, just taking a snooze before the first indications of the Heng Seng came on screen), and Von Spatzl was struggling to sleep for a moment or two in his Old Turquoise Chair. But in these moments, the terror of his life would take over and upend him in its endless waves. He couldn't sleep because he was worried, and he became

worried because he didn't sleep. Sure, he also became worried because his life was essentially the repetition of the moment when, in a shopping mall as a boy he pointed out a scuba outfit in a dive shop and pulled shamelessly on his mother's arm.

"Look, mother!"

Von Spatzl soon realized – much to his horror – that the woman's arm did not belong to his mother. Rather it belonged to a terribly tubby older woman who had never had children. In fact this childless farting blob in a tent dress no longer even had the comfort and reassurance of sleeping with her husband, Von Spatzl now speculated because she smelled of the mothballs her clothes were packed in and in which she herself would soon be packaged. In his Night Journal, Vol. IV, Von Spatzl drew a scuba outfit with mask and Neptune pitchfork and fell asleep in his Old Brown Chair, the pencil in his hand and a Chesterfield burning in his fingers.

Pennies From Heaven

Sally Moon was this one's name, what was she selling? Sally Moon... I was good then, I was okay then, a regular cripple with a positive attitude, Von Spatzl noted in his Day Journal, Vol. II. "Sally Moon. Met her in the bank, I was taking out, she was putting in. She dropped 1,348 pennies on the floor and I helped her. I said, 'You dropped your pennies, let me help you.'

'Oh how nice of you.'

Sally Moon said she had a car and we drove somewhere, a diner? And had coffees and she paid with pennies, and had lipstick on her teeth and long straight black hair in her eyes, and she said, 'What do you do?'

'Research,' I told her. 'I'm now in my reading period.'

Sally Moon liked books, 'Oh?'

I smiled and she told me she'd read all the works of Shakespeare. I told her Shakespeare was way too complex for me but I did like his movies, and she laughed and suggested we go see a movie and I said, 'Sure,' knocking of my coffee, 'Why the heck not?'

We pulled in to some Kung Fu movie, the only thing playing and I paid.

'Oh thank you,' she said, and I said, 'Sure.'

We watched a man chop chop 1,348 guys for 45 minutes and then she said, 'Let's go.'

We drove to her house and she said, 'Let me make dinner,' and she did. She chopped up a broccoli into 1,348 pieces, adding 1,348 grains of rice, and then we sat and ate and then she said, 'Let me make tea.' She made some tea and we sat and drank it and then she said, 'Let's make love' and I said, 'Sure, why the heck not?'

It was not very good loving. Fucking Sally Moon was like fucking 1,348 pennies scattered all over the floor of a bank. She did a couple of karate type things to me that I didn't like and so, when she fell asleep, I put on my pants and drank a cup of cold tea and left 1,348 pennies on her kitchen table. I walked for a hour to my house and wondered why I never got a dog. That would be good, to have a dog to keep you company and wag its tail when you came home from fucking some girl who dropped pennies. Sally Moon. She was Chinese I think."

The worst thing is: " I have no friends," he wrote in the Day Journal, Vol I. His only relationships were those digital entities hiding behind strange names who lived on stock boards, and breathed the words "short" and "long." But some of the messages spoke volumes to him. On the DELL stock board, he was particularly intrigued by this message:

"The elk have joined the river, Spanish mountains remind caution; women, like wisdom, punctuate...."

Emotional notation: I really must one day remove that tattoo.  
Vic & Time wore lions in their pajamas. The roar of the rail.  
Lions eating a lunch now of road kill.

AUSTRIA! VON SPATZL EXCLAIMED IN DAY JOURNAL, Vol. III.  
The day the baby was born I was happiest. All that walking...  
getting nowhere. I was happy the day...Did I tell you my  
hamster died. It was my first traumatic ... Tundra!

Dear Reader, perhaps you have already observed that Von  
Spatzl's entries during the day are often positive, even if they  
are non-sequitur strings of jubilate fantasy. At night, of  
course, a darker Eros emerges as the US markets have closed  
and his mother calls with comments about her failing health.

Von Spatzl's drawings and scribblings, whether produced in  
the day or in the night, evoke many things, among them: an  
interest in hearts, bicycles, animals (dogs particularly), plans  
with psychomathematical babble, *fin de siecle* Viennese  
colorations of trees, houses, cartoons as well as charts. And  
vague recollections of this or that grand master victor in some  
far flung Eastern European Capital. One would have to guess  
they are the dreamier aspects of Von Spatzl's psyche, but  
really, who knows?

Back to the Rambler: The third blow of the sledgehammer  
arced through the front windshield, crashed and got stuck in  
the glass. Mpht. Mpht. Pfpt. It was a honey stick thick with  
broken blue glass shards. She extracted the tool. She wiggled  
free the bits. Then she went round to the back of the Rambler  
and popped the tail lights, ping by pong.

"Uh, uh, ahem...what are you doing?" Von Spatzl asked.

"I'm saving your life," she announced. Very defiantly, too.  
Hmmm. Von Spatzl took an immediate liking to her and  
thought about proposing marriage, but instead asked: "Do you  
have a tattoo?"

That day he wrote in the Night Journal Vol II: "She was a  
saint," 14 times for a total of 56 words, over five continuous



anyone knows. And she accessorized with Bruno Unit that was identical to Von Spatzl's!

"Come on, hop in," she said and then sang: "I have a car, I like to drive..."

Hesitantly, he did get in. The Driver With No Name pulled away from Flushtown in a blur and the next thing Von Spatzl knew he was racing towards the beach in his busted up Rambler, glass flying loose and into his face, some bits getting into his nose and his mouth. He had enough presence of dream mind to notice that the wind in her hair provided a perfect movie moment, and seconds later, he an imperfect one. So nauseous was our hero from the action on the hairpin road leading to the water he visibly turned green.

"Are you going to throw up?" she yelled into the wind.

One could tell the WWNN was not genuinely concerned. She was American, after all, as Von Spatzl feared. But then, she hardly knew Von Spatzl, as she would later affirm in yet another dream where she said she'd never met him before. "Never seen the guy," she said. In that episode she declared her love for a personage that Von Spatzl immediately made very hairy, particularly on his neck and arms, but who nonetheless made the dreamer (Von Spatzl) mad with jealousy. Girls seem to like hairy guys.

"It's unfair, all that hair," Von Spatzl wrote 300 times for a total of 600 words in his Night Journal, Vol XV. He then added in red ball point pen: "Do unfair thoughts only come at night?"

(Finally, I fell asleep remembering my walks by the lake in Zug in the spring).

Because Von Spatzl was a clever and an "aware" dreamer – particularly when he ate curry as he did this evening, sprinkling his hard boiled egg with the aromatic powder – he even managed to peel the shell with his Bruno Unit) – Von Spatzl was quite aware he was dreaming this evening. In the dream he wondered if he could throw up in the dream without



physically throwing up on his T-shirt in his chair. He swerved, moving left, then right, then left, then right again in his Old Turquoise Chair. As it turned out it was *just* grade b nausea, and nausea, he determined (in the dream), works both sides of consciousness, as odd as that may seem. But actual vomit crossing the unconscious divide? Not tonight.

"Can we stop the car?" Von Spatzl asked weakly, covering his mouth. "I've got to fetch my Bruno Unit."

In an entry dated: "Tonight, Late 20th Century," Von Spatzl wrote out a series of numbers in a fibonacci sequence: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144 up to the 100th fibonacci number:  $F(100) = 354224848179261915075$  after he awoke from the most recent episode in the "driving to the beach" dream. Then, following an eye opener of a glass of Jack and a pair of Chesterfields, Von Spatzl fired up his Dell to log onto the early Asian action on the Nikkei and the Hang Seng. He saw early NASDAQ futures from Asia were pointed North. Japanese and Korean money was flowing West. Follow the money. It's the cure for nausea.

Von Spatzl wondered what it would be like to pee blood. Would it hurt?

The following day when all the brokers were having lunch and Von Spatzl took a nap in his Old Brown Chair, he returned to the beach. The snow had indeed mixed with the sand, a result of the ice dry wind, whipping it into beige and white cliffs. It was, for Von Spatzl, a memorable image, one that he would try to draw but without success in his Night Journal Vol. III when he woke up. He came up with a cream-colored page that he tore out and later typed on it: Dream Cream. Back in the dream, he had, in fact, used a camera, something he did not personally own. He and The WWNN took snaps. He focused intently on the sand and snow drifts, attempting to reproduce something that echoed the great Sahara, or the frozen tundra of the North, where he believed in earnest in the dream he was born to wolves and suckled by them too. Then, with the same spirit he pointed the little apparatus at the WWNN: Here she was laughing, here she was bending over, here she was

pushing her hair out of her face, here she was with her sun glasses on her forehead.

"That's a print!" exclaimed Von Spatzl. He touched her green sweater.

It was cold so they each had a coffee to warm up with, they held the steaming cup with mittens for kittens. Von Spatzl and the WWNN walked along the surf with their Styrofoam cups, triangles torn from its white plastic lid – something that reminded him then and there of his father, who he was walking 10 yards (roughly 30 meters) behind them, without being seen. When Von Spatzl turned, his father disappeared, a white plastic coffee lid triangle blowing in the wind, a pair of kittens running away.

She, feeling sporty, climbed a sand dune. He, feeling suddenly weird, watched from a distance. He watched himself watch and counted to 39 before she jumped into and through his arms and they fell together to the sand into a pretzel shape of desire.

*It is important to note, dear reader, that Von Spatzl did not order his thoughts in his Journals. So it is fruitless to make a chronology out of this. In fact, a friend of ours in an earlier life wrote him a letter, telling Von Spatzl his lifestory and in so doing, removed the "no" from chrology, something Von Spatzl took to heart.*

"Reasons! Reasons! Reasons!" shouted Von Spatzl, for no apparent reason. He set about making a list....

Again, on the subject of Von Spatzl's lists, there were many and here we only represent a few. None are very interesting. And it is tiring and more than difficult to decipher even a loose meaning of them. Think of them, if you will, as various soup cans lined up on a supermarket shelf, or a tidy stack of old magazines sitting on the sidewalk for the junkman to take away. Always neat, however, the lists were most often compiled single file in a brief tightly typed column of abstract nouns, verbs, phrases or symbols. Sometimes these words or

dates Von Spatzl erected from conversations with his psychiatrist, who he often described, or rather labeled, a "parachutesite" as he did in a letter he never sent to the bespectacled shrinkenstein, as he also often called him. Other lists came from his reading of 19th Century religious and economic thinkers. (He showed a brief interest in Jeremy Bentham, for example).

## List of Reasons

Sabotage 1922  
Blackmail 1925  
Pornography 1891  
Final Solution 1938  
Paranoia 1906  
Psychiatry 1993  
Capital Gains 1997  
Nicotine 1992  
Heartache 1959  
Scorn 1959  
Napoleon 1959  
Hiroshima 1959  
Rambler 1959  
True Love 1793  
Heroin 1977

Von Spatzl wrote: "Damn it," 3000 times for a total of 6000 words in his Night Journal Vol. XXII, sinking the phrase in the middle of this then-virgin journal, like a child drowning in the open sea. Toss in a few sharks and you've got soup.

This particular spring morning was blustery and clouds were on the move and soon enough a cloud blocked the sun. They'd left the beach and Von Spatzl was now swimming upwards towards consciousness, decidedly alone. He woke up sad and quickly tried to wash away the pall with a coffee of his own, poured into a Styrofoam cup and pushed a plastic lid on top of it.

"Here's to you Daddy Dearest," he said giving it a shake.

(On the first page of his Day Journal Vol. IX Von Spatzl wrote in yellow pencil in a large childish script: "Daddy?"). He pulled out a rather longish triangle from the lid and sipped the steaming java. Still in his underwear, our hero scratched his nuts and stared out the window at the squirrels, wondering when if ever, she – the WWNN – would just "simply walk by."

Von Spatzl was under the romantic spell of standing still. He believed that if he just stood still, eventually, the world would – sooner or later – come to him.

Tokyo

"Today I saw a boy not more than six, puffing on a cigarette while walking in the streets of Flushtown," Von Spatzl recorded in his Day Journal Vol. X. "He wore Indian warpaint, with a karate outfit, and he thumped along, dragging on a ciggy. I have decided to call him Tokyo."

I thought: McKitchen McKnife, a kid's suicide attempt.

Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol II, using the third person:

"She wrote him once in a letter: 'How do you want to fuck me? Do you want to fuck my tits? my ass? my cunt? my mouth?' It was an incredible question to get in a letter. For Von Spatzl, it was an incredible list! It had enormous erotic qualities, but he also admitted to himself: "Perhaps she was a bit too wild for me, afterall."

He added the phrase "Party Girl" 333 times for a total of 666 words on the bottom of the entry.

Regardless of the fact that he hadn't received a single letter from the Woman With No Name, Von Spatzl decided to burn all her letters – the ones he himself had written and mailed to himself, signing her name with an X, then erasing it and then, signing it: "The Austrian Girl."

These letters were separate from his journals and resided in a red folder, marked: "Erotic Letters from The Austrian Girl." Many were written on hotel stationery, while others were post cards (The Canals of France, The Bridges of Prague, Jones Beach, New York...all mailed from the post box not more than 20 feet from his house.).

Von Spatzl walked to the bridge near his house, a rickety wooden number that spanned a brook choked with beer cans and condoms. It'd been months since he'd been beyond Main Street. He was surprised that Flushtown hadn't changed a lick since he moved in many years ago. He carried the letters in his breast pocket and then, once on the bridge, he ignited them one by one and dropped them flaming into the brook. There were 39 letters in all. Now toast. When the last of the letters, each written in an effusive prose about the promise of Von Spatzl-Woman With No Name love, was burnt to high hell, Von Spatzl ambled across the splintering passerelle, tapping the guard rail with his crutch. He paused at one end then returned to the middle of the bridge and watched the black flakes disappear. He cried long and hard for effect.

"Is anyone watching me?" he wondered. Minutes passed, and yes, people did see him, first burn "something" and then appear to be "lamenting" with "salty tears of confusion, probably love and longing, what a shame, he seems like a nice boy....what happened to him... see those crutches, and his face... oh my!" This from Trisha Newton of Carmine, California in an aside to her husband, Tom Newton, also of Carmine, California, high school sweethearts, double incomes, no kids who had come to Flushtown by accident, getting lost on the highway.

Von Spatzl considered throwing himself in after the letters but instead resisted, murmuring "...mailing myself to you..." Someone (Trisha Newton, in fact) asked him what he was doing.

"I am ridding myself of the love of my life," he thought he told Trisha, but in reality he stared at her blankly. Then he wrote

on a piece of paper and handed it her. "Where is the grace?" it said. Trisha took the note, and left Von Spatzl to consult with Tom, the love of her life.

Von Spatzl considered falling. An accident. His entire body was heavy even though he'd lost weight from his diet of NASDAQ chips and Chesterfields, Jack, hard boiled eggs and air. What would be enough to sink him?

Von Spatzl wanted to be like anyone else. He didn't want to be anyone else, just what he himself was: An emotional orphan with a cigarette habit, failing health and a penchant for making easy money.

He tried to read Heidegger but ended up thinking only of "Geiger Counter" and then the problem of Uranium, then Uranus. The planet. Then, her ass, of course.

"Space," he wrote 12 times for a total of 12 words in his Night Journal, Vol. IV. "One 12 dimensions," he wrote underneath it.

Von Spatzl found an old letter and copied its two sentences into his Night Journal Vol. V:

"This letter was before I started ending. And after I dreamed her up."

In the dream he was united with The Woman With No Name at the foot of a staircase. At the top, off a landing, her mother was sleeping lightly in a broom closet.

"Don't wake her," she said.

The Woman With No Name handed Von Spatzl a frozen duck which he took eagerly, and then bid him to follow her. As he climbed the stairs he remembered previous dreams:

1. Where the Woman With No Name was raped by chess playing friends of his from Zug.
2. Where she danced on the portico of a Flushtown house.

3. Where she reached down from a dream cloud to pull him up out of sleep.
4. Where he yelled at her: "You are only a dream!"
5. Where she returned the cry with a cry of her own: "No I am not!"
6. Where she was waiting in a 6th floor walk up apartment and he was afraid to ring the bell and go in, but eventually did, the doorknob coming off in his hands.
7. Where she had many friends over at her house and he sat in a chair and looked up at her as she stood on a balcony and arranged her clothe and then fell off, landing on his lap, waking him in his wet dream.
8. Where he followed her across a brightly-lit stage and watched her curl on the edge of it as the performance began, Von Spatzl dead center on stage, naked.
9. Where he followed her down a street and watched her cross into a field and cut diagonally into it, disappearing into a hedge like a bunny, leaving Von Spatzl there with ants biting his bare feet and tears rolling down his face.

Then things happened, and happened swiftly: Von Spatzl's teeth became loose in their gums, and he began to worry. He lost his hair and found it on his pillow. Dozing in his Old Turquoise Chair, he suffered several bizarre nosebleeds that wouldn't clot. He was attacked by migraines that impaired his vision. He discovered all the sudden he had a pair of ingrown toenails, one on each foot. Von Spatzl was literally falling apart, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. There was blood on his gums. This is what he wanted, after all, wasn't it? He tried to cure himself with cigarette smoke and bourbon like a piece of game. He made a list.

## List

List  
List  
List  
List  
List

List  
List  
List  
List  
List  
List

Less.

"This is useless, Trisha," he wrote one thousand times for a total of 4,000 words in his Night Journal, Vol. XX. He remembered the woman on the bridge, the day he burned the 39 letters written in effusive love prose. The letters, yes. She was from Carmine California, of all places. Would she ever remember him? Wasn't her name Trisha?

Writing the word "Trisha" kept him up until 2 in the morning not because it was so tedious or difficult but rather because he considered what it meant each time he wrote her name, or parts of her name with the available letters. Unwrapping the enigma of her name. "This is useless, Trisha," involved a different "this" and a different "useless" and a different "Trisha" with each pass. A. R. Shit.

At first the writing and rewriting felt like a piece of music he was rehearsing, then a driving test, with the double s's a short but sickening pair of mountain turns in one version, then it felt like a chess puzzle where you and the other player agree to only move out your two knights capture all the pieces except the pawns, and play from there. The game ends in a draw. In the end, that is by number 888, the variations which he involuntarily produced in his head like cancer cells matriculating exponentially, were killing him, especially those that played on her name: shit ra, rat his, etc., etc.). And if he'd known Brecht when Brecht was a young man, he might have agreed with the German when he wrote: "My life is becoming a mathematical something or other." But Von Spatzl's real variations, the ones that moved with him, were more about parabolic sars and momentum trading and the plodding drip drip drip of his store of Jack Daniel's. So he forced himself to



wake up with this pertinent note in his Night Journal, Vol. IX: "She is a ghost in the machine. And I am, alas, the master of a Bruno Unit."

Didn't she once say, "You smoke marijuana so you'll definitely want to do heroin." Then, didn't she laugh so hard she fell off the Old Turquoise Chair. And from the ground in that schoolyard, didn't she say, laughing uncontrollably, "Hey... mix me a gin and tonic, will you Von?"

He drew a bottle of gin with a thick black magic marker, then he fashioned a glass to drink it in. He began to mourn the loss of the love letters. They were, after all, all he had left of her, no?

When he closed his Night Journal Vol. IX, Von Spatzl slugged down the last of the Jack and drew a picture of the empty bottle as a reminder to buy more. "More," he wrote beneath the bottle. But venturing out was such a tricky business, so many people out there! he could practically hear their thoughts. At least with television he was protected. He wouldn't die alone in a crowd.

Von Spatzl fell asleep drunk and dreamed of her again. In the dream he saw her reading one of his Day Journals where his thoughts, he knew, were purer, fashioned in indirect sunlight and under surveillance of a different God. In the dream, he grabbed the book out of her hands and announced: "This, this book, is about the life and times of Von Spatzl! And they are not finished! You will just have to wait!" And then he got on his knees and put his head on her lap and whispered. "I'm sorry but it must be like this."

Today of course something like this was bound to happen: The woman with the burned face asked Von Spatzl, on a hurried expedition to buy Jack Daniels from the chubby lady at ACE Liquors, if he had a light.

"Light?"

Since it was a windy day in Flushtown, he had to cup the flame with my hands and she moved her face close to mine.

"Your face, I can't forget your face," he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. IV. "Ever." How sad we can be. It is one of the things that separates us from the garbage we get on the Internet.

Addiction comes in many packages.

"I'll take three of these," he said wordlessly, putting the bottles on the counter and offering a wad of cash. "There are many brands. Just say no, for example. I'll take a pack of 'Just Say No', please, uh, make that two packs...."

"And bear in mind," Von Spatzl lectured while walking back home, his arms weighed down with alcohol, "Jenny Jones was once a teenager with braces and pimples: Package. Remember that she, too, once hid in her father's closet just to smell the cologne on his sports coat--in privacy. Package!" Von Spatzl wrote this all down in a furious script in his Night Journal Vol IV when he was back in his Old Brown Chair. "And of course, Jenny Jones, too, was ashamed her breasts were so small. Package! She took a birth control pill when she was 12 just to 'see how it felt.' Package! ("It made me feel sexy at first then sick as a dog, she packaged for an audience of millions, Von Spatzl, gaping, included). She then went on to admit that she took a pair of BC pills *the day after* she had sex for the first time. The Russian doll.

"I've made a million mistakes," Jenny Jones confessed. "Television is the new God. God forgives all." She was later seen chugging down a glass of uterine milk and wiping her lips with the sleeve of her red Chanel suit.

"Burrpp," she said to an audience of millions."

Von Spatzl, finished with his lecture, replied: "A lot of people think I've lost it. Yes, it's true I *have* changed my molecules. Exchanged them for new and better ones, watched the weaker ones perish. "Help me! Help me!" they cried.

Interviewer: What do you say during interviews when asked about your family?

I say: I have changed my molecules.

Interviewer: Do you still blame her?

I say: No, I can't blame her.

Interviewer: Was it frightening?

Interviewer: It still is fright ending.

"You see, Silly Dodo," Von Spatzl was explaining over the phone to a dial tone, practicing to speak for the big day he'd go on to the Jenny Jones Show and defend his point of view in the midst of a heckling raucous audience, "it doesn't mean I have to speak to them. They're dead anyway. D-E-A-D. As in, dead. And because they are always speaking at once, so no one will hear me anyway. And all those dead people speaking will be looking at the ground anyway. And if they do hear me speak, they won't believe it, because I never speak. Instead, I'll clasp my hands together to keep from falling apart."

Von Spatzl hung up, satisfied he'd said his piece, said his peace and then went to take a piss. As he was urinating a quart of spent Jack Daniels, he thought about how Vic and Tim had to be scraped up and pasted back together, and that their body parts were probably mixed in the coffins. And then he thought about how he conjured up his future appearance on the Jenny Jones Show and his dead brothers in the toilet. The mind is a fascinating place to visit, he insisted to himself in the mirror. "It is."

Today, Today, Today!

Today someone came and towed away that car the woman smashed up, Von Spatzl noted in his Night Journal Vol. IV. "That car, was my RAMBLER."

I watched from his window as a man in his 40s, losing his hair and his purpose in life, hooked the bumper and raised its front end. "Tim's Towing." I went out to his front lawn to survey the scene up close and the driver asked me to make sure the hitch was attached. I thought it seemed okay so I think I

shouted "OKAY." But the hitch slipped and the car slammed down tinkling the street with broken glass and plastic.

"Don't matter none it's junk," declared Tim the Tower.

Von Spatzl himself reattached the claw to the car, much to his own amazement, as a small crowd of children gathered. Now it seemed firm, like a plucked chicken on a butcher's hook. And so, for an instant did Von Spatzl. He was a regular guy. He fit right in. He jiggled the connection as a test with his Bruno Unit.

"Try it again," Von Spatzl said inaudibly.

Tim the Tower pushed a button here, kicked a release there and hiked the old Rambler a foot or more as shit fell through its carcass onto the street. Von Spatzl attempted to stifle tears. He was overwhelmed and covered his face. If anyone asked he would say he was praying.

"Thanks, my name is Tim," Tim the Tower said to Von Spatzl, whose eyes were fixed on the connection between the tow truck and his ole Rambler. Von Spatzl looked up, but *didn't* know the face. Didn't remember the face. He read the hand-painted sign on the side of the truck: "Tim's Towing."

It was then and there he wondered whether he'd been depressed for nearly all his years. Was it over? What would happen now?

"Look," said Tim the Tower, "I'm new around here, Tim, Tim's Towing? Mind if I give you a call, maybe go bowling or something?"

Von Spatzl thought about touching Tim's face but then decided against it and wanted to pray for real instead.

Von Spatzl stared at Tim the Tower and said nothing, his mind racing with the astonishing question: "Am I a depressed person?" Tim the Tower looking at the catatonic Von Spatzl

like a lost puppy, climbed back in his cab without a second thought and revved the engine and smiled.

"It'd be fun," woofed Tim.

"Call? Fun?" mumbled Von Spatzl after him more to himself than Tim, who good-naturedly waved out the cab window. Von Spatzl wasn't sure what this Tim guy meant. Was it a wave that one used to signify: "Yes, bowling?" Von Spatzl was puzzled. Then he realized the only purpose of this exchange was for Von Spatzl to make the muttering comment: "She was as sharp as a bowling ball."

And he smiled to himself. He he he.

In the wrecked car's wake the kids made a collection of the bits of plastic. They stuffed their pockets with the colorful artifacts. One of the children, dressed up as a Karate Kid with his white cotton suit and a black belt, drew a cigarette from out of his outfit. Scratching an Ohio Blue Tip off his bare foot, he lit up. He sucked it then passed it to the girl to his left, who was dressed as a leprechaun holding a bouquet of wilted daisies. The others watched, waiting their turn.

"Call me Vic," said the kid, striding up to Von Spatzl. I called him "Tokyo."

The Talk Show Cure

Later, Von Spatzl briefly wondered if he'd seen that guy Tim the Tower as a guest on the Jenny Jones show. Maybe. Maybe. Just maybe. Was it the special on syphilis? Was he part of the panel on cross dressing? Or that ole standby, marital problems that just don't seem to go away?

Von Spatzl drew a picture of an empty row boat with no oars. "Yeah, that's me," he wrote beneath it in his Day Journal, Vol. IV. "Or is it?"

Von Spatzl's mother called and complained of intense pain in her shoulder. He told her maybe she should go bowling, perhaps a workout would do it?

He learned from Jenny Jones that one of these self-appointed gurus of spiritual enlightenment had a different color Rolls Royce for every day of the week, but that he doesn't drive them himself.

"I'm afraid..." confessed the guru. "I'm afraid...to drive."

Von Spatzl wrote "I am afraid," one thousand times in his Night Journal (Vol. IV) that night for a total of 3000 words. Then he wrote "I have a car, I like to drive" in a spiral of red ink as blood-colored splotches dripped from his pen. Oddly enough his nose began to bleed, and the blood splashed onto his song lyrics. He turned to a fresh page and three drops fell, and then it stopped. One for each of us. Von Spatzl labeled each drop "Vic," "Tim," and "Von." Was it an accidental bleeding? But he hadn't finished suffocating to death.

"Of course you feel guilty," said his shrinkologist. "Shit you can get that from Jenny Jones! But tell me, Von, what you think of the chip sector. Has it topped?"

When he was done writing "I am afraid," for the 1000th time, Von Spatzl said aloud to himself: "I am hungry," put his pen down, wiped his nose and inhaled. "I am subsisting on air."

Von Spatzl found himself in his kitchen producing a hard-boiled egg. He stared at it. "I am going to eat you."

In the *Inferno*, as everyone knows, Dante meets and talks mostly with dead Italians from Florence who have been sentenced to God knows what for eternity. Von Spatzl wrote the word: "Neighbors," and drew a house above in his Night Journal Vol. XII. Coming out the billowing smoke-choked chimney of this house, Von Spatzl wrote "Dante eats here!"

"I am learning about death," he added on the following page. "Not for the first time, however," he added on the subsequent page with a picture of Dante eating a Twinkie.

Von Spatzl had written the same thing – "I am learning about death" – in practically each of the Night Journals, always in pencil, oftentimes erasing the statement and then restating it in ball point script or doubling the letters as if to make sure the lesson was learned. As his knowledge of death increased, his penmanship improved.

Von Spatzl spent the rest of the evening monitoring the Nikkei while he smoked a pack of Chesterfields, lighting one after the other and allowing the butts to extinguish themselves in ashtray Hell. "Neighbors," he said, wistfully.

When his lungs were a burning inferno, Von Spatzl wondered "Why are there no regular animals in Hel – just weird chickens armored in scales capable of breathing fire or spitting acid? Why not happy white bunnies hopping around hell? Or even vegetables growing in the warmth of hell? What's wrong with soybeans from hell? These hell-bred hybrids were not very friendly – even to each other, even along their chain of command. What was their moral structure? What the hell was going on down there, anyway?"

Von Spatzl, you idiot: "They obviously couldn't feel their feelings and therefore were bound to Hell. They were born dead directly into hell. Kaboom!"

There is the nothing. What if the nothing exploded – into life – into the Woman With No Name?

In fact, a woman on Main Street with a broken arm in a white plaster cast trying to tie her shoelaces, exploded. She looked scared but fresh. As she put her foot up on a stone stoop, she lost her balance and tipped over, the cast broke in about dozen large pieces and two dozen small ones, and she sat there crying, coming apart, bit by bit. Her bits went all over the place and it was clear she was scared of disappearing into nothingness. It broke my heart. Watching entropy at work. A

young woman selling daffodils picked her up and held her, pulled her together, reassembled her parts and then walked her to Flushtown General. When the pair was gone I put down my fresh quarts of Jack and picked up one of the larger plaster shards. I smelled it, and the smell was her. How sad people smell sometimes. I signed my name with a little note: "The thing that frightens ME most is that I *know* I'm all alone. - Von Spatzl, resident of Flushtown."

When I was finished writing, the girl with the broken arm was back with a new cast. She'd been converted and silently held out a bouquet of yellow daffodils in her free hand. She offered me one in exchange for the note on the plaster cast. I quickly dropped it on her toe, grabbed by booze load and hobbled home. Americans!

Later Von Spatzl was looking for something in his Journals and found this entry: "She looked at me with these big saucer eyes, I could smell the fresh plaster and it looked quite beautiful against the bright yellow of the flowers. She seemed familiar... perhaps it was the daffodils? But I didn't know her and so I returned to my house and cried for an hour." Von Spatzl had written this the back of an envelope he received from the Woman With No Name months and months and months ago and taped it into his Day Journal Vol. VI at least two years ago.

On the same page: "She was born in one of the original 13 colonies so perhaps she thought she was a Mayflower girl. But, she was just a flower girl. After *all*."

List

Man on top  
Woman on top  
Side by side  
Doggy style  
Sitting  
Standing  
Walking  
Dancing



Sleeping  
Dead  
Alone  
Flowering

Von Spatzl scanned the stock boards, making copious notes, including this bit he pulled off the Internet:

Weekly review

Message Number

1166 of 1180

"Hello followers, I am your leader....

Although it was obvious (to most of us) a pull back was evident with overbought conditions at 80%, 26 5/8 may have been too much of a pull back. Support for the week at 27 has been broken at 26 with the close at 26 5/8. The pullback was not only obvious but a necessary price action if the run up is to continue. Friday's drop on low volume confirms the response of weak sellers. The next resistance level is 25 3/4, beyond that, the 24 level. We may see a further pullback which could create an excellent buying opportunity. When you see the price drop because of weak selling, DO THE OPPOSITE. Recommend: Hold- if price continues downward, buy opp. at 24 5/8..."

Von Spatzl, knitting his brow, wrote in his Night Journal Vol. IV: "I am not my name. I am a collection."

Hours later, Von Spatzl now on a hunt for clues, found this morsel in one of his old and tattered books, and it kept him up for hours: "Jeremy Bentham never missed a board meeting." He saw ole Bentham (1748-1832) in the middle carrying on about what knots. Bentham, ole bean, had it right: "The question is not can they reason? Nor can they talk? But can they suffer?"

*"Who was the ugliest woman in history?"*

he asked himself, making the question itself beautiful in a flare of Empire script and curlicues in his Night Journal Vol. IV.

Oddly enough Von Spatzl went to the movies tonight. He recorded this in his Night Journal, Vol. X.

Quite suddenly he was there leaning on his Bruno Unit, a public figure practically on line at The Flushtown Bijoux paying for his ticket. Then, just as suddenly, Von Spatzl was standing with a hand in his pocket in the lobby with all the other people. His purpose: To see a film his mother recommended about a boy who gets lost in the mountains and is saved by a savage mountain girl. They live in the treetops and construct a telephone out of vine and leaves. But the boy and the savage mountain girl don't ever saying anything except: "Quick, come!" Von Spatzl walked out after the third "Quick, come," and planted himself at the candy counter where he tried to calculate how many pop corn kernels there were in the case. The pop corn lady showed obvious discomfort.

"Well, do you want something or not?"

"Who was the ugliest woman in history?" he asked the pop corn lady.

"What?"

"Jeremy Bentham."

Von Spatzl burst out laughing, nearly falling over. Hobbling out of the Flushtown Bijoux he called back over his shoulder "Feel your feelings!"

It could have been several weeks ago when, while talking to his father, Von Spatzl sensed he seemed a bit cranky. Brief, short, terse.

"It's a full moon, maybe it's that," suggested Von Spatzl hopefully. He was simultaneously typing up the conversation to paste into his Day Journal Vol. III:

"The moon my ass," his father said.

Later, Von Spatzl in a fit of optimism wrote:

"Something to capture the imagination and the heart and keep it day after day. Keep it pumping and spinning. When I say 'today' I mean 'now.' But how much longer can my father maintain his innocence? The days and nights will surely crush him. His feelings will turn him into dust. The only thing that seems likely to survive is the picture of the camera taken by the photograph itself."

Sleep waits, God taps His foot. Von Spatzl is a footprint in the mud.

"Thank you Stockholm. Thank you Michelangelo. Thank you Bruno."

Sitting on his Old Turquoise Chair he wrote on a shred of curtain: "She wore a green sweater. That night. Years ago, as she sat on the bed and cried. How he wanted it to just be over."

"Just be over," he wrote 100 times for a total of 300 words in his Night Journal Vol. XIV.

Actually, what it amounted to (at least in the early days), before he began this tedious argument while crawling out that overturned car, was this: "I just couldn't believe it." But the jury is still out. And God says nothing.

Disbelief in fact, informs the world of belief, makes it tenable, palpable, gives its fabric a structure, he argued over and over, wishing he had a dog who would listen... who would BELIEVE in him! A dog who would find meaning in Von Spatzl's story.

And so, several books into "it" Von Spatzl wrote: "I can't believe it" 100 times in his Day Journals (Vol. II, Vol. III, Vol. V, Vol. X, Vol. XV and Vol. XX. His hand was in good form, the letters neatly arranged in each appearance of this monstrous block of text. At least Von Spatzl was improving his

penmanship. He considered whether he should devote his life to knitting his brows.

On his way back from the movies he saw the girl who smashed up the car. She walked right past him humming a tune he didn't recognize.

"She *must* have recognized me. Am I just a photograph of a camera?"

She was alone, the saint, holding a daffodil. The Woman With No Name.

His name is Von Spatzl. Dog owner, with a story to tell.

"Hi, I'm Von Spatzl. You tried to protect my life... uh, what exactly is your name?"

Von Spatzl imagined this: He meets the girl, they go out to a movie, discuss Jeremy Bentham, how much they like popcorn, talk about some of the shenanigans they've been involved in, the theology of ambiguity, the weather, their crushing life stories. They finish their coffees and go home (to her home) and simultaneously think: "It is quite possible my life might be changing. Right now. Now."

They telescope into the future and come to the same conclusion: "You can only *really* tell when it's over." And she says: "Hey Von, mix me a gin and tonic, will ya?"

Von Spatzl does some extra-curricular reflecting on his own here in his Night Journal Vol. X:

"When Jeremy Bentham is dead, and the Dodo is fast asleep, and the Kwalti (sic) Indians have had their fill in the University cafeteria picking their teeth with pencils – their erasers chewed off so there is no longer any margin of error left – well that's when we'll know for sure if we were right in our choices."

"Here's your cocktail, Schatzy."

Since he began trading stocks, Von Spatzl speculated as to whether God inserts Himself into the daily gyrations of the capital markets. Does God decide whether Catholic stocks, Jewish stocks, Muslim stocks or Buddhist stocks deserve high Price to Earnings Growth ratios, or PEGs? Does He make them go up or down accordingly? And furthermore, does a sudden burst of Wall Street prayer lead to price spikes? Or the opposite. Sinners. Money changers.

Von Spatzl made more notes on his theology of day trading on a page of calculations in his Night Journal Vol. VII: "Does God have a strong buy on DELL? Is He recommending shorting General Electric (GE) down to a more realistic valuation? Surely, GE has too many businesses to accurately value, but is valuation really beyond us?"

"Perhaps her name was Peg, after all?"

Once at home, the happy couple watch television: The Jenny Jones Show (running in syndication). But she becomes (apparently) very ill and retreats to the bathroom, locks the door and makes quite a bit of noise.

She says: "You'd better go, Mr. Von Spatzl."

Our hero, stunned, thinks: Go...Go. Gaugau = Chinese for dog-dog: Sha Tien Gau – little heaven dog – and pees on the rug.

That night, Von Spatzl notes in his Night Journal Vol VIII: "Jack the Ripper's dog's name was..." (the diary entry is not clear here as Von Spatzl has crossed it out and in its place drawn a bunny rabbit).

Sitting in his Old Brown Chair, watching the NASDAQ futures dither up and down over a GDP report that came out only a minute earlier, he further speculates: Six months later he knocks her up, and they (Von Spatzl and the girl, perhaps her name is PEG), decide to get married. And Von Spatzl opens a joint bank account and she picks out the curtains, a cascade of daffodils.

Everything is cool as a cucumber. Until one day:

"No napkins."

"No napkins?"

"No napkins."

"None?"

"What do we wipe our hands on? The curtains?"

In the next episode of the dream Von Spatzl writes her phone number down in red lipstick (Chanel No. 5) on the palm of his hand. He then dreams of dialing the number, but never does and rubs his scarred face wondering: Why? Why? Why? He glances over at Jenny Jones who is demonstrating a recipe for banana bread. He unplugs his phone and stares at the cord.

"Who would collect me? Stockholm?"

Von Spatzl dozed off for a total of five minutes in his Old Brown Chair, his only real friend with this thought:

"Maybe I, Von Spatzl, explorer of the unknown, should get a dog in case I fall ill. The dog can go for help.... Go on girl, get Timmy...."

Von Spatzl startled by a clang...wakes...

"I am finally being called...."

No, it was just the knife sharpener man busking the neighborhood in his little pedal-powered cart, his grindstone at the ready, and hand-painted signs beckoning: "Knives! Knives!" He's got a bell that gets dull people out of their houses, knives glinting, looking for an edge. Von Spatzl naturally recalled an early attempt to end his life – "Stay away Vic & Tim... or my blood will be on your hands... a Ginsu never needs sharpening." The Ginsu pointed his very young and

tender throat... but then, exhausted, falls back asleep and revisits this dreamy scene from his innocence:

"They shot the president! They shot the president! Turn on the TV!"

At first, young Von thinks Vic and Tim shot the president, as they are always racing around the house with weapons – guns, knives, grenades, bombs. It wouldn't surprise him. Those two are dangerous. But no, this "they" was an anonymous they, the ones no one quite knows, except his mother who is screaming about this "they."

It is a balmy autumn day and Von Spatzl, wearing his cowboy shirt – actually the only shirt he ever wore in those sweet days – and his green dungarees with the holes, is eating buttered noodles out of the brown ceramic bowl in which he takes all his meals. On the bottom of the bowl he encounters a little smiling Mexican boy with a tall sombrero and a burro standing next to a cactus. Buenas Noches.

The president is dead.

"He's dead, it's terrible!" His mother is hysterical. Nothing unusual there, actually.

Vic and Tim were actually up in their room poisoning the gold fish with nail polish remover. And when they rush downstairs they say to Von Spatzl: "What is that shit? Looks like you're eating crickets."

In his Day Journal Vol. V, Von Spatzl produces the following information: Estimated time since life appeared on Earth: 70,800,000,000,000,000 seconds. Estimated time it takes to cook Jiminy Cricket: 3 seconds. Conclusion: Lots of cricket eatin'.

"What's for dinner, honey?"

"Crickets."

"Again!?"

"Then go watch television!!"

"The President is dead."

"Buenas Noches."

Was it today he had a New York pretzel with yellow mustard while wearing a bowler hat with a little smiling Mexican boy inside it? Von Spatzl removed the hat when he had finished eating the pretzel. He discovered mustard on it. He admired the yellow color.

In his Day Journal Vol. V, Von Spatzl drew in yellow Crayola a picture of a hat in a cat. As he was working away, the squirrels who had moved into the attic several months ago, were making noise they way he made money. What were they squirreling away?

Von Spatzl returned to his oeuvre: "Lello" he wrote five times for a total of five words.

Last night there was quarrel in the street. Verbal axes were tossed: She accused him of loving someone else.

"So why don't you just, just... punch me in the face?" she yelled.

"Yeah, why don't I?" he yelled back. "Paste your face with my fist? Huh? Is that what you want? Huh? Is it? Huh?"

Von Spatzl realized that anything, but anything could happen on TV these days. Even the King of the United States could die. He acknowledged it in some small way as part of his ongoing cure in his Day Journal Vol. X. "Buenas Noches."

Von Spatzl captured the quarrel on tape, recording it over a radio hour of Gerschwin he'd taped months and months ago from a public radio station. Twenty minutes later, when the couple took their noisy hieroglyphics to more private



surroundings, Von Spatzl played the tape and laughed, smiled, ate a boiled egg, smoked, drank a Jack Daniels, practiced typing with his Bruno unit, listened and laughed some more. He did the same the next day, and the day after that. When Von Spatzl had memorized the contents of this violent verbal duet, and committed to memory its high and low points, he could hum along to it much as he had the Gerschwin in his happier moments. Von Spatzl mailed this little piece of Kraftwerk to the next door neighbor (also, by the way, a fervent Jenny Jones watcher), with no return address, with the note: "Hear this? Rhapsody in black and blue."

Today in the street not far from Von Spatzl's house in Flushtown, a man was lying in the gutter, singing "My Way." He rolled against the bank building. He held an empty bottle of beer and began pulling at his zipper. Then the man yanked on his ding dong. Von Spatzl thought the man was going to masturbate, but instead this unlikely sex offender streamed his piss across the sidewalk. The arc hit the ground and sprayed a Yorkshire terrier, who barked, as if that wasn't fair play, even for doggies. Two policemen twirling their nightsticks, saw the offender, nodded to each other, pointed briefly to the exposed ding dong and kept on walking.

"Police business," Von Spatzl mused. Then he muttered, muttered, muttered: "How amusing...You'll never catch me, copper!"

"Official business," Von Spatzl wrote when he returned home. He printed it with authority in black grease pencil 500 times in his Day Journal Vol. IV for a total of 1000 words. Then added this note: "Dante must have had a good laugh."

THE WOMAN DID. Own a television. And that's what started it off...her loyal interest in Jenny Jones and what the messy-haired blonde witch had to say as she and her guests flew across the television screen high on amphetamines. It was a bonding experience, and Von Spatzl knew it. Did she say she had six year old cousin who smoked? Prince Albert in a can?

And didn't it turn out she drove a car, too? Didn't Von Spatzl discover it was an Austrian model? Wasn't that a pleasant surprise! Did she also take amphetamines on a regular basis? Blue ones? Red ones? Yellow ones? Would she, too, die an anonymous accidental auto death? The Woman With No Name? How would he know? He typed in "Auto Death" into an Internet search engine and came up with a picture of himself playing Borkov in the first round in Bratislava in the early 1980s. Borkov drunk, got into his Yugo after the loss and drove into the Danube. Those were the days, weren't they?

Von Spatzl wrote the words "Auto Death" across a double spread in his Day Journal Vol. VI, in big blocky letters. Von Spatzl then erased his "Auto Death," scouring it away with very hard strokes and littering his lap with spent rubber, as if the wheels of 100,000 cars had lost a their hair in their route to baldness.

Von Spatzl pondered his "Auto Death" drawing and erasure, an obvious reference to the automobile deaths of Vic and Tim. Sure, he wasn't blind, just drunk.

"How can we know the dates, the precise deaths of anyone?" he wrote. "Why take chances with someone who is about to die? Would you marry a leukemia patient? What for? Why not just pray for them instead?"

The mood shifted. On the following page he noted:

"With every cigarette I light, hope courses through me. She sat on the bed and cried. In her green sweater."

THE RUSSIAN, YAYA NIYANYA, was very tall, very pretty, wore a gold cross and spoke bad English with her very bad teeth, recalled Von Spatzl in his Night Journal Vol. XV. Met her on the quai at the train station in Budapest.

First Yaya Niyanya wanted to know the time, then Yaya Niyanya asked for a cigarette, then Yaya Niyanya proposed a drink, then Yaya Niyanya asked me to "learn her English," and finally Yaya Niyanya suggested I pay her ticket to Bratislava (I

was going there anyway to play in a minor chess tournament, which I eventually won after a 5-hour struggle with Kigolov, playing black). Once in the compartment she said: "Watch me drink tea."

We were alone, in first class, of course. It was already well past 9, so I was drinking champagne and smoking rolled black Turkish cigarettes, dappled with enough hashish to cut the tension of the long Eastern European nights. She went out of the compartment, her long legs trying to keep up with the rest of her body. Yaya Niyanya returned with a baby bottle, a tea bag soaking in the hot water. She gave it a shake then reached into her purse and extracted two sugar cubes. She unscrewed the top of the bottle, dropped them in, plop, plop, screwed the top back on, gently rattled it and began to suck on the biberon. Yaya Niyanya smiled sneakily, and with one hand holding the tea to her mouth, the other hand unbuttoned her blouse. Yaya Niyanya continued slurping and undressing. Soon she was quite naked, curled up, drinking her tea.

"Is that how you normally drink your tea, Yaya Niyanya?"

"I'm a baby," she giggled.

YEARS LATER, Von Spatzl would unerringly write in his Night Journal, Vol X: "Baby, you can drive my car. Sorry, I don't drive. I'm a guru."

Entering a bid for SAP, the German software concern, Von Spatzl was reminded of The Austrian Girl, how she said she didn't think she'd ever make it to Flushtown. She sent a post card, writing: "Ach, Von Spatzl, ich glaube nicht daß ich nach Fischtown kommen kann...wegen Krebs-Problemen..." On the picture side was the Bahnhof in Zug. But she came anyway, and in the end, she didn't have lung cancer or anything other than crooked teeth although she still smoked like the burning Tower of Pizza. Her hair was still lovely and it stayed on her head, and she still smelled of flowers. Von Spatzl picked up 1000 shares and sold them 5 minutes later for a gain of \$2,456.78 minus brokerage fees, which Von Spatzl noted

beneath her post card which he affixed to the page like a door w/a scotch tape hinge) in his Night Journal Vol. XX.

"You saved my life, you've rehabilitated me, thank you...please, sit down..."

The Austrian Girl appeared as if she'd had a very good education. She wore glasses, for example.

"We both speak German fluently!"

It was decided then, and noted in the Night Journal Vol. IX, that Von Spatzl would substitute her, The Austrian Girl, for THE OTHER ONE (the Woman With No Name) in order to recover and to keep from ELECTROCUTING himself with a ginsu knife.

"My story is absolutely shocking, My dear The Austrian Girl..."

"So? Tell me how vonderful you are," she said, giggling and angling for a drink.

"Let me get my manual, it's in there..."

When he returned, Von Spatzl massaged his chin thoughtfully and announced: "I don't know if I can sleep with you tonight, I hope that's okay. But I will give you the set up, and a hundred reasons why I am the right man at the right time. And why, it was funny, really funny the time we made toast for dinner and laughed and considered little Von Spatzls..."

"Who? What? Say, don't you have any beer? I *am* from Austria... that's like 3.4 liters per day. Vee have quotas," she chuckled. "Like your affirmative Aktion!"

Von Spatzl had serious projects now, he explained to The Austrian Girl. He warmed his brandy in his hands and pointed to the stars.

"Mind if I call you The Austrian Girl?"

"That is very funny," said The Austrian Girl. "Du bist ein Lustige Mann."

"Yes, of course, one has to be... in these... most difficult of times... But let me offer you a short explication of what I do..."

"Bitte..."

"Most of my research focuses on those, shall we say, 'special' individuals who, if you will, have forever changed a utility item," he explained. "Such as a pencil. And, with a single simple addition such as an eraser affixed to its head, the pencil becomes a *complex* machine. A machine capable of forging the fiction of history and other wonders. So these special people – I call them wishful tinkerers – I gave them a land all their own near the Hibernia Mountain Range. Each day, thousands climb Mount Hibernia for inspiration. Each night they climb back down and go to sleep."

She laughed and kissed him.

"Oh! Von Spatzl, you're a genius," she said. "I love you. Can I try that mechanical arm of yours?"

"Thank you, Stockholm."

But even Von Spatzl was a bit surprised, too, when the police kept on going. Police business! Ha-yuck! The Austrian Girl said, rhetorically: "What would they do with him, Der Pisser, when he says, 'You'll never catch me copper!'"

Later on, perhaps even months later, Von Spatzl saw three boys, apparently drunk, mulling over their fate on the planet. He described it all in his Night Journal Vol. III. One of these boys was a picture of youth – in effect, the future – crying on the sidewalk. Another, standing above him, wore thick glasses. He was obviously the moral force, the clerical voice, the voice of reason, too, of the trio. The third, an obvious bully playing the role of the military, attempted to drag the priest boy away. But the boy with glasses resisted and instead offered his leg to the boy on the sidewalk to cry against. Von

Spatzl watched this piece of theater with interest and reflected about how dogs (male or female) will eventually hump the nearest leg, regardless of its sexual propensity or inclination. As it turned out, the future hesitated to hump the moral pillar, and eventually, the military succeeded by brute force, tearing the boy and his proffered leg away--perhaps to fuck himself. It seemed to Von Spatzl, these were their last days of innocent drinking. After tonight, he imagined, serious drinking lay ahead.

Now, fully abandoned, the future cried out: "I'm a fucking nothing."

"I know how you feel, buddy... Shake, it's a deal," Von Spatzl said softly in reply.

The boy looked over to Von Spatzl, keen observer of innocence going down the toilet. But instead of offering an antidote, our hero stuffed both his hands into his pocket and said loudly enough to scare even himself, "I'm sorry, I'm in a meeting."

MY FATHER CALLS. They are taking a cruise to Treasure Beach. He seemed a little anxious about the trip.

"Your mother wants to go," says his father. "I could care less."

"Returning to the sea," I say. "Makes perfect sense."

Next thing I know, Von Spatzl hops into his classic Rambler with his grocer's arm, Bruno, and speeds down the motorway to Treasure Beach with The Austrian Girl. Their hair flying in the wind, bugs splattering on the windshield, cigarettes impossible to light--this was the life! Why not introduce The Austrian girl to mom and dad? It would make them happy before they pass on into the great unknown.

"Our Von is finally happy," they'd say from their perch in heaven knows where.

Driving, Von Spatzl worries more and more about his parents' happiness as he is pelted with road bugs. Their happiness depended upon his happiness, and his happiness, depended on ...The Austrian girl? Possibly, yes! Quite possibly indeed! He could see the logic! Pawn to Q2, K to C3.

Unsurprisingly, the logic was skewed perversely: Von Spatzl seemed happiest when The Austrian Girl was sad because it was something he could relate to, like his hard boiled eggs. As for "real *real* happiness" Von Spatzl ultimately viewed it (skeptically, I should add), a "bottoming out process," (a U-shaped bottom and not a V-shaped bottom), although there were many corrections and this was one here. Happiness was not achieved at 3 in the morning, but possibly, conceivably over a period of hundreds of 3 in the mornings, with several buy backs at 4 in the mornings and sell-offs at 5 in the mornings even with no volume to speak of throughout the day. The pattern repeated until there was a break through the 50- or 200-Moving Day Average. When price gaps were filled, when fear turned into complacency, there was a chance for upward movement. Meanwhile, it was all very flip-flop, and you only had to look at the spread, the price differential between the bid and the ask, to see it. So Von Spatzl placed a limit order to buy 1500 shares of NVDA at \$31.25 and sell the 1500 lot at \$33.25. While there was still some downside risk, it was minimal. The upside looked promising. Promising. Promising. Promising. For at least \$3000, minus brokerage fees, of course.

In the meantime, he shorted the top 10 Dow components, looking for that pull back that normally follows a ladder-like step up: A 15% correction in Old Economy work horses. In two year's time or better we might be looking at either a "soft" landing or a "hard" landing. That would be the time to short every index and boil off the excess...But there was time for that, if indeed Von Spatzl survived beyond tomorrow.

"Dad! Mom! I've gone long on love and I'm shorting the DOW."

But this was where he found out the truth. At the bottom. The bottoming process. Life at its very bottom is worth about a buck and a quarter.

*Editor's note: Well, not really. There's always the pennies on the pink sheets, delisting, and Chapter 11, which rewrites the American Dream in Babytalk.*

Von Spatzl eventually ran into Tim the Tower. Tim was cruising Von Spatzl's neighborhood in his truck looking for crack ups, and Von Spatzl was out on his front stoop counting the ants with his Bruno Unit. Tim pulled up in front of Von Spatzl's house. Von Spatzl counted 543 ants as they busied themselves with a piece of spent pinkish chewing gum.

Tim hovered over Von Spatzl, drinking a tall beer out of a can and sweating it out, said business was pretty slow.

"People don't drink and drive anymore," he lamented.

"You are God's footprint, Tim," said Von Spatzl, extracting a cigarette from Tim the Tower's pocket with his grocer's arm.

"Hey!"

Later that day, Von Spatzl wrote the words "Soft Landing" by outlining its rounded letters and then filling in the outside with a pencil, its eraser bit off in an anxious fit. Its scratchy anxious lines reminded him of his efforts as a Kindergartener when asked to draw a picture of a chicken in Miss Spelling's class. His intention now, nearly three decades later, was to create a study for a pillow to die on. He imagined embroidering the pattern on a pillowcase, putting his head on it, and never waking up. A soft landing.

"Not exactly a suicide," he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. VII, "just anticipating reality."

Before he went to sleep that night in his Old Turquoise Chair, Von Spatzl asked God: "What is your outlook for the next two quarters?" But of course he couldn't sleep and soon found



himself at his Old Brown Desk opening up a fresh page in Night Journal Vol. VII.

"I wonder what Dante's neighbors in Florence thought of him?" wrote Von Spatzl. "Did they say: 'Hey, there goes the noisemaker?'" He penned the word "Florin," once, in gold, and tried to go to sleep on it. But could not.

For hours Von Spatzl stared at the paint peeling on his ceiling and walls wondering aloud: "What does He eat? Where does He sleep? Does He dream? What does He do for health care? Does He save his letters? Does He keep lists? Does he have a Bruno Unit? What is His relationship with Santa Claus?" He crawled into bed but his pillow was too hard.

Von Spatzl wrote his thesis in high school on Dante. His twin brothers Vic and Tim drove him to school in the family car, a green VW Bug. Once they stopped abruptly at a traffic light and Von Spatzl's head went through the front windshield. When they pulled him back into the car they assessed the damage. "Ah, you'll be all right," they guffawed, lit a joint, and continued on to school, glass bits in his hair. He clutched his worn copy of *The Inferno* as he made his way away from them silently, no noisemaker was Von Spatzl.

*Editor's note: Was it then the young Von Spatzl plotted his revenge?*

"I went to the bowling alley to watch the automatic ball returns and listen to the smack and drop of the wooden pins," Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XXIII. "What a clever system. Soon I was in the bar and the boy, Tokyo, was there, drinking what looked like a rum and coke. Tokyo was incognito in a pair of green dungarees, the holes worn out on the knees, a cowboy shirt with mother of pearl snap down buttons and an Indian belt with the word MISSOURI spelled out in small colored beads holding his small frame all together. His kid sister was dressed as a ballerina on top and matching green dungarees like her brother on the bottom. It appeared she was drinking shots of Schnapps.

I made believe I was phoning someone – “Oh! Hi! Oh! Yes! Really? Nooo!” – and watched the kid light a cigarette, hand it to his sister and light another. “Oh! You don’t say...?”

An old lady with a painted face, looking like Dante’s mother on amphetamines, served them. Tokyo seemed like a regular.

The following day, Von Spatzl was mixing a cocktail for The Austrian Girl wondering if he would relapse and wake up.

“I saw the guy who was pissing in the street today!” she exclaimed, as excited as if she’d won first prize in the annual solo accordion competition in Zug. “He was pissing again!” she giggled. “And then the coppers walked by, just like you said. You know, ‘You’ll never catch me coppers!’ I mean exactly like you said. So either this never happened and you predicted the future, or it happens every day and is 100 percent predictable.”

“A U-shaped bottom is scheduled four years hence,” said Von Spatzl, busily stirring a concoction of gin and vanilla. “But currently we’re still climbing.” He believed he was in the right place at the right time, because The Austrian Girl confirmed this. “My dear The Austrian Girl, go get your Stradivarius, I think we should celebrate! Would you like an egg?” He marvelled at her crooked teeth. They gave her character.

It was only a week later that Von Spatzl was walking, holding the hand of The Austrian Girl when they strolled passed the woman Von Spatzl knew was a drunk but suspected was a whore. The Austrian Girl said nothing, and didn’t seem to be aware of how he, Von Spatzl, had spent his day – drawing pictures of the woman he knew was a drunk but suspected was a whore in thin, blue colored pencil. In his drawing he gave the woman he knew was a drunk but suspected was a whore a foppy hat with violets. It lead him to think that perhaps The Austrian Girl was a plant, which he noted in his Night Journal Vol. XXIII.

Questions for The Austrian Girl:

1. What if the police did take him?
2. Perhaps it was too nice a day to make a scene?
3. Maybe they didn't feel responsible? It's not my job type thing?
4. But isn't it equally possible, particularly in these times, they are caught, as are we, in a time loop, and every day is yesterday? Like when you sat on my bed and cried, sat on my bed and cried, sat on my bed and cried?
5. You're a plant, aren't you?

"I am in agreement with you Von Spatzl," said The Austrian Girl, cracking open a hardboiled egg on the Old Brown Table. "I believe we can now proceed to the bedroom."

Written on a phone bill and taped into the Night Journal Vol. XV, was this sentence: "N'hésitez pas à nous contacter pour toute information complémentaire."

A photograph of a kitten stuffed into a jar was taped onto the following page, below which Von Spatzl had written: "Bonsai Kitten," and "Vic" and "Tim," a copyright symbol next to the names of his dead twin brothers. Good twin, bad twin. Von Spatzl was well aware of the projections of anima/animus onto his two brothers and boiled himself up an egg.

Meantime, there was always the money, the question about what to do with the money. What about the money? Von Spatzl oiled his Bruno Unit and began to count \$100 dollar bills with it, placing them in a big stack.

"I DON'T GO OUT," HE WROTE. "I'm indecisive about the money. What's my *raison d'être*?" Then he erased it all. On top of that, he answered rethorically, "To become a Bonsai Kitty and get take out food with my grocer's arm?" Von Spatzl realized that this whole thing was an elaborate concoction of gin and vanilla. Snore.

"You see, The Austrian Girl came AFTER the other girl, the Woman With No Name," Von Spatzl was explaining to his shrink who snoring to the tune of \$100 an hour.

"She is my savior," he said to his psychotherapist, whose eyelids fluttered in REM sleep. Von Spatzl wanted to ram the Bruno Unit's into his ear, or his doctor's open mouth, but after smoking quietly for five minutes he'd cooled down and left him sleeping and a note about how to deal with the recent FED Rate hikes. "Go long on fiber optics," the note said. "They are borrowing heavily for the buildout, then short the shit out of them as they'll all go bankrupt. Earnings will be catastrophic." He closed the door and went home and wrote for free: "Savior" 1,000 times for a total of 1,000 words. Beneath this block of text he pasted down the letters he'd cut out of the Wall Street Journal: R e L A P s e.

Then this dream: Von Spatzl realized as he was waiting for an egg to boil – as if for the first time – that Jesus was killed for a non-murder. And not just once, but... how many times was Jesus killed? The unearthly paradox! Now in a sense, he understood what he'd written many years ago concerning Nietzsche. How in the fall of 1888 the ex-soldier and philosopher had, upon completion of a ruthless attack on the crucified Christ, vowed, "I swear to you we shall have the whole world in convulsions. I am a fate." Sometime later, he went mad, of course, and died. Did Christ know what would happen to Von Spatzl? That he would be killed BEFORE and AFTER the Austrian Girl? Von Spatzl lay in a street (in the dream), about to be crushed by a carriage with two white horses. His dream ended as he wrote (in his dream) for the 1,000th time "Savior" in his Day Journal Vol. III.

Von Spatzl awoke and forgot most of what he dreamed about. But he was more than a bit surprised to see he had written the word "Savior" 1,000 times. He was certain he would wake up one day and die in the evening. Was that indeed the plan?

Today Tim the Tower called Von Spatzl on the telephone.

"Of all things!" said Von Spatzl as he held the telephone in the air and stared at it as Tim loudly asked if Von Spatzl wanted to see a movie.

"My wife is bowling tonight," he shouted.

"No," said Von Spatzl in a whisper so Tim couldn't hear. Then he broadcasted: "I think I'm going to stay home and get drunk."

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha," laughed Tim.

"Yeah, that is funny."

Von Spatzl hung up and reached for his Night Journal Vol. XXI. He opened it up and found himself in the middle of the book where he read a note to him signed by The Austrian Girl. She quoted the mysterious Anaïs Nin (1903-1977): "And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

As it turned out, Von Spatzl did go to the bowling alley, Flushtown Lanes, and looked for Tim the Tower's wife, whom he'd never met. Von Spatzl sat at the bar with a Jack and a Chesterfield and surveyed the women bowling. She's the sharp one with the chiseled hair-doo, he considered. That slim blonde with the green dress? The chubby redhead in the designer jeans? That dark brunette smoldering with a smoke? Probably not. In the end, he couldn't guess which one belonged to Tim the Tower. Probably none of them, or all of them.

Von Spatzl's own wife had left him earlier that day – again. She was always leaving and never coming back. She'd never even spent the night. And tonight maybe Von Spatzl would die and she'd never know because she left. That was her plan, wasn't it?

"I never loved you, Von Spatzl," she screamed out the car window, speeding off into the future. "And stop calling me your wife! We were never married! God! Jesus! Get a life!"

He thought she said, "Get a wife."

Before it's too late.

He wrote: "Well anyway, one day I'll stop all this running around and settle down." Into my Old Brown Chair.

Von Spatzl drew a picture of his tombstone in his Day Journal Vol I: "Here lies Von Spatzl" it read. "He felt his feelings. Snore. Snore. Snore."

Von Spatzl said to himself under his breath, "Uh oh, I'm ahead of the curve."

At Flushtown Lane's bar, Ace Bar, Von Spatzl ordered another Jack and Tokyo ambled over, nearly tripping in his oversized yellow rubber boots. Tokyo appeared to sniffing airplane glue from an old sock.

"How many mice do you think I'm worth?" he asked

"That all depends," Von Spatzl told him. "My understanding of value is purely subjective and not because I'm a rat, but because of the Fed Rate hikes. You see it makes stocks more expensive, but they continue to rise...against common sense."

Tokyo lit a cigarette and passed it to his new friend.

Von Spatzl: How old are you?

Tokyo: I'll be eight on Tuesday.

Von Spatzl: I hear you buddy.

Tokyo: So you're a mouse training to be a rat?

Von Spatzl: Actually I used to train zoo animals, but now I train bras.

Tokyo: What's a bra?

Von Spatzl: A bra? A bra is what my wife used once to try and strangle me.

Tokyo: So it's a weapon, like a gun or a knife.

Von Spatzl: No, not at all. It's more like carry-on luggage.

Tokyo: Another drink?

Von Spatzl: Sure, why not?

Spaceboy

Many, many months ago, how many I can't remember, was the beginning of everything, of course.

Von Spatzl had found \$500 cash in a wallet in the street where his old Rambler had been parked, then smashed, then towed away. Tokyo was out in the street to check out the commotion, accompanied by his sister. He was dressed in silver spaceboy outfit with a pair of six guns, and she was dressed as a squaw and wore makeup, red lipstick on her teeth. Tokyo drew a cigarette from his gravity belt and lit it, handed it to his sister and lit another and handed it to Von Spatzl.

"I quit," Von Spatzl told him taking the cigarette and gave him a quarter from his pocket in exchange. They sat on the front porch going through the items found in the wallet:

1. Three clarinet reeds
2. A condom 3-pack, the wrapping worn thin, tied together by a rubber band. (A handwritten note offered: "Here, you might need these.")
3. A guitar pick made out of a torn piece of an American Express card.
4. Two free movie passes to see a "Urban Boy Savage Girl."
5. A check for "One Thousand Kisses."
6. A picture of the woman who smashed up the car in a summer dress standing on a golf course practicing her swing.
7. A 25-cent discount coupon for FRESH FARM EGGS from the Flushtown Market.
8. A phone number, the ink smeared by tears.
9. A note: "If lost please return to..." and the address and name unreadable.
10. A list of the works by Jeremy Bentham.

Tokyo said his mother was calling him.

"I didn't hear anything," said Von Spatzl.

Tokyo: She's sonic.

Von Spatzl: A boom.

Tokyo: Well, then...

Von Spatzl: Yes, well, then.

Tokyo's Sister: Are you a crazy person?

Von Spatzl: Have you ever read anything by Jeremy Bentham?

Von Spatzl lifted a \$100 bill out of the wallet and handed it to Tokyo, then gave his sister the discount coupon for eggs, then said, "Wait!" and handed her a fifty.

Tonight Von Spatzl wrestled with his hall closet, he noted in his Day Journal Vol. I. So much stuff he didn't need. Basketballs, baseballs, tennis balls, footballs, and amphetamines. There were stacks of Chinese dictionaries, Portuguese dictionaries, a book on parakeets, a book on canaries, a book on squirrels, assorted pots and pans, silverware, a tuxedo, a pair of black penny loafers and several shoe boxes filled with photographs of him and Vic and Tim from summer camps. And a picture of a woman he vaguely recognized, laughing, a Chesterfield smoking in her hand.

"She, uh what? She remarried?"

Very infrequently a snow storm enveloped Flushtown, and when the snows did fall, they covered everything in a solid white blanket. Von Spatzl, like a child wearing his mittens for kittens, went outside and built a snowman. It was 3 am. When he was finished he stepped back some 15 feet and then raced towards his snow man and hurled himself off his crutches, landing on top and crushing him into wet nonsense.

"That'll teach you," he said to the snowman.

With the streets of Flushtown covered with snow and ice, Von Spatzl out on an egg, cigarette and Jack run, slipped on the sidewalk. The drunk he suspected was a whore picked him up, brushed him off, set him straight.

"Be careful, Sonny," she said. "You might kill yourself."

"Now that's funny, lady."



Von Spatzl signed up at the bank to open a new account with the \$400, but realized he had only \$350 left. He wrote my name carefully on the slip of paper: "Entropy."

In the end he fucked up the bank account thing but soon enough, the \$350 found its way into a Charles Schwab e-account and Von Spatzl didn't sleep at all that night, instead spending the night writing it all down in his Day Journal Vol. I.

It was starting again. He could feel it all slipping away. In an attempt to set himself straight again, Von Spatzl reached into the ether and stabbed at his essence.

"Come here, Damnit!"

But his grasp yielded nothing, again. Which is why he originally turned to money and the markets and his Dell and watched the frenzied trading for EMC, which was already up \$5 and climbing. He plunked his networth down on EMC.

"Storage," he lamented in his Day Journal Vol. VII, "will soon become a commodity. But there will be about a dozen splits before that day.

A car pulled up in front of Von Spatzl's house today and a woman got out and started smashing up his Rambler. Von Spatzl watched as she destroyed it with a sledgehammer. He hadn't made a payment on the Rambler for four years. In fact, he'd never even driven it. He told my parents he'd sold the car, but that was a lie. He just couldn't let go of it, citing a case of extreme *anima mundi*, and chronic attachment to objects that are referred to as "she." Well, it was too beat up for the sellers to recuperate, anyway.

"Why are you smashing up my old Rambler?"

"Who are you, Games Bond?" she asked. Von Spatzl lit a Chesterfield and poured himself a Jack. He was always interested in Game Theory.

"Now that is funny, lady, very funny," he said. Look, here's \$100. And here's a crowbar. Go murder a murder of crows."

Von Spatzl remembered a classical piece of music then, and started to hum it.

"Da dum dum dum da di dumm dumm dumm...."

It was her favorite but he'd never know. When he woke, he held a crowbar between his legs.

THE DREAM OF REAL TIME WAS MEASURED IMPERFECTLY, in terms of Real Money. Time in general, for Von Spatzl, was now measured in money. \$500 dollars ago, for example.

CSCO at \$3.15

CSCO at \$6.75

CSCO at \$12.35

That was \$1750 ago, wasn't it?

As the Nasdog rached upwards, Von Spatzl was sitting on his longs and pacing, wondering how he got into this unending mess: Alone, afraid, sick, drifting on a boat filled with money with his crutches and Bruno Unit. But then, something caught his attention from the TV: "The things she said then...The things she says now." This was the theme today on the Jenny Jones show. (The Jenny Jones show is on right after The Damn Things Kids Do These Days show, which Von Spatzl watched or listened to almost every weekday at 4:30. He read sometime ago in the newspaper that they put The Damn Things Kids Do These Days show on in time for kids to watch themselves right after school. It's been on for 30 years. Up beat format now, it was reported. Violence for the first twenty minutes, then sex for ten minutes, and then ten minutes for living with parents, and ten or what's left for one weird story).

Today's guest, a psychologist from Schaumberg, Illinois, was talking about "relationships" and what people say and what people do. The psychologist said, "Most people are in chronic denial," to which Jenny Jones responded in a high-pitched squeal. "Ha ha ha ha... that's so funny! Not me Dr.

Whateverthefuckyournameis... Hey! we'll be right back after a word from our sponsor."

Suddenly it was \$51,275.52 ago.

Time is money, real time is real money. That was the real problem wasn't it? Was this real money?

## *The Problem, A Novel*

By Von Spatzl

The young keepitalist retook command of his ship and surveyed the damage. The first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eight mates were dead. The cook lay in the galley, poisoned with arsenic-laced hard boiled eggs. The remaining ones, that is, THE NOT DEAD deck hands, had jumped ship, leaving Captain Von Spatzl with everything and nothing. He had all the gold, but no maps. He was lost at sea, but had plenty of food. He had plenty of food but nothing to drink.

So he drifted contemplating a life of drift. Et cetera, et cetera ad infinitum, ad nauseum, yada yada yada...The end.

He reformulated the question: "Was this *real* money?"

He reformulated the answer: "Thank you, Stockholm."

Von Spatzl wrote the words: "COMPOUNDED Interest" 2,500 times for 5,000 words in ball point pen. His hand (my hand) hurt terribly after this exercise and had to be nursed into numbness by 1/2 a quart of Jack. An hour later Von Spatzl read that a Talmudic scholar had been recruited to write the Koran. That must have hurt, writing a Holy book from scratch.

"But, really: Where is the interest in *The Problem, A Novel* By Von Spatzl?" he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. VIII. Is it a Holy Book? Is it a work of art? A recipe for pain? A shopping list? An advertisement left under your windshield wiper? Or just

something you pick up at the airport to get you from Spokane to Sioux City?

Yikes! EMC at \$26. Historic returns! And here we sit in the historic past! The return! Fuck bonds! Fuck indexing and hedging! It's about growth assets - intangibles! And the perception that if you don't get in now, you'll pay 10x as much in a month. So the fear, and the greed. Actually more about greed and fear than anything else.

"Aren't you afraid of becoming independent via the returns?" he wrote. It was one of his deepest moments of insight. The return. To where? To God.

Meanwhile as the NASDAQ continued to fly upwards, mocking gravity, the Nikkei was committing hari kari.

"If only I spoke Japanese," Von Spatzl wrote 100 times for a total of 500 words. "If only I spoke Japanese, I could reason with them."

"Pay as you go," he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XI, as he ceremoniously shorted the Nikkei, bowing deep and low to his computer screen. "Chop! Chop!" \$15,000 later, he closed his eyes and fell into a black dreamless sleep for a full 24 hours.

When he awoke at 3 am the following night, Von Spatzl's first thought was not that he'd missed an entire NASDAQ trading day, but that he hadn't written a word in 24 hours. Then he wrote the following poem in his Night Journal Vol. IV:

#### Meetings in Mogadourocity

If you count today, our separated lives  
reach further than the one where you  
and I learned Portuguese and swore  
a Pirate pledge, and our flag was raised  
against all other lovers, the sweet bread  
warm in our mouths, and the sea a promise  
of time instead of death by drowning.  
É tempo de ir.

Did you watch as I plunged over that  
bridge, mailing myself to you? What  
do you feel, now that a child grows  
in your tummy, the seed of some mistake  
you refuse: Your dead father, a ghost,  
leads you. É tempo de ir.

We were to go to Mogadourocity,  
off the Portuguese Coast. I have already left,  
so you will see my empty chair:  
and my log, open and filled but the  
blue ink of dates and times rubbed  
clean by the ocean is you.  
É tempo de ir.

--Von Spatzl

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Later that night, The Flushtown Howard Johnson's was going bananas. Forks clinked on plates, glasses filled with milk slipped out of little hands, and couples and families in booths gobbled small mountains of bleached white smashed potatoes and washed out strips of dead cow. All the food had a pale glow.

Von Spatzl read the sign on the All You Can Eat Salad Bar. "Pay as you go." One weighed the food, got a ticket. Potatoes cost the same per pound as the meatloaf, as the chocolate cake as the lima beans.

Tokyo was there, dressed as a cowboy again, although this version came with a red-checked shirt and a pair of cap guns. He ate strawberry ice cream out of a deep parfait dish while his sister, dressed as a gypsy in a long dress, waved beads in the air, practicing some kind of incantation. She wore an eye patch and soon went to work blowing coke bubbles with a straw, which backfired, the coke spewing out her nose. Von

Spatzl sat down with them and ordered a Jack. He gave them each a hundred dollars in twenties.

Me: Here's your allowance, kids.

Gypsy Princess: Are you a fruitcake?

Me: Kids, You gotta know when to fold up, know when to hold up. I tell you this from my heart: Pay as you go.

Tokyo: How many mice am I worth?

Gypsy Princess: Some day I'd like to meet the Queen.

Me: One day you'll be lucky enough to retire, too.

Tokyo: She's always talking about the Queen. Have you got a cigarette?

Me: You really shouldn't smoke.

Gypsy Princess: He's been trying to quit.

Tokyo: I left my cigarettes in the machine.

Me: Funny.

Tokyo: How come you don't bowl when you go to the bowling alley?

Me: I quit. Now I just speculate. You two are actually very sincere.

Gypsy Princess: Here comes my mommy.... Made you look, made you look!

Tokyo: She's a brat.

Me: My mother used to be a waitress.

Tokyo: And now? She's a watercress?

Me: Funny. No, now she's a waterfall.

Gypsy Princess: Can I touch your face?

Today Von Spatzl recorded in his Day Journal, Vol. X that he yelled at his shrink to: "Wake the fuck up!"

Doc: "Feel your feelings." Snore. "Feel your feelings." Snore. "Feel your feelings." Snore.

With a month's worth of cigarette ash, Von Spatzl made a gray paste, adding white glue. Then across a double page in his Night Journal, Vol. XXII, he spread the black gunk in a thick brown-green patch and watched it dry...

He scratched out a note in the gunk: "My feelings."

In Von Spatzl's long-running serial dream, her car, The WWNN's car, a beat up Rambler, broke down on HWY (91) in Nevada. The WWNN got out and cursed the sky like a character out of the Bible. A tractor driver gave her a lift to a café in Tooker and she sat down and had a coke and a Chesterfield. She knew she'd better start thinking about the baby. Von Spatzl considered her plight out there in Tooker...but his mind, fettered with rising bids and asks--and feeling his feelings--kept him from participating. He watched from the cab inside a tow truck.

Fast forward: Six years later, same dream sequence, the Woman With No Name has returned to this cursed little town, Tooker.

"Curse you little town!" she screams as a rattle snake raps out a conga beat next to a cactus.

Six years later Von Spatzl was sitting (still!) in the cab of the tow truck, twiddling his thumbs, waiting for the wreck to appear and wipe away this mess once and for all.

"There are so many loose parts to these two boys, we'll never put them back together. Just put the pieces into two bags and we'll call it a day. Vacuum up the rest. No one will ever know the difference... and probably won't care either... six years from now."

In a sense (but not a very clear one), Von Spatzl cultivated a sympathy for her, The WWNN, the way some experts grow cacti to make perfect little bent and crooked arms and elbows. Watering, bending, watering, bending. Experts in watering and bending. Other experts do the same in tending bonsai trees, or others bonsai kittens. Because she, the WWNN, was his jelly jam of pain, and therefore the closest living being to him, he watered and bent his memories of her (or the ones he fabricated). If he gave up on the Woman With No Name, he'd have nothing - no heart to break, and no real time streaming to dream about. He'd also no longer have much of a reason to consider drowning himself in the toilet, hanging his poor throbbing head from the lamp post with a shoe lace, or even

taking the dramatic step of throwing himself in front of speeding bowling balls at Flushtown Lanes and calling this life a night. So he tended this delicate garden with a modicum of self-deception during the day, and felt the full fury of its vines at night.

So in dreamland, Von Spatzl played with the radio in the tow truck, flipping rapidly past local news of cattle disease, town hall closings, country music ("If the phone don't ring, it's me..."), and then began to drive backwards, quite fast actually - until he hit something. Von Spatzl plowed on in reverse nonetheless. He ran over something with a bump and squelch, heard an "Oh no!," and noticed then that the thing he'd flattened was Von Spatzl himself - as a boy. There he was, a young Von Spatzl, dressed as a boyscout (something he never was), holding up a wilting flag that said NASDAQ, embroidered with colored yarn, dead for all the world to see.

Having run over the boyscout version of himself, Von Spatzl looked up, confused, and saw the WWNN walking with a five-year old, Melanie, her hair in pig tails, in a dirty dress, gnawing on a large HERSHEY bar. Melanie was her she, obviously. (Any idiot can interpret dreams). Melanie, who would grow up to sing opera and dance the can-can at the Moulin Rouge in Paris and marry a con artist by the name of Jean-Pascal, had the head of a cactus in the dream, and small elegant pink and yellow flowers covered her head along with a crew cut of sharp needles. To boot, the WWNN was pregnant, it appeared; Von Spatzl could see right through her dress to the fetus. Von Spatzl knew that this other child would grow up to fix cars because the unborn child was tinkering with her mother's odometer, flipping the counter to read 99,999.99 miles.

In the dream tonight, Von Spatzl dreamed that yesterday's dream (the above written in Night Journal Vol. XX), the WWNN screwed the mechanic in a bed of grease and rust. Her little girl was upstairs in the motel next door reading the score for Puccini's La Boheme.

Hearing La Boheme, a theme song from Von Spatzl's café and salad days in Zug, triggered an avalanche of feelings, among



them, feelings of fatherhood, for one. Von Spatzl had the keen awareness that this unnamed female was the one God had ordained for him to beget with and he mourned her loss, the loss of these children who existed only in surreal photographs of light. The little girl reading (and sometimes humming) the score to La Boheme in that crappy motel brought tears to his eyes.

"Feel 'em, baby, feel 'em all," the shrinkologist coached.

In the dream, Von Spatzl explained to the shrinkman (and a day earlier in his Night Journal Vol. XXIII), the WWNN was crying uncontrollably. "The tears were river rushing flooding my penny loafers, and all I did was sit in this puddle, and watch her in her green sweater as she sat on the bed say. All I could tell her was 'Feel your feelings'." I woke up in my Old Turquoise Chair with piss all over me."

"That's the ticket," the shrinkman said. "Beautiful!"

Von Spatzl wrote: "I can't remember the last time I peed in my bed," three times for a total of 33 words. Then he wrote the number 140, (the number given to his house as a child), large and in red on top of it. On a clean page in his Day Journal, Vol. XXIV he drew the words in yellow and blue crayon: "Piss" and "Love."

Later on that day, Von Spatzl in another artistic frenzy drew a common cactus and colored it in a lime green in his Day Journal Vol. XXIV. He enjoyed drawing the needles on it. When he'd finished their sharp points, he touched one and started to bleed. The blood dripped down onto his desert landscape. When he'd given enough blood for his art, Von Spatzl tucked his finger into his mouth and sucked. He then added a curled up rattlesnake at its foot with the speech blurb: "Short tech stocks." Then he took a handful of yellow ones and two red ones, lit a Chesterfield and washed away everything with a Jack.

MEANWHILE VON SPATZL WAS SEEING THE AUSTRIAN GIRL with a certain regularity, which surprised him, but he plunged

ahead, his Bruno Unit at his side, a trusty friend now, reliable, smart, neat and inexpensive, actually. Most recently, Von Spatzl was trying to feel her feelings.

“Kom herein, bitte.”

“You’re a genius Von Spatzl, und ich liebe dich.”

“Willst du in meinen Koffien down layen?”

Von Spatzl searched his feelings for a feeling big enough, deep enough, stretchy enough to reach around The Austrian Girl’s feelings and feel them out, he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XVII. But nothing came. Nada. Zippo. The park was closed. Instead he thought about trying to make lively conversation and played with the buttons on her green sweater.

“Come here and let me fuck you.”

It amazed and astonished Von Spatzl that he could fuck, that he wasn’t too dead to stick his stick of life into the warm wet Garten of The Austrian Girl. (He should have been impotent. Certainly this would have earned him points with readers). But the Austrian came in rivers, and shouted Goethe’s poetry into the air, rattling the windows of Flushtown. She brought Zug back to him and his nights of sticky sheets and endgames (that game he survived an assault of Pokyev’s Queen, lost every piece but a rook, two pawns and ended up sealing victory when the Lithuanian resigned upon losing his last pawn just before touchdown!) swirling about and knotting him in youthful angst and delight. As Von Spatzl imagined he was screwing the entire New York Bunny lineup, and just now getting to the slick fielding shortstop in the 7th slot (The Austrian Girl), he fell apart and collapsed, thinking: “Heart Attack!”, and blacked out.

“Du bist wunderbar, Spatzy!”

The Philosophy of Von Spatzl

1. A red cardinal flutters in space in front of my eyes, very fast, and forever. That is me.
2. A hole in the ground becomes the sky above, Chinese people amble about.
3. Numbers are noble citizens who never get to vote.
4. The purpose of life is to conquer your fear of death.

You see one thing happened after another complicating the situation and accelerating it, wrote Von Spatzl later that night in his Night Journal Vol. XVI. He drew a picture of the Yellow Cutlass, overturned, burning, the stars shining above.

His mother called again today and asked when he was going to get a job.

"You're a good for nothing bum," she declared.

Under his breath Von Spatzl laughed because he had a new weapon to use against his mother: The Austrian Girl.

But instead of tossing that grenade at his Mummy – "Here, catch!" – Von Spatzl told her to short NUFO. Fiber optic is dead for at least 18 months, he explained, maybe more. "Go long on DELL, the chart says it's oversold, and look for a \$2 to \$3 buck profit in the run up to earnings, then of course you'll have a pull back to about 25 3/8"

"What are you talking about?"

"It's just a snack, not a meal," he told her. "But a Cadmean victory nonetheless."

"My mother smoked Chesterfields in her piss yellow 1965 Impala convertible, breezing along with a scarf on her head and sunglasses preventing her from seeing the obvious and the inevitable. Flying along, the wind eating her smokes, her

road took her nowhere. Cigarette after cigarette after cigarette after cigarette," he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XIII.

Today it was raining cats and dogs. Von Spatzl began to question the numbers that had meaning in his life. One of the numbers was:

140

He discovered this on the Internet while thinking about buying a new car for himself and The Austrian Girl to drive around in:

" 23. When should a car be considered used?

Technically, a vehicle is considered used if it has been titled. However, some dealers can rack up hundreds or thousands of miles on a new car without titling it. In these cases, the ethical definition of a used car should include any car used for extensive demonstration or personal use by dealership staff members. The only miles a new car should have on the odometer when purchased are those put on during previous test drives by prospective buyers (at dealerships where demonstrators are not used), and any miles driven during a dealer trade, within a reasonable limit. If the new car you're considering has more than 140 miles on the odometer, you should question how the car accumulated so many miles, and request a discount for the excessive mileage. We think a discount amounting to a dime a mile is a fair charge for wear and tear inflicted by the dealership.

A car should not be considered used if it is a brand-new leftover from a previous model year. However, it should be discounted, because many manufacturers offer dealers incentives designed to help the dealer lower prices and clear out old stock."

Another number he considered was:

15

He stayed with those two for a while: 140 and 15. Von Spatzl quickly dismissed the number designating his age. He wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XVII, in a tight, schoolboy script:

*“One’s age changes too often. Frank Sinatra’s When I was 17, for example, proves only the vapid sentimentality of bookmarks.”*

Tim the Tower was calling and knocking and calling and knocking and calling and knocking and calling and knocking and calling and knocking. Von Spatzl was too drunk to answer the door, so he pretended he was asleep. He counted to 140, then to 15. Tim the Tower finally went away.

Von Spatzl drew a self portrait in his Day Journal Vol. XV: A picture of a bed and the text: “One day nothing happened. The end.” He then proceeded on the proceeding pages, to make a list.

Five Years Ago

Shits: Five years ago I ate nothing but dried apricots and thought I could shit myself to death. I should have eaten the pits.

Pits: Five years ago I cut my finger and the blood dripped on a column of ants. They greedily ate it up.

Ants: Five years ago I was in the hospital for minor plastic surgery in Zug and a crazy woman came into my room while I was recovering and claimed she was my Aunt Gertrude from Zürich.

Recoveries: Five years ago I never thought I’d recover, I wrote to my dead Aunt Gertrude in Zürich and mailed her the letter, c/o God in Heaven. And since it never came back to me, I think she got it.

Heavens: There was a little girl I knew when I was five years old whose name was Valerie and she was always holding her hands to her face saying things like: “Heavens to Betsy!” Idiot.

Idiots: Five years ago I explained to a bartender in Zug that the blind man in the bar swinging his seeing eye dog around above his head was just looking around. Ha yuck.

Dog: Five years ago I remember distinctly sitting my hotel room at the Hotel Zug tying and untying my shoes, unable to decide whether I should go out at night or not and thinking I wish I had a dog. Then taking a bottle baby aspirin. Then reading Nehru on Agriculture. Then saying to myself: I am so sad. Then hearing music from beneath my floor.

VON SPATZL CONSIDERED HIS MANY LIVES.

1. His abbreviated childhood punctuated with suicide attempts and star gazing.
2. There was too, his infatuation with color. The olive green Formica kitchen counter in his family home. The bright green vinyl grass pushing out in his family garden in the spring. The white crystalline snow that fell and under the street lamp in front of his house. The shiny yellow of a lemon skin that under the street lamp was the color of his own skin.
3. These colors rushed back at him like a long-forgotten god reclaiming his being.
4. Von Spatzl moved on to his lonesome adolescence, punctuated with the pencil scribblings in the margins of his vast library.
5. Here were question marks, exclamation marks, drawings of Nancy and Sluggo across his friends – dozens of 17th, 18th and 19th century thinkers.
6. There was the death of his pet hamster, Sam the Hamster, a dried steak of beige and white fur on a bed of cedar chips.
7. Then the gray death of his academic career just before he was to matriculate, bookmarked by the last adventure of Vic and Tim, labeled euphemistically “The Accident.”
8. That episode was followed by series of black and white documents entitled “MY THESIS,” written for no academic institution at all but which clearly helped return his eyesight and heal him enough to work his hands as Von Spatzl scored his thesis of run-on sentences with a hole puncher, snapping

perfect little circles in his entire library of notes, books, and index cards as well as the 500-page typed report.

9. What he most remembered was sweeping the result into a brown anthill and setting it on orange and blue fire in his room in Prague). Then there was his life in Zug – the dirt-colored chess tournaments, the thesis on Nietzsche with the red cover, and finally, of course, the pink plastic surgery and The Austrian Girl (golden) in her lingerie (pink, again) and violin (a brown worn at the edges).

10. And the blue lake, ringed with gangrene green junkies, watching the blue blue sky, mesmerized and numb with white cold.

11. Oh, and of course, all those drab beige hotels, four, three, two, one and no stars.

12. And now, TV-blue Flushtown and his daily date with the NASDAQ.

13. It exhausted him, as well as me, this rainbow.

Von Spatzl considered buying flowers. They die. He considered her green sweater. Did she still wear it? He considered her crying on the bed or was it the chair? He considered his amphetamine habit. He took a yellow one. He lit up a Chesterfield and prayed for an easy death, then went short on IBM, a full 3800 shares, reminding himself to keep the stops tight. He covered the short a full 4 points later for a total gain of \$14,400, excluding brokerage fees.

Von Spatzl considered the plastic sacks filled with cigarette ash. Not much of an achievement, but a monument, nonetheless.

Von Spatzl found a virgin white “hanky” in his sock drawer, and glued it into a page. Taking a small can of white paint, Von Spatzl layered the “hanky” with a thick coat and took particular delight in watching it dry. Meanwhile, no one called. His bank of computers buzzed, and the flies circled and the fuzz yawned into being on the walls of his small house as if they too, had hair, like him. It was as if the walls with their beards were pushing forward, expanding into his space and his time. He considered taking more amphetamines in order to accelerate time, thanks Vic and Tim. More

amphetamines in order to get to the end of this. To “already be” at that precious moment where he held his newborn little Spatz, and touched his beloved’s face. Yes he wanted to be proud to be Von Spatzl, proud to be like anyone else.

Amphetamines. They were useful, he concluded. He tried to pick up a red one with his grocer’s arm, but it slipped and fell into a crack in the floor.

Von Spatzl then went long again on another 3800 shares of IBM and sold after the dead cat bounce – and the appearance on Ivestors Business Daily of some savvy PR from ceo Lou Gerstner. He nailed a gain of a full 5 points, a gross profit of \$19,000, in 15 minutes. But of course this didn’t make him happy at all. “Not at all,” he wrote three times for a total of nine words in his Day Journal, Vol. XVII.

### Doughnuts

The WWNN pulled into the asphalt parking lot for a meeting with *her* shrink. Von Spatzl then peed on his shoe toes when he realized *he* – Herr Doktor – was the shrink she was coming to see, and his job was to cure her, to fix her, to fashion change and administer love and not to shower her with piss.

Dr. Von Spatzl sat there, a puddle of piss gathering in his penny loafers, oxidizing his shiny copper cents. But she couldn’t find a parking space (so many drunk and drinking at the Mental Bar Café) and so, the WWNN missed the 50-minute hour. The WWNN called Von Spatzl on the telephone and apologized.

“Uh, Dr. Von Spatzl?”

Von Spatzl suggested dinner but became suddenly concerned about his teeth, because they felt loose in his mouth, he wiggled his front teeth. He stammered out, “I’m sorry, I can’t meat chew.”



When he awoke, Von Spatzl pulled down his Day Journal, Vol. XVII and drew a black grand piano with white ferocious teeth and named it: POTATO.

If the Woman With No Name came down from Dream Mountain, knocking on his door, Von Spatzl would tell her he was getting a driver's license and learning how to drive with a used car that he was going to buy over the internet. "Verkaufen," he explained in German. He would drive around with her and show her Flushtown, ACE Liquors and the fat lady embalmed there, Flushtown Lanes and the bar there, the guy pissing in the street, his friends Tokyo and his princess sister. The cigarette machines. Maybe even the Howard Johnson's and the pay as you go food bar. He'd teach her how to effectively trim the grass blade by blade with his Bruno grocer's arm unit. He would sigh. He would look at her. Sigh again. He would tell himself: She's a nice tight little package and know she was really a time bomb. She would explode and throw Vic and Tim into the next world, and keep Von Spatzl in this one, in spite of his protests, rearranging Von Spatzl's home movies of car crash disasters. Would she then turn The Austrian Girl into a goddess, a life-saving Engel? Or render her to the slag heap of his memories? Or perhaps they'd become friends? Unlikely.

The dreams confirmed a moral collision that defined Von Spatzl's relapse.

She – the other woman – the Woman With No Name, with the *original* green sweater, would eventually sit on every bed and cry herself rivers, and ultimately create for Von Spatzl the sense that even with new curtains, his life, this life, would finish as an endless real-time time loop. Yes, that was the most he could hope for. So much piss in his loafers. That was/is the lingering feeling – Wet Piss – that he felt. And all because of a wrong turn, in Tooker, or some other podunk American town, stoned on late 20th Century Iced Teas. (Because going into that curve, without looking, ended up decapitating Vic & Tim, poor shits, they'd never drink another Long Island Iced Tea, not on this planet anyway.)

Was she really killed, then, too, in that crash? A thousand pictures of death and still not enough words to kill someone off completely, or bring them back to life.

In the dream, she was still living out of suitcases in the motel, so it seemed unlikely she was really dead.

Meanwhile, back in the Old Brown Chair:

"Why are you doing this to me?"

This the last thing Von Spatzl said to Vic & Tim as the Cutlass rounded the curve and headed full throttle for the rising draw bridge, aiming for eternity. The perfect crime.

[Von Spatzl said this too, years later as WEBM was roaring into the 100s as his portfolio ballooned to more than \$1 million (There were easily \$50,000 days)].

"The perfect crime."

Von Spatzl felt himself deteriorating. His heart (broken, re-broken and most recently an electric pain that throbbed, particularly as he approached his computer bank), his lungs (88 Chesterfields a day), his liver (the effects of the Jack Daniel's no doubt), his kidney (was that blood he was pissing?), his teeth (loose), his feet (slight swelling), his back (muscle spasms), his ability to sleep (rare, thus the renewed interest in sleeping pills), and his diet (hard boiled eggs and the occasional ham sandwich) all took a toll on him and ground him down to the dust he really was. How that would all this affect his capacity to squire the one and only woman he.... (It was interesting he wasn't impotent. His readers are disappointed. We can feel their pain.)

But Von Spatzl was anxiety-ridden that his seed was contaminated even if he could send a stream of them into the waiting mother. The long line of Von Spatzl spunk (his genes tucked neatly in suave rows of chromosomes), was no longer the honey dripping from the bee, but dried out paper money hanging on a tree. "Money, Money, Money," he wrote in his

Day Journal, Vol. XVIII. She orgasmed in Deutsch Marks. But the Central Bank was unaffected.

"Spend them if you have them," he wrote on the following page. "Possibility edged and reduced by probability. Earning power is a useful illusion." 18 words.

THE REAL BIG PROBLEM was the concert that night, and it still plagued him more than 20 years later. Von Spatzl didn't have tickets and everyone was going. He didn't have a car, couldn't drive it if he did.... "I'm busy working on some calculations, pages and pages of sigmas, epsilons, square roots, cube roots, and letters and numbers that stand for things that exist only in my head and beckon me to cut a path out of this mad house," he told them defiantly. But no one was listening.

Von Spatzl hated, hated, hated being part of a "gang," or any group for that matter, organized or not. And in fact, he wasn't. He had overheard some people he recognized from school talking about "concert" and "the gang" and "tonight." (The prom was in two weeks.) Von Spatzl ate his peanut butter and banana sandwich on a soggy rye toast in silence. He would be a resolute corporation of one.

"Hey gang," one girl (no one Von Spatzl took seriously except for the fact that she was good in math) said trying to concoct a coalition and fabricate value in her own portfolio of worthless images about herself. But now Von Spatzl knew better. He was, after all a Dodo and she, who liked "gangs" eventually landed a big job with IBM, but got syphilis from a herd of Wall Streeters at an orgy, and died alone and frightened in Milwaukee.

So, that night: He'd stay home. Alone. To feel his feelings, his calculations spread out before him like plans for the Roman Empire. Blue lines criss-crossed charts and square roots, notes scribbled not in the margins but across the pages. Here it was, the critical map for the future. He'd left the "gang" in the past! Ha! Ha! Ha! And so, sipping his father's bourbon, Von Spatzl forced himself to pity them, the gang, those poor losers.

Having fun and laughing, while he, Von Spatzl, dreamed up things that Man hadn't ever considered! Infinite memory systems, thought-body transport and the bounty of Real Time. He was standing on his two legs about to be broken at the dawn of New Time, while they were living in the past with their retro music, beers, clothes and feelings. Having fun! Ha!

So how did he get in the Cutlass with Vic and Tim.

Von Spatzl's Mother: Take Von with you. He needs to get out. A concert sounds like fun.

Vic and Tim: Aw Shit, mom! Who wants to go with Von anywhere?!!!

Von Spatzl's Mother: You don't have a choice, boys, now run along.

Vic and Tim: Well, okay.

(They snickered, plotting terrible things for Von Spatzl).

They didn't even have an extra ticket and planned on leaving him in the car in the parking lot. Like a dog. With the windows up!

She, the Woman With No Name, a spry teenager in a hippie shirt, did go to the concert. Standing on top of her chair she held up her lighter when the band started playing. She danced in her seat as some guy from the suburbs sitting behind her hooked his fingers through the belt loops in her jeans and pressed his face into her ass and she moved to the music and farted. Since she was from another town, the Woman With No Name wouldn't even know he, Von Spatzl (someone who would one day earn the accolades of Stockholm), was not there - Not at all! - but was instead at that very moment when she flicked her lighter to get a roaring flame going, Von Spatzl was crawling out of the inverted and broken Cutlass, gasoline flaming on his penny loafers, and his brothers Vic and Tim cooking like a Sunday barbecue without their heads in the front seat.

If his life were a slow motion film up until that point, that was the moment it all started to unreel, to become unreal, to get real - fiction unbound. His genetic expression, a compendium

of billions of years of molecular attraction and repulsion, spilled out in a charred version that only entropy could love.

"I was missing and she was present. At least that's how it felt," he recalled in his Night Journal Vol. XXIV.

Years later Von Spatzl wrote the Woman With No Name a 300-page letter detailing the intricacies of his life – his physical pain, his suicides, his longing and desire and the death of Sam the Hamster. He signed it with a P.S. "I really hate to complain." He mailed it to her with neither address nor a stamp.

Just to recapitulate: They never really met except in his dreams. And they never watched the Jenny Jones show together, he never showed her his delicate watercolors of the Urals, nor did he show her his special recipe for cream of mushroom soup. "Very subtle," he explained. He never invited her to meet his friend Tokyo and laugh (ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha) at the silly but wonderfully ludicrous costumes Tokyo and his (Tokyo's) sister wore. While they smoked. Cigarettes.

No. Never. "See how it works?" Von Spatzl yelled across the room in his Flushtown mansion.

"I am the future!" Von Spatzl wrote in grease pencil across his NASDAQ Level II screen, prices flickering like Christmas lights although it was July. It was a delusion. The future. That is.

Von Spatzl was terribly concerned about the screen door suddenly. It squeaked with the wind and scared the shit out of Von Spatzl.

"Flies!" he cried. "... or, ghosts!" he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol XIX. Or just the holes in doughnuts. Ha yuck.

IN ANOTHER DREAM, (see Day Journal Vol. XVIII), Von Spatzl and the WWNN were, oddly enough, in the same town for a few months at the alcohol rehab center located at a strip mall with a Dunkin' Donuts and discount liquor store. She was there to

work out her problems with Vodka. Von Spatzl on the other hand went for the free coffee and doughnuts (imported from the Dunkin' Donuts). Our hero was lugging around his voluminous notes on a paper he was to give in Bratislava on pet theory, something which always fascinated him because he always wanted to own a dog, to have a best friend, which he concluded at the end of 478 pages was "practically written into our DNA."

But his job as janitor was at night and she was already plastered by then, pouring vodka into her coffee during the heart to heart meetings, and so, they never met. Again.

Von Spatzl's hamster had died within three days of his getting it at the Pet Store, he recalled in his Day Journal Vol. XV. He had bought the tiny rodent from a very skinny woman who had an orange nose like a duck, and fuzzy sideburns. She smelled like cedar chips and held a baby chicken in her hands.

"Why not this little one? It's only 50 cents!"

Glad to have a pet he could love unconditionally, Von Spatzl named it Sam. Sam the Hamster. At first Sam the Hamster scampered about the empty fish tank, ate pellets, shit them out in little brown pellets (that looked very much like the pellets he ate) and slept. He seemed to be enjoying his life, and Von Spatzl was happy, for finally he had a friend all his own. He did have to fight with Vic and Tim who seemed to think it hilarious to poke Sam the Hamster with flaming Ohio Blue Tip matches. "Roast Hamster!" they roared. "Get him while he's hot!" But three days later, Sam was lifeless as a doorknob in its stinky bed of cedar chips. Von Spatzl poked it with his finger.

"What's wrong Sam?"

The family dog, (which Von Spatzl never liked and essentially feared because Dog was at the command and control of Vic and Tim who gleefully and often commanded Dog to "Attack Dog! Attack!" pointing at Von Spatzl. The large, oftentimes vicious, German Shepherd appeared extremely interested to

know what was going on with the Sam the Hamster. Dog jumped up on the dresser bureau, his black paws inching forward, permitting him to peer and sniff at the hamster's cage. Dog's tail moved in rapid left-right beats. Tail wagging indicting joy? Quite the contrary. A bell tolled for Sam the Hamster. This was Von Spatzl's first real lesson in guilt.

"Mommy my hamster's dead. Sam the Hamster is dead! Sam is dead!"

"Feel your feelings, Von, even if your feelings are dead, like that stupid 50-cent pet rat of yours."

Vic and Tim could be heard laughing.

Von Spatzl's mother flushed Sam the Hamster down the toilet, and, crying, Von Spatzl waved it goodbye, but Sam came back up so she tossed toilet paper on top of it, and flushed it again. But Sam returned! And so did Von Spatzl's mother with a rubber plunger and she plunged Sam the Hamster down the pipes like so much baby shit. Von Spatzl thought, "Now Sam's in the sewer."

The young Von Spatzl began to regard sewers as a bastion of hope however dark. He had a nightmare that changed his feelings about sewers. In that dream a crocodile rose up from the sewer and took a piece out of his tiny ass as he sat on the toilet drinking champagne and flipping through the latest copy LIFE magazine. Second less on guilt.

REMEMBER HER? White as snow with her blond hair and blue eyes. She was a neighbor. They were playing, assuming fictional roles of doctor-patient, husband-wife, author-sheet of paper: In black magic marker he wrote "Sam the hamster" on her five year old ass. And signed it: *Von Spatzl*.

"Live for today (or tonight)," he wrote 1000 times for a total of 5,000 words in his Day Journal Vol. XVII.

It was about that time Von Spatzl heard someone's mother say their kid asked: "How many mice am I worth?"

His mother called and complained of stiff joints and a runny nose, a urinary infection and she added that she'd stubbed her toe. "Short Microsoft, but go long on the B2B integrators," he told her. "Mister Softy doesn't have a viable XML strategy."

Then he paused thoughtfully and slurred: "Mommy, do you have enough champagne?"

"Organized religion," wrote Von Spatzl in his Night Journal Vol. V, as he was formulating an end game trading strategy, "lacks a unified argument, one single and clear. Like politics, which presupposes that the body politic wants a better life, religion, essentially promises a better death. Or a death with meaning, which is better than nothing. Therefore organized religion, with its fantasy feasts and booze bashes, its guilt-laden gifts and picturesque prayer hours, its holy holy houses and special magic words, its spooky secrets and its hell-raising hierarchy of holiness raises the question of confusion: Is confusion part of faith? How to reconcile all the fractious sects? Religion, as it was evangelized, suffers from a difficult and obscure message of hope and redemption, a place in heaven, heaven on earth or other places. One only made clear when death comes knocking on the door, or life goes bursting through it. Where, for example, is the religious prospect supposed to go with 'God is love' when genetically we are selfish survival machines, unconscious of the future. It would be easier to go with something like 'God is money' because money is now, money is real time."

So when the drunk he suspected of being a whore asked Von Spatzl, "What religion are you, honey?" our hero couldn't quite explain that he wasn't religious in the sense she thought, and that it would take all night to explain it, but perhaps that's what she had in mind. Von Spatzl shook his head and said, "Excuse me, I have to go pee pee."

Here lies the snake.



That night Von Spatzl sitting on the toilet for a full hour wrote in his Night Journal Vol. V: "Excuse me, I'm in a meeting with Jeremy Bentham, and I have to go pee pee," 100 times for a total of 1600 words. He developed cramps in his hand and neck and his feet fell asleep on the toilet dreaming of crocodiles and champagne bottles he couldn't open for the life of him.

As he washed his dishes Von Spatzl thought about the WWNN – "Where was she really from?" Dishwashing was his most reflective time of the day. It was when he got down to hot water and soap, the thin(k) hot soup. Two strong elements on their own which, when added together, combine to form a primordial plasma capable of almost anything, he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. VI. It is where we come from, we are descendants of dumb hydrogen molecules...leading to things like love and the heart-rending death of Sam the Hamster.

Jenny Jones was replaced with another woman, younger and prettier than Jenny Jones. Von Spatzl didn't recognize her. He wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XI: "What if Von Spatzl were on Jenny Jones, that would be something, wouldn't it?"

Von Spatzl said to Jenny Jones' replacement, a younger and prettier TV bunny: "Excuse me, I have to take a wee wee," and effected a little tinkle that seemed almost unnecessary. When he came back, Von Spatzl asked Jenny Jones' replacement:

"Do you own stock in Christianity? Are you shorting Judaism? You holding Islam? How about the Holy Bible, the Koran-- what's the long term outlook on those books? Are you looking at the November options on the Torah? Looks like it's trading at a discount to cash to me, but of course, my religious beliefs are impossible to classify... be right back."

TV Bunny: So you are Amerikanerin?  
Von Spatzl, Leaving: Ha ha ha ha, that is too funny! Erin! Get it? You made a faux pas. But it's true, my Will is feminine.

Whereupon he left the glittering television studio to make it back to his Old Brown Chair to resume his life's work, which

was most immediately to record the events of his most recent dream in his Day Journal Vol. XXIX:

Woman With No Name Crashes Into Pet Shop, Wine Store, Kills Hamsters, Champagne Cases Explode! Tooker Shook!

That crash was a major kaboom. Sticky glass with drying champagne and hardening furry pets combined with a paperboy strike and all of Tooker crowded around to watch the firemen and policemen extract dead hamsters. But this news would never make it into the paper, The Tooker Times. It seemed some clever Lefty had unionized the league of eight and nine year-olds for a bigger cut of the sales and free classifieds. So, no one bought the paper until the next day. Who would want to read yesterday's news unless they were doing a study of what happened the day of the strike. The strike was quickly over. And the Woman With No Name became a non-celebrity. She just had her truck towed to the mechanic shop.

"Strike Over!" rang out the next day's headline. At which point Von Spatzl woke up to find the Nikkei about to crash. He'd cover his short of the Nikkei 250 index by Friday when a near term bottom would set in.

Von Spatzl habitually wrote in his Night Journal at least 1000 words every single night, except for one stretch where he was so drunk he didn't touch a pen, pencil, crayon or a pair of scissors for 24 hours. Another time, suffering a relapse, he recounted the cracks in the walls and watched his Braun traveller's alarm clock tick tocking in his Flushtown palace. He smoked exactly 574 cigarettes, but only half way (5 drags each for a total of 2870 drags).

His health, he wrote in a bald lie, had never been better, in spite of the fact that he was clearly deteriorating into dust. Who knew if his heart would suddenly give out and he would sit down in his Old Brown Chair and just give up and die, his genes so long in the fight for existence would be overwhelmed by entropy. He didn't have a gene for love and happiness and so he would die unloved and depressed.

"I'm just not selfish enough," he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXIX as the phone was ringing off the hook.

"I am not here," he told the phone. "In case you ring."

Last night he wrote the words: "I am not" one thousand times for a total of 3,000 words. His hand cramped and he went outside to sit on the porch with a bottle of Jack, a glass and a pack of Chesterfields. He could almost see her. Maybe if he drank a bit more...

The Austrian Girl would save him, wouldn't she? The relapse was picking up speed.

"Well, wouldn't she?" he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXIX. "Are her genes altruistic?"

At three am with the stars shining above his small cape house on the edges of Flushtown in the middle of America, Von Spatzl turned on the computer and saw that his options on DELL were going to expire. He panicked, but just for a second. He quickly made a trade with a brokerage house in Tokyo and saw that he was actually \$10,000 ahead. "Thank God" he wrote twice, then looked it up on the Internet and copied "Thank God" out in Japanese which he then dutifully copied on a clean sheet in his Night Journal Vol. XXIX.

Von Spatzl estimated his net worth, after taxes, at about \$1.348 million. He decided to take a position in Gorman Rupp Corporation (GRC), a maker of water pumps, which he believed had bottomed and would soon become seen as a "safe" stock in what were bound to be perilous times. Pumps are in, chips are out. He bought 50,000 shares @ \$14.15. Total cost: \$282,000. Add in brokerage fees, taxes, SEC fees and it was \$290,000. "I am looking for a 50% move (at least) in nine to 12 months," he wrote in red grease pencil in his Day Journal Vol. XXVIII.

Von Spatzl's mother called and said that she had broken her arm slipping in the bathtub. All her friends signed her cast. It made her a bit of a celebrity.

With two kids in tow, the Woman With No Name took the number 12 bus downtown to the Opera House, a ratty wooden structure built by a lunatic in 1876 who had a thing for the Europeans, particularly Puccini. He was a minor celebrity anywhere outside of Tooker. The WWNN took the bus because the mechanic sleezeball lover was "looking under the hood" of some other bimbo. Melanie auditioned and got the lead part of star crossed lover for "Madame Butterfly For Kids." The WWNN took a room in the Blue Ribbon motel and drew a bath while the two kids watched TV and ordered room service. Bags of potato chips and cokes were brought up by the elderly motelier, who smiled, mumbled something about shorting Microsoft, and closed the door.

Von Spatzl knew somewhere in his heart of hearts that the Woman Without No Name wasn't real. "I think she's putting one over on me big time," said Von Spatzl. The Shrinkman was pleased and mixed up a pair of gin-vanilla cocktails to celebrate. (He'd also gone long on GRC, the water pump specialists. Von Spatzl had told him the next wave was Low Tech, which he recorded in his Day Journal Vol. XXVIII).

Then things got crazy as Von Spatzl began a letter writing campaign, burning through three reams of 8 1/2 x 11 paper and 42 Bic pens, and seven Number 2 pencils. Von Spatzl wrote to God, to the President, to Karl Marx, to Tender Buttons, to Red Buttons, to Nietzsche, to Kant, to Kierkegaard, to Bobby Fischer ("Where are you? Haven't seen you since Old Yugoslavia!"), to the SEC, the FDA, the FCC, the CIA, to NBC, to CNN, to UCLA, to the NAACP, to the GOP, to the NBA, to Jenny Jones, and of course to Henry Kissinger... all in an attempt NOT TO WRITE TO THE AUSTRIAN GIRL (who he realized through the posts on his e-mail therapy group was a substitute for The Woman With No Name). But he wrote to The Austrian Girl anyway. That afternoon, when she was over mixing spritzers, he slipped her a note: "Can you feel my feelings?"

This and all these letters piled up.

"You've been busy, Spatz," she said. "Writing?"

"Ahem," he said.

Von Spatzl wrote even more letters. His missives flew from his pen, and his stack of virgin paper grew smaller as his stack of letters rose high towards the ceiling. The letters featured long beautiful sentences that wrapped through his compound nouns ("visionquest," "downgrade," "endgame" and "housebound") like a snaky wire plugged into an Anglo-Saxon juice socket. He inserted notions like "eroding revenue base," to describe his personality in a letter to the American Society of Jungian Analysts (ASJA), and "religious disorder," to illuminate his psychological state to Jack Welch, ceo of GE. He spit out verbs like "glide," and "storm" and "seek," and turned to the guests on Jenny Jones espousing words with misguided gusto like "can't" and "won't" and "hit!" Von Spatzl also wrote short elegant sentences on post-its that he stuck onto these letters:

My lungs are burning.  
A cold glass of water in my visionquest.  
Do yourself a favor, friend.  
Go fishing and die by the river.  
Sic 'em Slick.

Sometimes, he wrote neither sentences (long or beautiful), but drew elaborate three-ball point pen copies of the Mona Lisa (La Jaconde) or barking cocker spaniel dogs or rats speaking in speech blurbs of bones and cats. He piled them on his pile, then took them down letter by letter, signed them, folded them, addressed them and readied them for the post.

"Yeah," Von Spatzl told The Austrian Girl, nonchalantly. "I'm writing a letter."

"Quite a few," she noted.

But the letters, (403 of them in this batch, tied up with a string), like all Von Spatzl's letters (except for mainly bills) were never mailed. Instead, they found their way into a wicker basket. I discovered them years later after the markets had tanked, and everyone involved in the Internet bust was either dead or dying, having jumped from Wall Street window ledges, or were cut down at their desks by irate ex-employees. These letters described a future (but now of course, the past) that Von Spatzl had planned for only in the abstract. A future rife with paroxysms of doubt, longing, desire that he himself had incubated for years, but now the world had caught it like a timed-release disease. It was all there – the fatigue of the telecoms, scandals, urinary infections, political unrest, loss of religious confidence, the mass movement to Adopt a Pet and Adopt a Highway, and the killing of thousands of pet hamsters. Quite naturally he was stunned (and a little proud, too) when reality came round like a punch thrown by a girl wearing a little black cocktail thingy. Because he was at that cocktail party gulping down champagne to quell his guilt. Because he was, in his cloud of American doubt, expressing the Zeitgeist. Because it was then and the days of horseshoes and handgrenades no longer counted for anything other than a desperate attempt at being a philosopher at some Uptown Trophy Wife Affair (UTWA).

Von Spatzl wrote the word "desperation" in elaborate script using an old quill pen, scrawling it out 222 times for a total of 222 words in his Night Journal, Vol. XV. Then footnoted the block of text: "I am a desperate scribbler."

The second time he saw the Woman With No Name, she looked so pretty, in spite of his near inability to see her, he was crying so much in that bar. But today on the street when he passed her she looked thin and pale as if perhaps she'd caught a disease and was about to die of it.

"Who would marry her now? After all that nonsense. I should give her a letter to give to Vic and Tim. He pitied her. And he pitied her again, and then pitied himself for pitying her and

drew a bucket in his Night Journal, Vol. XXVIII to empty all his pity into once and for all.

The shrinkman said: There you go, Von baby.

Von Spatzl: Am I cured?

The shrinkman: Are we still long EMC?

Von Spatzl: Wipe that smirk off your face.

The Shrinkman: What?

Von Spatzl: You've been sleeping with the Woman With No Name! I caught you!

The Shrinkman: Shit, now don't go and have a relapse now.

Von Spatzl: It's too late. Too late... it's set in sad.

Von Spatzl was back to staring at the ceiling where the curtains hung from their corroded hooks. The curtains, bleached by the constant glare of the sun and by the occasional nagging of the rain, kept him safe. At least that. And Von Spatzl fell out of Real Time back into the past. The dust accelerated its accumulation and the computers sat dark for days, weeks. Time passed and Von Spatzl wasn't the wiser. He stopped seeing the shrinkologist, stopped killing the flies, stopped going outside, stopped writing. "I am set in sad."

Because Von Spatzl didn't have a dog, a cocker spaniel maybe, that he would have named "Slick," that dog couldn't pee on the curtains. (Instead all he had was a stupid mechanical arm). "I am set in sad."

The hooks though were definitely corroded. During the time he spent staring at the ceiling (actually the precise point where the curtains hung on their corroded hooks), Von Spatzl wondered (sometimes aloud, just to hear his voice, in retrospect quite positive) whether the corroded hooks would corrode completely one day and lose their ability to continue hooking as they were originally designed to do. The hooks could break into two pieces, then neither the top or bottom part could reasonably be called "hook." Maybe one half could reasonably be called a "ho" and the other an "ok," or "oh" and "ko."

In the back of his mind, Von Spatzl wondered if he would take these curtains with him when he died, lay them into his home away from home.....? "A housewarming gift," he decided.

Three weeks later, though, the relapse expired, like sour milk reversing back into the cow. It was sudden, as if a storm had passed. At the very least it felt unnatural. Von Spatzl had grown so accustomed to pain, he was lonely for it. But he struggled out the front door. He could see the sun and the clouds drifting by. There was a thing called sky. The kids played in the street. What had changed?

In a fit of revived mental health, Von Spatzl practiced his golf swing in the living room, knocking the little white whiffle ball into those very same cursed curtains.

Wasn't it strange, he wrote in a fleeting moment of clarity-- "how simple it all is? She sat on the bed in her green sweater, crying. Set in sad, indeed!"

But he was interrupted by the intrepid The Austrian Girl. Duhriing, duhriing!

"Hmmm," wondered Von Spatzl. "It's the P-h-o-n-e." Von Spatzl still wished he'd had a dog, a smart one, a friendly one, one that could answer the phone.

"Sic 'em Slick."

"Hullo? Ach ja, I guess you're not home, Von Spatzl, I had a Frage für you and of course to tell you how wonderful you are let me kiss you baby," she said, then audibly sighed. The Austrian Girl then played a melancholy song on her accordion and after two refrains, hung up. Von Spatzl recorded this telephone encounter in his Night Journal Vol. XXVI.

Von Spatzl walked outside again. Trees and sky and birds hip-hopping about scrounging for worms, or seeds, or \$100 dollar bills, stood before him. The whole world, peeled like an O-R-A-N-G-E. He could smell the earth, its past: From the thin hot soup to the rusting ghost of his Rambler smashed up and



towed away. Von Spatzl remembered remembering it. That day... years ago.

Was today his birthday? Or just spring?

Reaching into his pocket, Von Spatzl extracted a real golf ball (how many indentations are on a regulation ball, he wondered) and placed it on the shag rug that served as the footwipe he'd bought when he first moved in at the Flushtown Hardware. Von Spatzl wound up, and punched the little white dimpled fucker through the open door. It took off in a bee-line and would have easily killed a child if that child were in the line of the ball. And if that child were Von Spatzl as a child and Vic and Tim were still alive and were playing "Let's kill Von" as they often did, it would have killed Von Spatzl.

"Vore!" they would have giggled.

But the ball was captured by gravity – a lot sooner than he'd anticipated – and hit the ground, skittling between two houses and disappeared.

"Soon: The Story of My Life," he wrote below a drawing of a golf ball in flight in his Day Journal, Vol. XXII.

TODAY VON SPATZL ORGANIZED HIS JOURNALS. AGAIN. He had already written in the bulk of 30 volumes times two. The Day Journals on the bottom, the Night Journals on top.

"What a system!" he screamed in delight.

He sighed and turned on the Jenny Jones show. She had been replaced again by an even prettier and younger newsbunny. Von Spatzl turned off the Jenny Jones show and poured himself a Jack and fired up a Chesterfield. Then he flipped the Jenny Jones Show back on and realized that it was Pat Sajack who'd replaced Jenny Jones, and not the prettier and younger let's-talk-about-it newsbunny. What a terrible disappointment. Now he missed Jenny Jones' puffy blonde hair from the time she lost in a game show years ago. And the fake jewelry. And

the batty eyes, and the sincerity you could play with a Glockenspiel.

Von Spatzl's father called today and said he couldn't play golf because of his hip.

"It sticks."

"Get a Glockenspiel," suggested Von Spatzl.

Von Spatzl's father ignored him and complained that "everything was fucking swell." He added: "Your mother won \$500 playing Lotto."

"Gee," said Von Spatzl. "That's quite a lot of money."

Von Spatzl's father didn't hear him, the went dead, (Enron?), or a lightening storm (Satan?), or sun spots perhaps (Entropy?). ACTually Von Spatzl had hung up without realizing the conversation wasn't over.

"Fucking swell" Von Spatzl wrote 100 times for a total of 200 words. He weighed the idea of sending his father a Bruno grocer's arm unit for his birthday., but instead wrote the words "Assembly: 15 minutes," in his Day Journal Vol. XXIV

Von Spatzl remembered today the time he once fainted after being bitten by Sam the Hamster. It was Day 2 in the Life of Sam the Hamster.

"C'mere Sam, c'mere Sam the Hamster."

Dog was nearby, of course, tail wagging, looking for snack. So was Sam the Hamster as he pierced Von Spatzl's telephone dialing finger. Oh dear! Von Spatzl shook off Sam the Hamster and drew back his hand, looked at his finger and noted a good amount of blood trickling down his hand. It wasn't the first time, but this was unexpected, and he fell on the floor like a little sack of rocks.

"Get up Von, time for school."

One day later Sam the Hamster was dead. Von Spatzl suspected Dog, and remembered how Dog used to howl when his grandmother sang old Polish songs that no one knew.

Von stole the wet and soggy Sam the Hamster from the toilet and wrapped him up in toilet paper, which he wrapped in aluminum foil. He placed shiny Sam the Hamster into plastic bag, which he placed into a shoe box, which he placed into Mother Nature's womb, a hole he'd dug the night before when no one was around. Covering Sam the Hamster up with dirt, Von Spatzl said, again: "Goodbye, Sam the Hamster."

Two years later Von Spatzl dug up Sam the Hamster's grave and found, instead of Sam the Hamster, a dead and rotting snake. He then buried the snake in a different hole and wrote on a cardboard marker: "Here lies the snake."

Today was his birthday again. He was 30 for the first time.

"I've lived half my life," he wrote twice, for a total of 10 words in the first page of his Day Journal, Vol. XXX

Von Spatzl then drew a picture of a snake, between the two sentences: "Here lies the snake" and "Sam the Hamster is still dead." From a distance, or on television, it could have been a picture of a ham sandwich.

WELL BEFORE THINGS GOT OUT OF HAND, every woman resembled The Woman With No Name. Every woman wore a green sweater and every woman seemed ready to cry on his bed. Every woman's father had died, as he did, she told him that first night, and every woman was angry with him because he didn't feel his feelings. Now that he felt his feelings, every woman was a mystery. Oh if only every woman were a virgin tech stock with an e-commerce business plan written on a napkin.

Von Spatzl could now see death, now that he was rounding the clubhouse turn on his own. He saw death everywhere. In the walls, in the curtains, in his hardboiled eggs, on his computer

screens, in the \$100 bills he carried, in the carpet, in the songs of the Red Cardinals, in the squirrels hiding their nuts in his attic. Everywhere. So when she, the WWNN called, he recognized her by her death, and said nothing. What would he say to death? "Get thee behind me!" No, that would not do. She hung up quickly after breathing softly. Von Spatzl thought he heard her say: "Thank you." But he could not be sure. Indeed, he also thought he saw Jeremy Bentham at the Flushtown Lanes, but he couldn't be sure. He thought Jeremy Bentham had already died, but these days...well you couldn't be sure. Death didn't mean death, of course.

"I recognized her breathing even though it'd been years since I'd heard her breathe," he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXVI. "It made me sad to know her breaths were numbered and I wasn't surprised she was doling them out over the phone, spreading the sound of her breath over the telephone network, an inexorable march towards death. She'll probably get caught in the coming downturn in telecom stocks." ((Von Spatzl was getting ready to short WorldCom from \$66 to \$10.)

Von Spatzl returned to his golf swing, slamming whiffle golf balls into his kitchen and the living room, into his computer banks, the balls ricocheting off the windows, the dish racks, the refrigerator and landing in the sink, or on the floor or bouncing back to him. Then his mother called to wish him a happy birthday.

"I have bursitis," she said. His father got on the phone and said that his neck was stiff.

"Lotto," said Von Spatzl. "Or Glockenspiel...take your pick."

TODAY VON SPATZL TOOK HIS PHONE OFF THE HOOK and walked outside with his best friend, his Old Brown Chair, a bottle of Jack and a fresh pack of Chesterfields to watch the cars drive by, which he counted - 423 in all during a three-hour period. He smoked and drank until sunset. Von Spatzl cupped his ear like a kid on the seashore with a shell, and heard the beep beep beep signal indicating the phone was off the hook. He liked that sound. It reminded Von Spatzl of Klagenfurt in

Austria, when driving through across the Slovenia border he heard the startling American country music song with the memorable line: "If the phone don't ring, it's me."

Von Spatzl considered the emerging truth about Jenny Jones: She was on permanent vacation. She was dead, possibly murdered, or terminally ill. In any case, she wasn't coming back. Sad but true. It was the end of an era, there was no turning back, no turning around, no turning in your badge, just turning in your grave. He suspected she'd been thrown off the air for any of the above reasons, or possibly others he was not privy to. It was clear that today's show was very different than any other Jenny Jones' shows in that it was basically an analysis (by Pat Sajack) of The Damn Things Kids Do These Days Show. Von Spatzl was a bit tired of it all, so sitting outside while the world suddenly bloomed into REAL TIME, he drew the logo in pencil for the well known detergent "*all*" and looked at it carefully, wondering if it was really a case of deceptive advertising. Then he erased it. On another page, in the same style, he drew a logo of "Nothing" in the manner of the logo "all." Beneath it, he wrote: "Same thing."

In spite of it all, Nothing seemed to change. Vic and Tim were dead - still. He was still alive and for the first time in years he reflectively touched the long scars on his legs.

"All this plastic surgery and this is what I look like, this is what I feel like."

He went outside and looked at the universe and noticed a wallet in the street. "Those kids from down the street," he wrote in his Day Journal Vol. II. "All dressed up and nowhere to go."

SHE ARRIVED IN HER GREEN SWEATER ONE DAY, put down her big blue sewing bag and stood in front of the tobacco and paper store (which was now closed), under the awning. She looked out on the coffee shop, where I sat, next to ACE LIQUOR store and the Maxi Taxi taxi stand, where one beaten yellow car puffed pollutants into the atmosphere.

She rocked gently as if her body were singing Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly," shifting her weight from foot to foot, occasionally tugging at her green sweater. Von Spatzl had never seen her before and he was pretty keen on changes in spite of the fact that he rarely left his fortress except to replenish his supplies of amphetamines, tobacco, alcohol or to get eggs, or see the Shrinkologist. But this was a change. A woman had invaded his neighborhood, and she rocked back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, killing him softly with her song, cutting a groove into his fragile sensibilities for change. She began at 6 PM when the tobacco and newspaper store closed and stopped at 8 PM. Sharp. She was pretty. What was she doing? Why would a pretty woman do what she was doing....?

Years later, she was still there, regular as rain. Rocking from foot to foot, gently, easily. Killing him softly. It was working, and it was, he determined in a mood of generosity, a kind of prayer. Put a nickel in her and watch her go.... Kill me softly.

Von Spatzl understood now, now that he had been killed then in that screaming yellow cutlass, and now that he was dead, dead, dead and had healed (Am I cured?), he recognized that this neurotically charged space in front of the tobacco and newspaper store was her church and she was praying and he was sitting in the pews watching his life in reverse.

Her church was a square yard. Kierkegaard's name in Danish is Church yard. Where he was buried.

Von Spatzl imagined that when evening fell, she took the bus back to her family and cooked them up spaghetti and meat balls and they sat around drinking diet coke working out the kids' geometry problems, laying the foundations for the neuroses of a lifetime. Her church is a secret.

"I'm going out, be back in two hours."

She probably lived an hour away, he speculated in his Day Journal Vol. XXVIII and then copied it out on lined white paper,

and sent it to her, Churchladydancing, c/o the tobacco shop without a name, without a stamp, without a date. It was one of the few letters, however, that Von Spatzl did send.

You don't have to be Einstein to see that you had the same experience as your Austrian friend, Von Spatzl said to himself. Except there was one difference. And that was: "I don't think you are the typical refugee, either," she said. Then she told a story:

"Where I grew up we walked to a lake to catch little fishes that you couldn't... essen. It wasn't really a lake, just a scratch in the earth where Wasser had gathered and fischen had followed. Später, we started trinken Schnapps because it was sweet und strong in the school yard near to the lake. The school where I was forced to attend for seven years was called Lakeside. Get it? Side lake, lake side..."

"Ha yuck!" said Von Spatzl, reaching for some Vanilla Gin and a smoke. "Gee willickers, The Austrian Girl, I put a nickel in you and there you go...a regular laugh riot.... Let's sing Killing Me Softly together. Go get your accordion."

She smiled and undid the buttons on her blouse.

"Ja, well, anyway, ach...in Winterswetters, the water froze and we skated on the lake and often gefell in," she went on. "None of us ever died because we knew how to schwimm. I always wanted to take a boat to the island, but when we discovered the ice in the winter, we just walked there. Ja, just like that girl. Wie heißt sie? Ja, Becky Thatcher, ja. Alzo, in der Fruhling and die Sommer, der ducken genested on this bushy little island mit snapping turtles wo sie their eggens gelaiden ... in the dirt, and sometimes in the bushes in der naher von der school fence. We'd finden baby snapping turtles on the grass in the spring, verloren, und very very cute, unable to find the water. But of course, eventually, they do."

Von Spatzl who was maybe in love with The Austrian Girl, and found her English charming, removed his pants and then told his own island story:

"The island where I was forced to live is 122 miles long, shaped like a fish, and is the home of Indians, ducks and cowards. Geologically termed a 'terminal moraine,' my island is the bizarre result of large glacier action sliding over puritan New England and halted by a team of young white women standing on the beaches of Connecticut eating baloney sandwiches on white bread with mayonnaise drinking martinis wondering where their husband were. As the glacier melted, people began to shop for mink coats while the excess water dribbled down their legs and formed the Long Island Sound, which leads to the East River (where plenty of dead people are watching the fish races). The glacier meanwhile had built up a large mound in front of it, which we call 'RESPONSIBILITY,' and it slid south towards Honduras - but never got there - and pushed up the rich rich rich earth in a line that most closely resembles a fish. The southern flank of course, faces the Atlantic Ocean and is covered with medical waste and black oil-colored sand. The island is ideal for barbecues throughout the year, even in winter...."

"Gee, that sounds nice, I'd like to go there one day," she said.

Von Spatzl, ever nervous around Americans, said: "I hope I haven't SHOCKED YOU."

"Kom hier Von Spatzl...."

TODAY THE DREAM MERGED WITH REALITY. She, the WWNN, called again, distributing more breaths, a spreading cloud of death. He heard her breathing and counted 34 breaths. Of course now Von Spatzl knew that she, too, was afraid of dying and yet oblivious to the fact of her death, as each breath told a finely tuned lie. So why call me? he asked himself. It drove him mad again, holding that black phone, that semi-solid fiction linking him to the mouths and ears of the world he'd left behind. What could she want with me now that she tossed me like a Kleenex and left me to pick myself up with my Bruno Unit? The critical juncture, of course, was about wrapping himself around his growing consciousness of himself as hero



in a culture of failure. Was it about will or fate? Cookies or cake? Neither/nor?

He said not a word, but could tell at least one thing: The Woman With No Name was calling from an auto repair shop. He heard the sound of engines revving and busy men with moustaches and cigarettes testing carburetors, opening and closing metal doors, preparing these fragile metal survival machines to try and protect other survival machines from the inevitable. Von Spatzl could also tell one other thing: Her child was just waking up. And one last thing: She was pregnant with a second child, and that her movement away from him had perhaps (was this why she was calling?) reached its limits. Hit a wall. In an attempt to get religion, she was first attempting to reign her self in, using Von Spatzl, who could hardly walk straight, as a bulwark, an anchor against her own nightmare. Von Spatzl an old testament Witness of her former self. Living proof, Von Spatzl was/is. Yes, she was thrashing about, and there would be more. Cry a river of tears, he sang in his head. She would indeed. (His Shrinkman told him he would indeed be able to predict the future). The juncture was ultimately about selfishness and altruism. Whether to heal himself enough to reach into her cauchemar and pull her out like a fallen child out of a well, or to write a book about it and gain notoriety on a Best Seller List. He would call it *The Problem*, of course and would appear on *The Jenny Jones Show* triumphant and in a suit with a bright power tie.

She continued breathing, and saying nothing. But Von Spatzl could hardly believe it was the same woman. "The one that was destined for him and who had spilled his quota of uterine milk on his zizi making a mess," he wrote in his *Night Journal*, Vol. XXIX. And now, he realized, she was about to write him a book-length letter. She too, would turn to the absurdity of words and symbols to cut a path through the Death that lay before her. Hah! Before he hung up, however, Von Spatzl had the paranoid observation that maybe this was just some telemarketer calling from Omaha, looking to sell him double-paned windows, "easy to open, easy to clean."

Von Spatzl's mother called today and complained that he, Von Spatzl, was a pain in the ass because "you don't have a job" and "I'm always sending you money."

"You're costing me a fortune!"

"What?" he said in a voice startled him, because he was hardly accustomed to talking, let alone with a raised voice. "You sent me exactly \$12.85 on my 25th birthday and coupon savers for a cereal I don't like," he said.

Von Spatzl in a fit of rage drew a picture of a bunny and mailed it to his mother along with a check for \$50,000.

"Here is your bunny back," he wrote and recorded the transaction in his Night Journal Vol. XXVIII.

Today Von Spatzl went really long on NUFO, buying 3,800 shares at \$10.50. He wrote: "I wonder what words are made with NYSE, NASDAQ and AMX market tickers," he wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. XXV. "COW must be the name of some company. Certainly someone has the ticker, DUCK. Who took FUCK? I wonder. FUCK would probably do well in an IPO. 'FUCK is not an internet company,' they could say in their press releases. What about SHIT? PISS?"

"A friend of mine once had a car, but he crashed it into our lake. Killed a few ducks. It was late at night. He ran over their little duck house," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. X. "Then he cried a river of tears."

Von Spatzl wrote yet another letter to the Woman With No Name that he would never send. "Why do you add to your bundle with the anxieties that comes from pen and paper?" he wrote her. "Is it your wish to be tragic? A writer of what? Emotional despair? You haven't had enough psychoanalysis." He addressed it Rust Bucket, Tooker, then taped it into his Night Journal, Vol. X.

I took a walk to see if the Churchladydancing was praying at her one square meter of holy ground. She wasn't there, but

this was Sunday after all. Instead, I saw a man who held a sign, a piece of worn cardboard. The sign said: "I am waiting for a miracle." I gave him \$2,000 in \$50 bills.

In front of my house on the way home I saw the man who was a year ago pissing in the street. He was baying like a sheep. I gave him a handful of weeds and told him: "Wait for a miracle." Later that night I saw him as a dark green tree, waiting in the forest for someone to scare. I painted his picture as a *fin de siecle* Baum. (See Day Journal, Vol. XIX).

The Austrian Girl called and wanted to go out for 3.2 liters of beer. I said come over, I've got 5 liters of wine and she said she wants to have at least 3.2 liters of beer and so I hung up.

"I am used to being sarcastic," she said when she called back. (The Austrian Girl, was, Von Spatzl knew, 1/16th American).

Yeah, he thought, like it's an acquired habit.

"Oh, let's not fight darling, you are my savior, remember? Please...?" he asked her/told her (only in writing, however) in his Night Journal, Vol. XX.

"I once heard on the Jenny Jones show," Von Spatzl explained to The Austrian Girl, "that ducks have an imprinting mechanism that permits them to immediately walk like a duck the moment they see their Mother walk. But my question is what if they woke up from birth and saw a truck?"

[Von Spatzl stopped watching the Jenny Jones show, and instead tuned in by radio; he had pulled the plug on his TV and neglected to plug it back in].

"'All ducks walk like ducks,' concluded today's guest," said Von Spatzl. "Then Pat Sajack said, 'Thank you.' Don't you think, The Austrian Girl, that sarcasm is the nectar of Saturn?"

"How many liters a day, though?" she guffawed. "Kom hier, handsome, sexy Von Spatzl, put me in check mate for while."

Von Spatzl always struck by the forwardness of Americans [The Austrian Girl was 1/16th American], permitted himself to be loved in his Old Turquoise Chair.

"Am I dreaming?" he asked The Austrian Girl. "Or are you wearing the exact same pink lingerie from Zug, that first time we met?"

"You are dreaming Von Spatzl," she said. "I bought a duplicate set. Like it?"

"I have a confession to make to you, The Austrian Girl," said Von Spatzl.

"What is it?" she said, pulling off his pants.

"I can see the beauty, but I can't feel it."

"You understand, of course, I am just a fantasy of yours."

"Yes, of course, but a very successful one. I'm nearly rehabilitated."

Von Spatzl that night wrote the French word, "Habiller" three times over a self-portrait as a baguette.

TIM THE TOWER CALLED TODAY ON THE TELEPHONE, Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XXV. Von Spatzl picked it up and listened.

"You sure don't talk much," said Tim the Tower.

"Yeah, it's fucking spring again and I tend to talk like a duck this time of year," Von Spatzl replied.

Daydream from Day Journal, Vol. XX: "I moved my Old Brown Chair to the window, looked out on the street. The Rambler is smashed, towed away, gone. I considered the pleasurable sexual experiences I've had in this brief life. Then I segued into a consideration of Heaven. What are its exact

dimensions, is there an upstairs or a downstairs, how does gravity function in heaven? Is there a night and day in heaven? Do people ever get hungry? Do they watch TV? Do they read Dante...in the original Italian?"

Von Spatzl remembered a poem he'd once written, (torn out of the Day Journal, Vol II and pasted into Day Journal, Vol XII next to a picture of his screen door he'd obtained by rubbing a pencil over a paper over the screen). "How poetic I used to be...."

Von Spatzl saw his Shrink again today.

Shrink: So, how are we doing?

Von Spatzl: Go long until the first week of March, take the fibers (maybe better to call them fibbers), again, JNPR and some of the software infrastructures. Then short the fuck out of the whole tech industry in September.

Shrink: Fine, fine, fine. So, did you dream?

Von Spatzl: I shit in my pants.

Shrink: You dreamed you shit in your pants?

Von Spatzl: No, I shit in my pants. Just before I came here.

Shrink: You're kidding.

Von Spatzl: Remember, headshrinker....March.

Von Spatzl wrote a poem of all things! Written on the foil side of a cigarette box, the word PULL was embossed at the top. Underneath the poem and written in ballpoint pen: "Today I spent the entire day dreaming of the life of Von Spatzl and his great exploits!" Taped into the Day Journal Vol. XXVII, the handwriting was Von Spatzl's own:

Poem

I once came  
thirteen times  
without moving.  
I could count them,  
One, two, three, et cetera.  
It kinds of builds

and builds. Not one  
spasm, you see.

And he wasn't even  
in me. But it's your  
poem, you do what you  
like, she said.

"Thirteen? No, you're kidding."

"Aren't I, just?"

I just shit in my pants.

"You're exploits are word famous."

"You mean world famous."

--Day Journal, Vol. XXVII

The Police knocked on Von Spatzl's shaky screen door today,  
frightening away the flies.

"Anyone in there?"

Von Spatzl came to the door. The policemen, one fat, one  
skinny, both with arms folded, their guns in their holsters,  
looking mean asked him for identification. Von Spatzl showed  
them his checkbook without uttering a sound. That seemed to  
satisfy them. They wanted to know what happened to the  
PRETTY GIRL who used to visit Von Spatzl. Von Spatzl was a  
bit shocked they knew a pretty girl used to visit him. She'd  
only been here twice. He felt watched but didn't show his  
nervousness.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"I don't know."

They went away possibly thinking Von Spatzl was stupid, but he was clever enough: He kept them from seeing his trading strategy on his NASDAQ level II trading screens.

"You'll never catch me copper," he muttered under his breath after they'd gone and then went to work writing it all down in his Day Journal Vol. XXVII.

Hmm. Who were they talking about? Judy America? Was she really what you'd consider "pretty"? Perhaps the police have their own categories for "pretty."

Von Spatzl made a note to write a shortish tract called "What is Pretty?" with footnotes and possibly pictures.

OUT FOR SOME CHESTERFIELD CIGARETTES, Von Spatzl saw a man in the street with half his face melted and running down his chin. Folds of flesh appeared as pinkish lava waves. He was walking with the whore who was drinking a beer in a paper bag.

The man, a victim of an acid fire when he was a young child and playing "chemistry" with his father's pesticides, was laughing, his eyes bright. Von Spatzl's eyes were glued on him and he felt the man's weird, smooth prison. The man looked up and saw Von Spatzl looking at him. Acid Face was the first person he'd looked at the whole day. It was as if he were an answer to his question concerning Heaven, is there a night and day in there? Here was eternal dusk. What a magic moment, so tender, so sad, so real. Von Spatzl wondered if he was just seeing the beauty... or feeling it.

Later on that same day, Von Spatzl could see her orgasm in Tooker or whatever car garage she was parked in. Could he feel her orgasm? It wasn't clear what that feeling was. He'd just eaten a hard boiled egg with curry, maybe it was that? "Isn't it a bad idea to have sex when you're pregnant?" he wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. XXV.

TODAY VON SPATZL REALLY REALIZED. He spent the whole day really realizing. Level II or even level III realizing. Like climbing out of the basement and going right to the roof. Like a weather vane, he shifted his realizing to dozens of subjects he'd long since forgotten, and new ones he'd never considered, like garbage pickup routes, the explosion in geriatric healthcare, the Watts Riots, Flower Power, the manufacture of vanilla extract and the number of books about "relationships and how to make them last."

Perhaps one day, with enough realizing days under his belt, he'd mount the heavens and really take off. Where? Back home, he realized. "They will cheer me because they don't understand me," he mused.

Countdown Begins: 1521321989, 1521321988, 1521321987, 1521321986, 1521321985, 1521321984, 1521321983, 1521321982, 1521321981 ... and so on, he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXVIII.

IT HAD BEEN YEARS SINCE HE'D BEEN IN THE LIBRARY. Von Spatzl picked a book from the shelves at random. He found a picture of a man holding two buckets filled with water. Beneath the picture was the word: "Punishment" Von Spatzl wanted a copy of the picture so he dropped a dime into the machine and made a Xerox. Von Spatzl reflected upon the word "Xerox." He asked the librarian: "Have you ever noticed the word "ero" in Xerox, nestled like a little kid between two picnic table leg xes."

"Uh, the library is closing in five minutes," she said.

"Buckets," he told her. "Two of them."

"Four minutes."

"I'll make a note of that," Von Spatzl said, "have you ever heard of Jeremy Bentham being told to leave the library?" Von



Spatzl, leaving with his Xerox, went home to paste his Xerox in his Night Journal, Vol. XXIV.

"Fuck me hard," she said.

"Ouch," she said. He had grabbed her by the ass because she wanted to be fucked hard.

"Buckets," he told her.

"You're smart, but you're no Jeremy Bentham," she said.

--Night Journal, Vol. XXIII

Von Spatzl was not sleeping regularly, and hadn't been for years, but occasionally napped in his Old Brown Chair or less occasionally in his Old Turquoise Chair. Once he fell asleep boiling a four-minute egg, but woke up in time just as the water boiled off. In these quick sleeps, Von Spatzl would rapidly descend (or ascend?) into a dream. Today, for example, he dreamed there was a fire in The Woman With No Name's building. A guy came out with half his face melted into a puddle of flesh, his skin on fire, his hands trying to put it out, catching the glutinous hot gel of his face as it dripped off. Next door, the Woman With No Name was screwing the mechanic. The mechanic's name was Tim. He could see that from the patch sewn into his mechanic's uniform, which he was still wearing. "My wife," he said to the Woman With No Name, "is off bowling. Don't worry."

The man on fire cracked into black carbonized pieces when someone threw water on him. Two buckets, one after the other. Slosh, Swoosh, Crack! Slosh, Swoosh, Crack! Von Spatzl found himself at the end of the dream standing on a large black and charred page in his Day Journal, Vol. XXIV, looking up at the Woman With No Name's window, two empty buckets in his hands. "Are you satisfied now?" he yelled, but she couldn't hear him as she was busy with her orgasm.

SUSIE WONDERFUL WAS A PRETTY SINGLE MOTHER who caught up to Von Spatzl in the library one day. (Years ago, and

so she was now safe enough, Von Spatzl reflected, to reflect upon). It was the last time before the last time he'd been in the library, then making Xeroxes of his eyes opened wide and blown up 400%.

"What on Earth are you doing?" asked Susie Wonderful.

Momentarily blinded, Von Spatzl reached out and caught hold of her tits.

"Oh, excuse me," he said.

"I like you," she said. "Let's go get Chinese food. I'll drive."

"That's good because I only walk, and barely at that."

As it turned out, after sweet and sour soup and fried rice and lychees she put his hand her buckets.

"Susie, I know you are wonderful and all," said Von Spatzl in a moment of confession. "But I must tell you that I can't have sex with you."

"Lychee?" asked Susie Wonderful.

As it turned out, Susie Wonderful had a very bad case of genital herpes. She told him this after half a quart of gin and half a pack of his Chesterfields.

"Can I use your toilet?" asked Susie Wonderful. (She hadn't told him yet).

"Sure help yourself."

Susie Wonderful came out and sat on Von Spatzl's Old Brown Chair and showed him her crotch.

"You can come and touch it," she offered. But then of course he noticed it – the red and swollen folds, dotted with bright white pustules. Von Spatzl stayed put on the Old Brown

Chair's cousin, the black leather sofa with the stuffing coming out of it. He reached for his Bruno unit.

"Can I use your toilet?" asked Susie Wonderful. (Now, of course, Von Spatzl knew).

When she finally went home a half-hour later, Von Spatzl noticed she didn't flush the toilet and left him a gift of her shit.

"Wonderful," said Von Spatzl, dousing his Old Brown Chair with a quart of Jack. "Disinfectant," he wrote across a double spread in his Day Journal, Vol. IX, five times for a total of five words.

"I thought you were my friend," Von Spatzl cried. "Why would you want to give me herpes?"

He debated the differences between "I'm sorry," "I'm very sorry," and "I apologize." Could words disinfect the past?

Von Spatzl wrote: "I thought you were my friend" 10,000 times (it took three days) in a single book, (Night Journal Vol. XXVI) for a total of 60,000 words. It signaled the bottom, perhaps, even if he hadn't hit it. Von Spatzl and I sat outside together that night sipping VBJDs and smoking Chesterfields, watching Tokyo in a gladiator outfit duel with his sister who was dressed as Queen Elizabeth. We'd been friends for so long.

"I'm very touched," said Von Spatzl. "Me, too," I said.

The very next day...

Von Spatzl paced the room. Back and forth, back and forth.

"I want to ask you if you agree..."

Lying down in his home away from home, trying to wrap his mind around death, Von Spatzl's mother called to say she stubbed her toe. She said she might have to have it replaced.

"They can replace your toe?"

His father got on the phone and said he had a little pain in his hip.

"Might have to have it replaced," he said.

Von Spatzl pondered the ailments of his parents. He tried to visualize their DNA breaking apart, and his own the most representative strain left amongst those remaining in his family tree. Von Spatzl then rose out of his coffin and sold his entire holdings in DELL- 10,000 shares - and moved the money to GRC, which made pumps. 20,000 shares. He got in at \$6.45. "Pumps," he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXVII. "You always have to replace pumps."

He also shorted 500 shares of LINUX at \$248. He would cover when the stock traded at \$3. "Mister Softy won't let a competing operating system happen....plus, Linux is free."

He took the phone off the hook and continued to pace the room back and forth, back and forth. "Froth and black," he wrote 333 times in his Day Journal (Vol. XXVIII) for a total of 999 words. Then over this block of text, Von Spatzl drew a picture of a house with someone looking out the upstairs window shouting: "Uterine Milk!"

Since coming back into life - stepping outdoors, making an appearance at the Flushtown Howard Johnson's, speaking to some people on the street, and actually looking into the faces of people he spoke with - Von Spatzl was exhausted. He was exhausted by humanity. And he could sense himself breaking apart. Again. So he crept back into his crypt with his Bruno Unit and tried to piece himself back together. He started with his own mythology.

It was perhaps the most enlightening insight of Von Spatzl's life. Von Spatzl began to see himself as child-hero and fathom his origins. His father, a deposed and weak king, his mother an ailing and now barren queen, dump the boy in a river where he, like Moses, is lost in the reeds. The infant Von Spatzl, still with poor motor skills, attempts to swim to shore.

Miraculously, he does. (This is before he learns about the utter terror of death, and he behaves instinctively, if that indeed is the correct term). Von Spatzl is soon found by wild animals and breast fed by an unnamed mythical beast with hair on its hooves. He grows up wild and learns to speak the languages of the forest, the desert and the ocean. Meanwhile, Vic and Tim go on to learn English and play Little League. They become model American terrorists, hooked on sugary donuts, mechanical toys, then knives, bb guns, cars, alcohol and the cult of television and death.

Many many years later when Von Spatzl finally made it to Stockholm, all he could say was an exhaustive: "Thank you, thank you."

"Thank you Stockholm," wrote Von Spatzl in his Night Journal Vol. XXVII.

The Austrian girl removed a bugger from her nose today. It was long and dried. "Accccccch," she cried and Von Spatzl laughed from his belly for the first time in a very long while, he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXVIII. "Put a nickel in you The Austrian Girl and there you go!"

Von Spatzl in a rare moment of capital self-indulgence removed a wad of cash from his bedroom mattress and found himself suddenly in a music store about to buy something he couldn't play: A guitar. When he got it home, he stroked its metal strings and a neighbor banged on the walls. (Von Spatzl was surprised because the neighbor lived in a detached house. It meant the neighbor had to come out of his own house, squeeze in though the shrubs up against Von Spatzl's house, and bang as if he shared a wall with Von Spatzl.)

"Write your congressman," Von Spatzl sang again and again.

Von Spatzl continued caressing the guitar strings without much effect, but it seemed to please him. Then he got a fresh bottle of Jack and went outside with the guitar and Tokyo came by dressed as a Tiger, followed by his sister in a white furry bunny outfit, bottomed off with fluffy pink slippers.

Together the three smoked Chesterfields and drank and played old blues songs, songs none of them knew the words of.

"So how many days has it been already?" Von Spatzl wrote in the heat of the night in his Night Journal Vol. XXIX. "Since Vic and Tim have been dead?"

While waiting for the Nikkei to open in the middle of the empty American Night, Von Spatzl dropped off to sleep in his Old Brown Chair and dreamed the police found the Woman With No Name. She was dozing in a car parked at a 7/11, just off the main road leading East out of Tooker. It was four in the afternoon where she was.

"Wake up," they said. "We thought you were dead."

"I'm not dead," she said. "You wish!"

"Oh, well then, okay."

The police left in a cloud of dust and she, The Woman With No Name, got out of her Rambler and walked to a phone booth and dropped a handful of nickels into the slot.

Von Spatzl woke up. Duhrrringggg! Duhrrring!

But he didn't answer it right away. Instead, he struggled to the front door to see who it was. In his mechanical walking style he paced up, out, down, forward back and forth in his house. Then, running in a herky jerky manner he picked up the phone on the dead run, dragging its cord into the kitchen before he answered it.

"Hello? Hello? Hello? Who is it? Dang nab it!" He could hear breathing. 12 breaths. Then the line went dead.

Von Spatzl pulled out his Night Journal Vol. XXVII and wrote once in an effusive, elegant script in black ink from a quill pen:

*“Lewis Carroll: It was late at night when  
the old man died.”*

Then, shelving the volume, he stared at the phone until it rang again.

It was his mother who called to complain about a bad case of conjunctivitis.

“Pink eye,” she said. “It’s disgusting.”

“I’ll bet,” said Von Spatzl who added that she should wear pink fluffy slippers. “At least be color coordinated.” He then went back to sleep in his Old Brown Chair – 15 minutes till Tokyo opened – but was soon awakened by the phone again.

“Hello?”

“Yes is this 516 944 7076?”

“Yes?”

“Am I talking to Mr. Von Spatzl?”

“If you want to go into it, yeah, why?”

“You may have already won a prize.”

“Oh?”

Von Spatzl dutifully spelled out his name and address for the woman, plus his age, his monthly income, his needs and desires, and the woman said thank you very much indeed. She sounded English.

“I’ll send over my sister.”

A loud boar like guffaw exploded over the phone.

Well, well, well. It was Tim the Tower having fun in a woman's voice.

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. It's a phony phone call."

"Go drink your uterine milk," Von Spatzl told him, just a little bit disappointed he hadn't won a prize after all. He wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXIV: "I never win prizes."

Von Spatzl received an e-mail from "Cheatin' Wives" dot com, signed by a woman named Eleanor. She said "My husband doesn't pay me too much attention these and would you like to get to know me, and why don't you just visit my web site?" Von Spatzl wrote back that if her husband didn't want her, why would he, Von Spatzl, want her?" "P.S." he added. "You don't know Jeremy Bentham from a glass of uterine milk, lady. Get a hobby."

## My complaint about Von Spatzl

By Von Spatzl

To Whom It May Concern,

I feel that there are better ways in which to disseminate the following information, but this letter will have to suffice gosh darn it.

For openers, as witnesses to mankind's inner dissatisfaction, we must act equitably, fair and balanced. In other words, when Von Spatzl is challenged, Von Spatzl either denies everything or claims that his words were taken out of context and that his enemies are plotting against him. Friggin' malarkey.

The need his cronies have for his unsavory solutions is especially strong as a means of transferring blame – an outlet for the despair they face when normal channels of protest and change are closed.

From the very beginning, lawless Von Spatzl clones have labored to recruit into their ranks the sons and daughters of



the powerful, famous, and rich. I confess that this is sufficiently illustrated by the ridicule with which Von Spatzl's undertakings are treated by everyone other than mean-spirited undesirables. Plus, he's a plagiarist.

Von Spatzl supports a wide variety of holier-than-thou attitudes. Some are wicked; others are obstreperous, most are mixed in a bag of fiction and lies. Yet, quite a few openly support abjection. In the end, the most telling thing is that he is too disorganized to reason with, as his journals, a complete waste of ink, attest. Bruno! Hah!

While it is not my purpose to incriminate or exonerate or vindicate or castigate or even by golly, urinate, Von Spatzl claims to have turned over a new leaf shortly after his long-winded confession. (Which we all saw on the Jenny Jones Show). This claim is an outright lie that is still being circulated by Von Spatzl's lackeys. The truth is that Von Spatzl's unenlightened classicism riding on the words of drugged-out alcoholic twits and under-aged hoodlums as well as a stream of socialist foreigners and chess hacks is one of Von Spatzl's favorite themes. In addition, he has given the traditional (and therefore value-laden) buy and hold strategy of investment a very bad name, indeed. I am personally long on the Fiber Optics.

Think of Von Spatzl's wisecracks as being the sum of two components: an antisocial component that consists of Von Spatzl's desire to pander to our worst fears and an effrontive component that consists of everything else. We are concerned primarily with the former.

Oddly enough, Von Spatzl's positions have served as a powerful weapon with which brutish polemics can make it virtually impossible to confront. Does Von Spatzl actually think his arguments through, or does he just chug along in his journal writing about whatever trite diatribes happen to suit his needs that day? If you can go more than a minute without hearing his meandering groans and illiterate (and bad!) poetry, that purport to be philosophically relevant, you're either deaf, dumb, or in a serious case of denial. Or quite possibly, in a coma.

All I can tell you is what matters to me: All people, including beer guzzling sex-crazed geeks or hippie chicks, faux intellectuals or misguided stock day traders, ought to be kind and sensitive to one another. In my view, Von Spatzl's criticisms and rants about his "food supply," his mother's quite serious ailments, and the "pain" he suffered at the hands of his twin brothers, are made of the same spirit that accounts for the majority of the problems we face in this world. That is, cheap booze.

A brief study of sociology will show one inescapable fact: If we contradict Von Spatzl, we are labeled depraved slobs. If we capitulate, however, we forfeit our freedoms.

Comments on the above are welcome, but please think them out first.

--Night Journal, Vol. XXVI

## 9 Fragments From

The Secret Journals of Von Spatzl

1.

Von Spatzl: Shrinkman, don't you think it's a bit strange that all we talk about is money?

Shrinkman: Well, uh, well uh, how do you feel about that?

2.

Von Spatzl: The Austrian Girl, the thing is, what I mean, that is... well, just look around you! Don't you see that we are both worms and food for worms! Isn't that terrifying?

The Austrian Girl: Well, Spatz, I've repressed most of that, but I do know that being dead is not as terrifying as *going to die*.

Von Spatzl: That's why I admire you so much. You can drink, you can piss standing up and you can play the accordion.

The Austrian Girl: Say, would you mind giving me bigger boobs?

3.

Von Spatzl: Now kids, here's some money. Invest it wisely.

Tokyo: Got a match?

Princess: What happened to your face?

Von Spatzl: Let's just say I had a bad night.

4.

Vic & Tim: We want to be stupid that's why!

Von Spatzl: Oh. So that's it. I thought you hated me.

Vic & Tim: Look at him. Can't say a word.

Von Spatzl: Word.

5 .

Von Spatzl: Look, as a child I fully believed in my magical powers, and why not? But as I got older I grew more frustrated at my inability to control the world.

Von Spatzl's Mother: I broke a nail, what did you say?

Von Spatzl: Don't you see that my problem with the world began when you stopped me from playing with my shit.

Von Spatzl's Mother: Well, are you over that now?

6.

Von Spatzl: If you can hear me Woman With No Name, send me an e mail.

Von Spatzl's E-mail Box: You have no new mail.

7.

Tim the Tower: You sure don't talk much.

Von Spatzl: I'm sorry, I'm in a meeting.

8.

Fat Lady at Ace Liquors: You sure don't talk much.

Von Spatzl: Do most alcoholics?

9.

Von Spatzl: So finally! Jeremy Bentham! I thought we'd never meet. You don't look so good, at least not like the engravings I've seen of you.

Jeremy Bentham: I'm sorry, I'm being eaten by a worm.

## Ahead: A Bend in the Road

-- Sign along the Mississippi River.

Von Spatzl was dreaming that after having sold off 9,600 shares of CSCO, 1,000 shares of EMC, 7,500 shares of NOK and taking a short position on JNPR at \$244 he inadvertently hit the short sell button for 10,000 shares of GE. What a nightmare! He awoke in a cold sweat and checked his current trading lineup. Yes, in fact he'd done just as he'd dreamed. He quickly covered the GE short. Oddly enough, his short of GE netted him \$20,000. Apparently there was a news report about an oversupply of titanium filaments which pushed GE down \$2 and change. He promptly fell asleep in his Old Brown Chair and saw The Woman With No Name drive, drive, drive straight ahead into the next day, directly into the rising sun. She passed a sign that said simply:

# **Welcome!**

Von Spatzl could sense The Woman With No Name groping in her heart, he could sense her isolation, her desperation, and for a moment he could also sense her slight constipation. But

that passed. He felt uncomfortable inhabiting her body, but he got used to it.

She felt as if...well, she didn't know how she felt. "Do I still have feelings?" she said to the radio. The kids were sleeping, sleeping, sleeping. She fired up a cigarette and rolled down the windows slightly and a crisp gust of Missouri roused her.

"Feel your feelings," he shouted to her in his dream, "then maybe I can feel mine!"

She eased her Rambler off the road onto a shoulder, the dust rising in a cloud and choking her. He could feel her wanting to have never been born. She said: "God why don't You just tell me what You want from me?"

Von Spatzl began to cry and in the dream he kissed her sleeping children. He awakened in his Old Brown Chair with tears running down his face. He wrote the word "Tear" in his Day Journal, Vol. XXVII twice, vertically, in red.

HIS MOTHER WAS DYING, he could plainly see. But he ignored her pain. Instead of tending to her, he called emergency. The ambulance didn't, however, pick her up. They came for him.

"I'm fine," he protested. But the three men in white wouldn't listen. They injected him with a sedative, lifted him up on a gurney and slid him into the white wagon, flipped on the siren and the blue lights and sped him off to Flushtown General. A doctor was taking his pulse when he came to, and smiled. "We're putting you into a private room," he said. When a nurse came round to see him, he looked up at her and saw her nametag: Vicky Valmont.

"I am concerned about my health...Vicky Valmont," he said. "But actually, now, I feel fine."

"Have you been feeling your feelings?" asked Vicky.

"I think I'm going to have a heart attack," he told her. "But not right this minute. I figure two years maximum."

"We'll see what you'll do. In the meantime, here's some nice yellow Jell-O for you."

He spent three days in the Flushtown General's Emergency ward, first as a patient, then as an observer, then as the victim of food poisoning from the food in the cafeteria.

When Von Spatzl arrived back home he wrote the episode up in his Day Journal and titled it: "Close Call."

His shrinkologist offered this opinion: "You really should be going long on the NASDAQ, Von."

Von Spatzl said: "But I'm feeling my feelings. Plus I think you have another 3 months to stay long, then watch out below. We've reached the top of the bubble. The internet's fiction has reached its final chapter."

The madness dragged on. His long positions were getting toppy, as he'd thought. Time was coming to close down these positions and go short. But he knew that a steep drop would force intense buying, if only to catch the vibrations of the dead cat bounce. He stayed up night after night looking for signs of the downturn, and remarkably it strengthened him. He drank Jack and smoked and charted the NASDAQ 100, printing out 5 day charts, 20 day charts, moving averages (50 and 200 day charts). "Here," he said. "This is where it'll drop off, where the dead cat just falls and falls and there's no bottom." Where and when was it? His birthday.

Finally, he fell asleep in his home away from home. Von Spatzl dreamed again (a flying dream) about The Woman With No Name. He floated above her Rambler, crying as he flew and his tears splashed on her windshield. She wiped them away and then, in an eerie moment, she wiped away her own tears (he hadn't seen her crying!) with a hanky embroidered with the initials "VS." Stunned, he yelled at her from above: "Your car is a horse with no teeth." But she couldn't hear, and Von

Spatzl's arms had begun to hurt from flying. He woke with a feather in his mouth.

Von Spatzl drew a picture of a pair of horse teeth, beneath he wrote: "Left" under one tooth, and "Right," under the other.

That evening his mother called.

"Oh, nothing," she said. "I was just lonely."

In fact, his mother had died and she was telephoning from the cemetery. Instead of attending the funeral, Von Spatzl went to sleep. He dreamed he buried her. There were two dozen people at Rolling Meadows, all standing in the hot sun, swatting away flies come to feast on the sugar oozing out of their sweaty pores. One man Von Spatzl didn't know spoke about his mother's sense of humor, her sense of duty, her love of life and the love she had for her children and her husband.

"She simply melted my heart," said the man. "And I know! I've had six heart attacks!"

The mourners raised their arms shouted "Hallelujah!" and Von Spatzl awakened, brushing away a fly.

His mother called again.

"Are you still lonely?"

"I am just lonely," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal (Vol. XXVI), one thousand times for 4,000 words.

Today The Austrian Girl, after 3.2 liters of beer, told Von Spatzl about her life as a hooker.

"I was vorking as a high class call girl for a Madame in Los Angeles," she said. "Well *vorking* was not really the vord. I was pretty and schmart, zo la Madame liked to have me around and fed me booze and food and gave me a room in the Beverly Hills Hotel. Zo I vatched cable Fernsehen and practiced my accordion for the finals in Mexico City. It was,

vell, okay. But as I had absolutely kein experience als eine hooker, I was viewed as a pretty lousy call girl. Ha yuck! But because of this some film producer thought I was charming. He told Madame that he would like to spend some time mit me. So we went to his suite wo he ordered food and champagne and flipped on the cable television.

'So vat do you like?' he asked me.

'I actually like to play the accordion, and I used to play quite a lot of violin. Right now I'm scribing a text book on Gene Psychology, that is how genetic material influences psychological phases of development....'

'That's nice. Now ask me vat I like....'

He turned out to have a penchant for eating shit. Ja, shit.

Oh I had heard rumors, but I didn't believe them. How can anyone eat shit?

After we sat there and he explained how he liked eating shit – straight out of the ass! – and we had some champagne and I nodded, and he offered some cocaine powder, he ambled over to the bed and laid there with all his clothes on.

'Kom here sweetheart,' he said.

So I went over to him and he said: 'Take off your clothes und struddle my face.'

It was klar he was impotent.

"No, not that way, the other vay...I want you to shit in meinen mouth."

Acch! Vell, you know champagne and cocaine, basically, constipates me. Makes it all stoppen, ja know? But after half an hour of his probing my open asshole mit his finger, I managed to dump a little shit into his mouth.



You'd think he'd be happy, but upon receiving the small kakachen in his mouth, he pushed me away and leapt off the bed, ran into the bathroom and vomited violently like a cat mit einen hairball. I sat on the bed and cried while he made a terrible noise. Now, bien sūr, it's funny, sehr lustig. Ha yuck! Ha yuck!

That's one of the dirtiest things I can think of, I'm sorry. You promise not to tell anyone?"

"Ummmm," said Von Spatzl. "I'll call you back."

All the while, however, Von Spatzl wrote down every word into his Night Journal Vol. XXV.

"I'll call you back," Von Spatzl wrote one time each in the Day Journals Vols. IX, XI, XXII and XXVI and once in the Night Journal Vol. XXV. But the phrase "I promise...to call you back," appeared only in Vol. XXVI. One can only speculate as to what this means – does Von Spatzl begin to honor The Austrian Girl with this "written" promise? Is it a reference to her sordid tale, or does it indicate a promise of some other secret? Or perhaps it is merely another one of his out-of-context phrases that refer to nothing other than some interest in seeing his words shining out of his Journals like so many stars he'll never visit but only wish upon?

He called The Austrian Girl and read her back his journal notes from Night Journal Vol. XXV.

"That didn't *really* happen did it?"

TOKYO CAME OVER FOR A BEER dressed in a silver-colored plastic knight in shining armor outfit. His sister, the Princess, was Rapunzel. She carried two meters of her red hair in a large plastic bag. The Austrian girl was there doing crosswords, and we all had beers and chatted about the different kinds of beers there are in the world, the ones we've tasted and the ones we haven't and finally the brand of the beer everyone drinks on a daily basis.

"Rheingold."

"Schlitz."

"Olde Bohemia."

"I don't drink."

"I can't believe you trink beer and schmoke zigarettes," The Austrian Girl said to Tokyo. "Give me a seven letter Deutsche vord for "'bad.'"

"Yup," Tokyo replied. "I do both. How about 'schlect?'"

Von Spatzl got up suddenly and said: "I had such a good time at the concert. What was the name of the group?"

"Hot Tuna."

"Right, now I remember."

Tokyo said: "Hey, what's this?" picking up the Bruno Unit grocer's arm.

Von Spatzl: "Don't touch that it's very dangerous. It breaks eggs. Who knows what it'll do to an Astronaut!"

Rapunzel said: "Hey, can I buy some stocks?"

"Sure, how about some candy stocks?"

When they left, Von Spatzl recorded the purchase of 10,000 shares of RMCF, Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory in his Day Journal Vol. XXIV. "At \$2.50 a share, it is an easy four bagger. Everybody loves chocolate." An hour later the stock hit \$5 and he sold it. "Mmmm good."

Today someone sued Jenny Jones for \$25 million. The nature of the lawsuit was not clear, nor was it certain who was suing

her. Von Spatzl remembered that \$10,000 invested in DELL's IPO would today be worth \$25 million.

"In this case I think the messenger should be taken out and shot," Jenny Jones said through her lawyer.

"Oh? where?" asked Von Spatzl to the radio. "In the back?"

"His zizi."

Von Spatzl wrote the words "Doodle doo" five times for a total of 15 words in his Day Journal, Vol. XXV. Then he added the phrase, "Ah, relationships, the eternal battle against the fear of death."

Written in black grease pencil opposite a black and white picture of a 1950s kitchen that Von Spatzl had glued into his Night Journal, Vol. XX some years ago, he added this message: "Nora, his wife, baked Yorkshire pudding that night."

Von Spatzl had a change of heart, largely because

1. He was actually feeling okay. The attempt to feel his feelings was paying off. His fiber optics were bolting north and he was become fairly expert with the Bruno Unit.
2. But he felt sharp pains in his chest and was fairly certain that he'd have a heart attack any moment. It was just a matter of time. His number was coming up.
3. He therefore decided he would title everything:

## The Mathematical Story of My Life

He thought he would like to forget all his yesterdays and merge with The Austrian Girl. But of course there were complications which he recorded in his Night Journal, Vol. XXIX.

Me: My dear The Austrian Girl, you are a nosey little crook...

The Austrian Girl: Vell, Von Spatzl, I was just looking for a cozy little nook....

Me: I believe I am about to die of a heart attack.

The Austrian Girl: Ach! You're...you're just an art hack.

Me: Ah, that's a...a crushing blow.

TAG: A blushing crow.

Me: You mean a one-legged man in an ass kicking contest.

The Austrian Girl: Exactly.

Me: Just like James Joyce.

The Austrian Girl: Nora, his wife, baked Yorkshire pudding that night.

Further complications as expressed in this conversation (Night Journal, Vol. XXIX) The Austrian Girl had with Von Spatzl:

Me: The Austrian Girl, I know your blows...

The Austrian Girl: Von Spatzl, please blow your nose.

Me: The Austrian Girl, why don't we go and take a shower.

The Austrian Girl: Go and shake a tower...

Me: Oh, don't tease my ears

The Austrian Girl: I wish you would ease my tears

Me: Oh please, stop nicking your pose.

The Austrian Girl: You have eleven toes.

Me: The Mathematical Story of My Life.

The Austrian Girl: Are you multiplying me to become your wife?

But in a more recent conversation, (Night Journal, Vol. XXIX), the gloves came off...

Me: I think our problem is a lack of pies.

The Austrian Girl: Ach, Von Spatzl! A pack of lies!

Me: My heart is roaring with pain, I need to seal the hick. So go help me sod, quit pit nicking, I'm a damp stealer.

The Austrian Girl: You're a hypodermic nurdle, you should wave your sails...

Me: I'll just sit in my Old Brown Chair, and chip the flannel on the TV...

The Austrian Girl: You are a mad bunny.

Me: ... bad money you mean.

The Austrian Girl: Right, I'll call Stockholm as soon as I'm out of the shower

Me: I need to move... ah... lead of spite...

The Austrian Girl: This is the pun fart...

At which point she slipped off her plis and gave him her lips.

Me: I hit my bunny phone...

The Austrian Girl: You are a monk who travels from one place to another, going nowhere but deeper into love.

Me: My Old Brown Chair.

TAG: Your bold clown air.

Me: Death, in the end, is a joke. Ya huck! Kiss me nood gight. I'll just let go now... just die. Hold me in your arms, say you love me one last time.

TAG: I'll mix some spritzers. I don't think your time is nigh, let's start a fire and get high.

Me: The Mathematical Story of My Life.

The Austrian Girl: Ja, naturlich, I'll be your vife.

DAYS LATER AS I SAT ON MY OLD BROWN CHAIR holding my heart, which I believed was pumping irregularly, The Austrian Girl who couldn't deal with my death asked: "Who is this?"

She was nosing through my Night Journal, Vol. X.

"Cynthia Slooton From Wooton?"

"Really, The Austrian Girl," I said, "you shouldn't go sticking your schnoozle into my unfinished work...particularly as I lay dying here in the Mississippi of my life. But because I love your crooked teeth as they give you character, and you've mixed up such wonderful gin and vanilla cocktails and you did have some decent insight into the failure of server farms to fully take hold in the current economic environment... I'll tell you the story..."

"Ach, gut! Another Von Spatzl classic!"

"Let's see now...Cynthia Slooton? From Wooton? In jolly ole jolly old... yes, now I remember. She was that very very English girl, who came round once because she was lost here in Flushtown, and couldn't find the main road. She knocked and Von Spatzl (that's me), had been dozing off in the Old Brown Chair waiting for a bid to clear on EMC. Well, Cynthia Slooton from Wooton just walked right in the front door!

"Hi,' she said. 'I'm Cynthia Slooton from Wooton - that's in England,' she apologized and smoothed her outfit: orange blouse, orange skirt, orange shoes, orange socks all topped off with fiery red hair.

"England? This is America! You can't just break into people's houses!" I shouted. As you know I barely talked to anyone in those days, it was such a shock to have someone barge into my house. I fairly left my catatonia and leaped into another skin, that of the Angry Young Man. I imagine I got it from watching American television. But anyway...

"Oh I'm terribly terribly sorry!" she said.

"You can't!" I shouted. "Not in this country."

"Well I'm terribly terribly sorry, I said," she said.

"It doesn't matter how terribly sorry you are, you can't do it," I continued shouting. I had no idea where this would end. Oh if only I had a dog!

"But I've done it and I'm sorry, you see it's just that I'm, well, lost, I'm from Wooton you see, and I can't find the main road and I saw your light on and well, I thought, perhaps you could direct me to the main road."

"The main road?"

"Yes the main road..."

"Cynthia Slooton from Wooton, you say? I've never heard of you," I said. "Are you well known?"

Von Spatzl and Miss Slooton continued on this way, until, Miss Slooton sensing our hero (that's me!) weakening, said, "Say, I could make you some pumpkin soup if you like... I've picked up some pumpkins, would you like that?"

"Let me understand this Miss Slooton from Wooton with her pumpkins shootin tootin.... Just who's slootin' who?"

"Oh that's clever, what do I call you... ?"

"I, Miss Slooton, am Von Spatzl, doctorate of letters, champion of chess, veteran of plastic surgery, lately of Munich, Bratislava and Zug."

At which point The Austrian Girl giggled with delight.

"Lately....! Ha yuck!"

"That sounds very very important," said Miss Slooton. "But I'd be pleased to produce some very wonderful and tasty pumpkin soup..."

"This is highly unusual," I said. "I don't know if my readers would support this kind of chromatic symbolism in a work like this. I suspect you are out for something else...."

"Oh, but Mr. Von Spatzl, I am but a lost sheep...on the road to the slaughter house."

"Oh very well, if you insist...." I said. "Hm... you are very very very very attractive...I particularly like your orange hair."

"Well, thank you, but it's really tangerine..." she said as she ran out to her carrot-colored rental car, got a pumpkin, some clementines, and a bag of carrots and some orange amphetamines. She then set up shop in the kitchen, and in almost no time at all, Miss Sooton produced an entirely monochrome meal.

"That relationship, my dear The Austrian Girl, lasted for a single night: Halloween.

"Later, however, Cynthia Sooton from Wooton had a terrible time getting into the bathroom, so drunk was this Wooton girl.

"'Hey Spatz, hey!'" Miss Wooton called drunkenly. 'Come here.'

"And like a dumb loveable puppy, Von Spatzl – that's me! – opened the kybo door to see her standing, her orange skirt lifted up and held by her chin as she did her pee pee standing up like a man and squirted out a yellow-orange can's worth of used beer. I was, however, shocked and returned to my Old Brown Chair where I smoked in fuming silence until Miss Wooton, realizing her error, left, never to return to Flushtown. Ever ever again!"

"I see you wrote the word "Rheingold" 333 times for a total of 333 words in your Night Journal, Vol. XVIII," said The Austrian Girl.



"Yes, The Austrian Girl, it is one of many images. Like now. See: Von Spatzl reaches out for The Austrian girl, but she was no longer there. She was never there."

"Hmmm," she mused. "Yeah, like a Hobo on a ham sandwich."

That night Von Spatzl got up to pee, but instead of peeing into the toilet, he peed into a trashcan and went back to bed wondering if he had flushed.

"Bucket," he whispered into the darkness.

In the morning he drew a picture of a trash can in subtle grays and blues trying to create the feeling for painted metal. He taped the masterpiece to the wall in the bathroom and wrote the word: "Bait" beneath it in red lipstick "The Austrian Girl has left for the day."

The Mathematical Story of My Life, again.

"Reach for the stars with your own Bruno Unit," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. XXIX. "And find the pattern in the universe."

THE PHONE RANG AND RANG AND RANG, slowly boring a hole the size of a nickel inside Von Spatzl's head. This void exposed Von Spatzl's brains and his brains dribbled down the side of his face like melted Silly Putty. Von Spatzl went to the bathroom to see the cavity. In the mirror, he saw it clearly and touched the soft brain tissue as it slid from his head. How much of this hole was real and how much of this hole was his imagination? He touched the opening gingerly, and he felt a sharp sting on his finger. Opening his mouth he saw the bottom rows of teeth dotted with muted silver. Looking down his throat to see his heart, he saw the red muscle pumping, working away. Returning his gaze to his eyes Von Spatzl saw he was crying and the tears rolled off his face and onto his shirt smoking like acid and burning chasms into his chest.

--Night Journal, Vol. XXIX

Von Spatzl pulled down the Night Journals and thumbed through them. He was convinced he was mentally ill. That he hadn't healed, that he was mired definitively in the past, and the past was his only "now." He should have collected rocks, or insects or art. He should have gotten a regular job at a regular office and had a regular girlfriend, eating regular meals at regular restaurants and then produced regular children and have a bunch of regular friends who regularly come round and get drunk on the weekends. Then die a regular death. He would send nice looking cards with flowers, or funny cartoons to people on their birthdays ("You're not getting older, you're getting better!"), anniversaries ("Another year of love!"), or deaths ("My deepest sympathies.") on all the appropriate occasions. Instead, Von Spatzl was the poster boy of someone falling backwards into a pit of terror. Except to himself. He couldn't wrap his consciousness around it – his terror. There was a huge yawning gap. He'd never get back to Kansas... or Zug for that matter. He was certain he'd die in his Old Brown Chair, leaving a gaping hole which no one could, or worse, no one would, fill in with the pensive handful of dirt or the inspiring letter or the precious meaningful object to see him off. He'd die a regular death, like most of the people who'd been on Earth. His legacy was living on the fringes of the twin deaths of his twin brothers and a haunting love that never existed. He lit another Chesterfield and got a fresh bottle of Jack.

"I'm having a having a having a relapse relapse relapse," he wrote in the dim light of his desk, sitting in his Old Brown Chair. He typed the phrase 110 times for a total of 1000 words on a piece of graph paper and drew a picture of his Old Turquoise Chair on top of it in red grease pencil.

Von Spatzl lit a candle and, turning the page, watched the light and shadows flicker; shapes danced on the blank page. Was he being beckoned? Was this a pattern worth recognizing?

Carefully sharpening a Number 2 pencil, the curled shavings dropped onto his lap. More patterns. Random or destined? He raised the point above his ear and with a force he'd almost

forgotten he owned, sent the arrow of lead hurtling through space and down into and through the page and the others hiding behind it. The action smashed the pencil into splinters and created a hole that stopped short 17 pages into the uncertain future. He wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. XXIX, immediately after this intervention, "Alas, I am finally a man of action...."

The phone was still ringing. Von Spatzl wouldn't dare pick it up. He looked over to his mattress stuffed with money, a mere fraction of his net worth. He peered at his portfolio glowing on the computer screen to get the total sum. If he cashed out all his stocks now, paid the short and long term capital gains he'd be worth exactly: \$1,466,750.35.

Duhriiiiing! Duhriiiiing!

They are calling about the money, Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXX. "Phuck! They can have the money. The money. The money."

Von Spatzl wrote out a check to The Austrian Girl for One Thousand Kisses and taped it to his kitchen door in case he died and The Austrian Girl found him.

"At least she'd have that."

Taking a reflective breather from this longish episode of intense self doubt, Von Spatzl wondered if in the years to come he would ever write of this period in his life in a more expanded way, say perhaps in a novel, or perhaps a series of novels.

He'd have to cut out a great deal of the excess. Perhaps a series of children's books? It would be best if his *oeuvre* was banned from libraries, however. He understood, after all, how the world worked, even if he didn't understand how he fit into the machinery.

"MY SECRET? REDUCE, REDUCE, REDUCE," Von Spatzl reminded himself in one of his earliest notes in his Night

Journal Vol. I. He reread it again and again, as if to indicate that what followed from that note was the result of intensive and considered reductions to be found in The Secret Journals of Von Spatzl. But if Von Spatzl's biographers speculated about his work, the full 60 volumes of fat springing pages composed over a 10-year period, they'd have to conclude that "a great deal went unsaid, unwritten....that was Von Spatzl's great secret."

"I just want to thank the people of Sweden..."

Boo... Hisss.... Boo.... Hisss... Boooo! Fix! Gyp! Booo!

The Old Turquoise Chair

YEARS AND YEARS AGO after Von Spatzl had returned from Europe, his doctorate on "The Present Tense in Nietzsche" (not only written but published in English, German, Italian and of course, Chinese), he met the Woman With No Name in a bar called Horse Feathers. She was playing pool as it turned out, and winning big time.

"Your turn four eyes," she said, bored.

Von Spatzl took her on and, convincingly cleared the table of all the striped balls in his first go.

"Holy wow!"

From then on (for the next 18 months) she was his, or so he imagined. Von Spatzl felt the rising and healing tide of love moving through his breast, and the aching pains in his recovering legs; he held her hand as they walked to a near by park with an Indian name. Was it Takapusha? They played on the swings and in a deft display of adventure, he dipped his naked foot into the lake, scaring her. She took his hand and he held her tightly.

"Marry me" he wrote for a total of two words in his Night Journal, Vol. I.

Note bene: Von Spatzl's thesis on Nietzsche was inappropriately titled "Salut Slut." The title had little to do with Nietzsche, and mostly to do with a dirty weekend he spent in Dijon that, over the course of 48 hours, had turned from friendly to amorous to erotic to filthy to dangerous, and come Monday morning had the boy hobbling on a train back to Zug. Von Spatzl though, at least in those days, had a sense of humor. He began waving to women in the streets, in cafés, at his chess club (on Thursdays, when they allowed women) and his landlady on the Spritzgasse, "Salut Slut." They all would have been angry if they knew what he was saying and frightened by his burn scars if they weren't charmed by his pleasant smile.

"Salut Slut!"

Character, he noted dutifully and without irony, "is the psychological adjustment to a changing environment."

- Day Journal Vol. XIX

Question: Grasshopper, what is the reason for the ink in my heart?

Answer: Holy wow.

Years later that same girl, The Woman With No Name, her boobs budding forth, full and fruity (from birth control pills), wearing a navy blue one-piece to keep them in, laughed and laughed and ran to hid in the bushes.

"Catch me! Catch me! Catch me! If you can..."

Of course Von Spatzl couldn't catch her. He could barely catch the 9:20 to Zürich, or catch a fly. But his imagination was titilated: Becky Thatcher Picasso from his post-war surrealist period, he mused. In a deep and robust expression of his own youth, Von Spatzl chased her (his legs fresh and meaty) and found her breathing hard next to the snapping turtle egg nest.

"This is my island," she announced, newly born in love.

"Behold! The Mother of All That Is!"

Von Spatzl removed his pants and pointed his dinger towards some ducks. He peed into the lake scattering the feeding fish. She giggled. He carved their initials into a tree. Little did he know that she was about to go into full retreat, questioning not only his love, but love in general: Is this love?

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

Now Von Spatzl could see the V.S. floating in the heart he shaped with his Swiss Army knife. In love with himself? "Not even plastic surgery could help me," he wrote in his Night Journal, Vo.I III. "All my things when I die. Trees, too."

For years and years afterwards, he called, wrote, sent flowers, chocolates, stones he'd carved in the shape of hearts... to no avail. Horse feathers.

"I'm not marrying you!"

"All my things when I die."

"I'm not marrying you!"

"No little Von Spatzls, then?"

"I was only kidding."

"All my things when I die?"

"You are obviously in deep denial my little friend," Von Spatzl wrote in an illegible Gothic script three times for a total of 27 Gothic words, in his Day Journal, Vol. I, adding the caption below: "My Psychiatrist, 5 PM, Tuesdays."

I had a dream last night that I was sitting in the back seat of the car driven by Vic and Tim, wrote Von Spatzl in his Night Journal, Vol. I. We were travelling along a mountain road, hair pin turns, the moon our guide, my father's voice trailing us:

"The moon my ass." And when things happened I was propelled like Space Boy, launched through the front windshield out into the space to fly among the stars, alone without air, and turning, watched the twins soar into the past.

## List

My things.  
Your name.  
My name.  
All of my things.  
Your words.  
My words.  
My images.  
My dead things.  
Are yours.  
Your things now.  
When I die.  
Holy Wow.  
Dear God.

She in the green sweater, her silly tears running a groove in her makeup. She was saying over and over and over again: "Holy Wow...Holy Wow...Holy Wow...."

Her "Holy Wows," served as a kind of incantation, a spiritual chant meant only for him, Von Spatzl, catcher of "Holy Wows," as The Austrian Girl might say. And they were, in a word, rehabilitating. Like most spiritual quests, signs along the road were misspelled, or indicated miscalculated distances, and ultimately pointed out yet another dead end. This is the nature of all quests, whether for physical or spiritual pleasures, riches, goals. Left alone, Von Spatzl searched elsewhere: He read Goethe, and felt *insipid* because he identified with Young Werther, and he weeped. In a moment of "sheer stupidity" Von Spatzl sought the counsel of Vic and Tim but they only made fun of him and slapped his face, calling him: "Face."

Until he said to himself: "I won't speak anymore."

And for the remainder of his life with them still alive he spoke only 17 words to them over the course of 12 years.

"Face," they said.

Von Spatzl said nothing, only plotted his exit, again and again.

"Whatsamatter, Face?" they taunted. "Face."

Silenced, Von Spatzl, focused on the act of realizing: Years later he realized he had actually been under the influence and grace of "Holy Wow." All those striped balls.

But when word came of the accident and Von Spatzl's escape from death and the twins' failure on Earth, Von Spatzl said nothing, again. It was his third or fourth nothing period. Walking about on crutches, he said nothing all the time.

The phone rang and he would listen waiting for it to stop. Jehovah's witnesses knocked on the door and while the phone was ring, Von Spatzl opened the door and stared at them and he said nothing, and they left. A neighbor complained about the length of his front yard grass – "It's downright hairy," she sneered – and he said nothing. Nothing to the little fat lady in the market who sold him rice, beans and his supply of eggs for hard boiling – "That it?" – and took his change, saying nothing. Von Spatzl said nothing to the ACE LIQUOR man and his moustache who sold him Jack. He doled out nothing to the neighbors who waved hello. Early on he only nodded to the squirrels and birds in his yard, and mouthed the word "nothing." Von Spatzl looked at himself in the mirror and said the word "Nothing." Von Spatzl's silence was as thick as a hot and humid 4th of July.

"You could have found him," he wrote in his Night Journal, Vol. XXI, "any day or night of the week in his bed counting anything (spiders, paint cracks, dust balls, cigarettes he'd smoked, cigarettes he planned on smoking, and later on, dollars). Anything that could be counted. The Holy Wow was beyond



his grasp, just an echo dressed in a green sweater drenched with salty tears."

"A woman came and knocked on Von Spatzl's door," Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol. X. "She was, she said, a Jehovah's Witness and wanted to know if Von Spatzl had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart. Von Spatzl looked at her and said nothing."

"Perhaps a magazine, then?"

I said nothing, and finally she went away back to Heaven.

The next day Von Spatzl wrote the name "Vic" once on a blank page in No. 2 pencil in his Day Journal, Vol. V with his Bruno Unit. Then he scotch taped it to protect it, to seal it, to bury it under the glassine finish – a cheap, but effective effect. On the following page he wrote the word "Tim" and did the same thing. A cheap, but effective effect.

"There you go boys," he mumbled to the pages. "Now you have your own pages."

A woman came and knocked on Von Spatzl's door. He opened it and looked at her. They looked at each other. He'd never seen her before. She carried no flowers, her face was not burnt and she wasn't wrecking his Rambler. He couldn't imagine what she wanted. They stared at each other for a full minute. Von Spatzl wondered if indeed this was Jenny Jones. She seemed smaller in real life.

Von Spatzl began to count the seconds off in his head. He'd just gotten to 43 when she began to yell: "How dare you give my son \$100! So much money! Who do you think you are?! Some kind of lunatic?"

Von Spatzl stared at her, unperturbed, and said nothing. She ranted and raved and secretly, Von Spatzl wondered if she could read his thoughts: "I've got drugs and liquor in my house!"

Von Spatzl reached into his pocket and fished around, looking up at her just as she repeated for the fifth time the word "lunatic."

Von Spatzl found what he was looking for and wiggled out a \$100 dollar bill. He folded it four times as she spewed her anger at him like acid green vomit.

When she had accomplished her goal of covering Von Spatzl with her saliva, she wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her dress and stood dumbly awaiting response. Von Spatzl met her cloudy brown ones with his dewy blue ones. He reached for her hand and grasping it opened up her fist and inserted the bill. Then he closed his eyes and the door, returned to his desk and his Old Brown Chair and began to fish around for a pen....

"Thank you Stockholm," he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXI

Persistence in the Face of Agony

Recent Conversations With Von Spatzl (Day Journal, Vol. VIII)

Me: Tokyo, my boy, this life... it's like fighting a liar.

Tokyo: You mean, lighting a fire, man.

Me: Your mother was here.

Tokyo: Got a ciggy?

Me: You really shouldn't smoke.

Tokyo: So what happens to all your things when you die?

Me: They'll probably be auctioned off, why?

Tokyo: Oh, you can't take them with you?

## List

(Day Journal Vol. XX)

flutter by  
bedding wells  
I must send the mail  
cop porn  
it crawls through the fax  
it falls through the cracks  
would you like a nasal hut?  
puke on  
coupon

THE OLD BROWN CHAIR FELL APART TODAY, Kerplop, just as he was setting in to short a good 1,500 shares of LNUX, wrote Von Spatzl in his Day Journal, Vol. XXX, standing up amidst the pile of wood that was once his best and only true friend. "I am holding the leg of the Old Brown Chair in my left hand right now," he wrote. "This very second."

Von Spatzl drew a picture of the broken leg of his Old Brown Chair into his Day Journal Vol. XXX and wrote the words: "Hope is a dangerous thing," beneath it. He then scotch taped the 12-month chart of LNUX. It looked like the Cliffs of Dover. "Just wait till you see what happens next!"

VON SPATZL'S MOTHER CALLED TODAY.

"My mother called today," Von Spatzl wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XXX.

"Your father is dead."

"My father is dead," he wrote 1000 times in his Night Journal, Vol. XXX for a total of 4,000 words.

"Hope is a dangerous thing," wrote Von Spatzl in his Day Journal Vol. I, in his initial foray into Secret Journal Writing.

"My father's dead," he wrote in his Day Journal, Vol. XXX, the next day. "Holy wow."

# The Letters

Dear God,

What is the reason for the ink in my heart?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Why is the pain more intense when it is dark, when I am naked  
and in bed?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Could you please get me the hell out of here?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Where are Vic and Tim? Have You dealt fairly with them?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Why am I searching for reasons, for answers? Do the squirrels ponder the wisdom of hiding their nuts? Do the birds question the nature of worms? No, they don't. Is this kind of protest a form of prayer? Will it do? Or do I have to hit the correct note in order to sing in the choir?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

If I wrote this letter in German would you understand it differently?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Wo Sind Sie?

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Should I short the fiber optic sector now or wait until huge debt shows up on the balance sheet? Take a look at JDS Uniphase if You have a moment.

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

Am I supposed to feel anything? What if my feelings are disguised as nothing?

Oh, and by the way, what will I learn when I get to Heaven? What if I drop dead right now? What will happen to all my things? Will I be able to sit on my Old Brown Chair on a cloud?

Von Spatzl

P.S. Did you read my thesis on Nietzsche?

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Father,

Today I played basketball and football and baseball and that kid from the Bronx I told you about, took a crap in his pants in the camp bus and it was so hot you could smell him all the way to Switzerland. He also stole my butterfly guide. So I peed on his bed and he told the counselor and they didn't give me any supper I hate this place I want to come home.

Yours sufferingly,

Von Spatzl  
(Your son in prison camp!)

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Father,

It occurs to me that I grow older faster than you. For example, when I was two years old and you were 38, you were 19 times older than me. Now that I'm 10 and you are 46, you are only 4.6 times older than me. At one point you will only be a fraction older than me.

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Valerie,

I think you are the most beautiful girl in the world. Would you like to come to my birthday party on Saturday? I will give a slide show of my butterfly collection and some of us will play a little chess tournament.

Yours hopefully,

Von Spatzl

P.S. I'll be 11!

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Valerie,

I don't think it was very nice what you said about me, that I was "always trying to be mature." I am 11!

And then you talked with that guy (Stephen Maltedmilkballs) the whole time you were at my party--celebrating me! I am very very heartbroken.

And your present was something someone else gave you! What am I supposed to do with a pink T-shirt? It doesn't even fit me, and it feels like you wore a couple of times anyway.

You're lucky I'm a nice guy because I could tell everyone. One day I'll write a book and smear your name all over the world. You'll be very very sorry. And I probably won't forgive you. Ever.

Von Spatzl

P.S. You smell and have B.O.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Valerie,



I am sorry that I told people how cheap you were and that you were a whore. I promise I'll never do that again. I swear.

Yours sincerely,

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Nixon,

Do you still have your dog, Checkers? If you don't, you can have our dog. His name is "Dog." I don't like him. He's mean and he bites. But maybe you'd like him.

Von Spatzl

Age 11!

P.S. I think he's going to kill Sam the Hamster.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Nixon,

Why haven't you written me back?

Von Spatzl

Age 12

P.S. Sam the Hamster is dead, by the way.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Nixon,

Did they let you take your dog when you left the White House? Our dog is still around and he's still mean. He's yours for the asking.

Von Spatzl

Age 13

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Valerie,

I have a very serious question to ask you.

Are you really in love with Stephen Maltedmilkballs?

I don't want to alarm you, but I heard from some people in gym class that he has three testicles. I just thought I'd warn you before it was too late.

Yours frankly speaking for your own good,

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Mark Twain,

I've read all your books (except the one about Joan of Arc, but it's on my list), and I liked them very much. I especially like the girl Becky Thatcher. She's adventurous, intelligent, caring. I think she'd make a great mother. I think one day I'd like to meet a girl like Becky Thatcher.

Yours sincerely,

Von Spatzl

Age 13

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Dante,

There's a girl named Valerie in my class. She's very beautiful and has long frizzy blonde hair and wears suede mini skirts. She's also quite good in mathematics. Valerie reminds me of your Beatrice. I'm a little afraid to talk to her but I find myself thinking about her all the time. I even had a dream about her

where I pushed her on the swings at school and went around to watch her from the front and I could see up her dress. Then she let go and flew off and landed right on me and then I woke up.

Did this ever happen to you?

Yours truly,

Von Spatzl

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Dear Valerie,

Do you want to go to the prom? Like I have the Cutlass! Whaddya say? I've also quite a load of Acapulco Gold and Jose Cuervo Gold and some gold chains (one for you!).

I know you'll say yes.

"Spatz"

P.S. We've got a cooler!

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Dear Valerie,

I'm sorry you are still in the hospital. University is good, I'm taking Applied Mathematics, German, Italian (we're reading The Inferno by Dante, which I've read numerous times of course), Computer Science, Economics and a course in auto mechanics. I'm the president of the Chess Club.

But most of my time I spend with an Austrian girl I met here. she's on an exchange program and she's making esoteric films on the nature of the self. We're working on one now together about mothers and guilt. It's a documentary. She's great, very mature, you'd like her.

Warmly,

Von Spatzl

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Dear Valerie,

I'm glad to hear that you've made first violin for the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. I'm not doing so well. Actually, I've been quite depressed. My life is a shambles. It's all my fault. I'm a nothing. I'm sorry I hurt you so many years ago.

Will you ever forgive me?

Von Spatzl

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Dear Valerie,

I don't blame you for not writing me. I heard you had twins. Every time I think of them I think they could have red hair like me.

I know, I'm pathetic.

Sorry to have bothered you.

Congratulations,

Von

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Editor's Note: Von Spatzl did indeed suffer a two car accidents when was 17 in his mother's 1975 yellow Cutlass, no "Valerie" was in the car.

The police report indicated that Von Spatzl destroyed a white fence and that he knocked over a fire hydrant that shot a

spume of high pressure water 25 feet into the air on the night of his high school prom. It was a night Von Spatzl also claims he was putting the finishing touches on his thesis on Nietzsche's Present Tense (which was later renamed "Salut Slut," although a copy of this supposedly 555-page tome has never been found. School records show that Von Spatzl wasn't at his prom, according to his classmates who were, and who also say they barely knew the guy. In fact, Von Spatzl was found in his room, a worn copy of *Il Paradisio* on his bed and a chess board with its pieces scattered on a small table. A pair of candelabras shed the only light in the room. When the police came, they observed that the young Von Spatzl's "hair was wet but the boy was uninjured." When asked who would pay for the car and the damage, "the boy slid out a briefcase from beneath his bed and calmly opened it. It was filled with cash in \$100 bills."

"How much?" he asked.

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Dear Father

It's about 3 am and I'm sitting in my room and you are down the hall sleeping. I've been reading and rereading Dante's Inferno. My eyes are tired, my head is throbbing. I can't make head nor tail of the universe. Needless to say, I can't sleep.

IWhy did you marry mother? Why was I born?

Von

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Dear Father,

Are you afraid to die?

Von

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Editor's Note: In a startling letter written to the "The Woman With No Name," we have a sense he was trying to instruct her:

My Dearest Woman With No Name,

In answer to your sweet question...one rather learns to create a fiction that seems right. Or a number of them.

1. My father's story.
2. My mother's story.
3. My children's story.
4. What I think about sex.
5. What I think about God.
6. What I like to read.
7. What I like to eat.
8. Und soweiter.....

Von Spatzl

Editor's Note: The letter is torn off at this point, as if it were just a note... he plays at her name, repeating "Woman With No Name," as if she doesn't exist, but in the thickness and heaviness of his words and the reoccurrence throughout the Day and Night Journals, the Woman With No Name is, yes, *is* someone.

In another letter, also undated, with the characteristic sweetness he holds for the Woman With No Name, he writes:

Dearest Woman With No Name,

You ask me what to look for?

Here is my recipe. What to look for. Things. That don't make sense. Things like. Grief. Loss. Unexplainable joy. Confusion. Things lost then found (Hermes, no?). Strange. People who just come barging into your life. Stolen glances. Weird thoughts. Effluvium carries it along – rage and anger and fear and jealousy and images of yourself as superior and then

inferior and the flip side, love and contentment, feelings of things being "just right." Right. Just.

It is possible you've missed some things along the way. But one can't live life as a vacuum cleaner, sucking it all up into a bag that is mostly dust.

As hard as you try you can't turn over every stone along the way. But you can turn over the stones that speak. And stones speak, as do tables and chairs and trees and birds.

With love and Holy Wow,

Von Spatzl

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*And yet another letter to the famous Woman With No Name:*

Dearest Woman With No Name,

I met a man in a café here in Zug. He seemed to be a professor of some kind, and perhaps he was, although I never asked. An American with strong skills in German, Italian and as it turned out a working knowledge of Sanskrit. Bearded with small glasses, tweed jacket, he seemed a very atypical American in a foreign city. He drank kirs and smoked fine Cuban cigars. But what interested me enormously, and this is why I am writing you, is the book he was reading.

I had just returned from a minor chess tournament (I played the local champs in Neufchatel all at once, and hated to destroy them all in such a short time, but I had a train to catch back to Zug). So I fairly collapsed into a chair at my preferred café, Le Zinc, ordered my standard Ricard and sat, gazing at the infinitude spread before me in Zug. I noticed the man, sitting next to me, largely because of the way he turned the pages of his book. With slow deliberation, one could see him gathering up each word as if it were a drop of clear water for his thirsty parched eyes. I noticed the book he was reading. "The Problem of Rebirth." Written by a Sasha Indoshikan.

When he noticed me noticing him and his book, we made our introductions and soon enough, the man gave me a café rendition of *Life on the Planet with The Problem of Rebirth*. We looked out over the bustling Saturday street scene on Zug's main square.

"Are you certain that all this is meant to be?" I inquired. "Couldn't it all be a mistake – evolution and human takes a wrong turn as it did obviously in the 'hot thin soup?' Some inorganic molecules get together after a billion years of floundering about they start replicating... and now we have kirs and pastis?"

"No," he said amiably but definitively. "All this is *not* a mistake. And it *is* good. Trust me my friend."

All that craziness I've experienced. It is not a mistake and it is good.

"This is good?" I asked again. "All this is not a mistake?" I touched my damaged legs and resettled my walking sticks on a chair near me, just for emphasis.

"No, it is *not* a mistake, it is what is *supposed* to be."

Part of the problem, I suggested, is that we are just not highly evolved. "But you're talking about necessity."

"Yes, that's true," he concurred. "We live in paradoxes, and it's not some philosophic Rubik's Cube, either. It's quite real and it all filters through, and is real and is meaningful. It is necessary."

I bought him another kir with my winnings from the chess tournament and left him there. I returned immediately to my hotel room at the Hotel Zug where, with a mild headache, after an hour or so I heard the most thrilling music drifting up through the floor.

Yours searchingly,



Von Spatzl

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*And yet another letter to the Woman With No Name, perhaps implicating her... one can wonder.... Particularly when we know that it was rare that Von Spatzl ate dinners consisting of anything more than hard boiled eggs, let alone sharing them with others. Yet some of his remarks here are pertinent, indeed he claims this "English girl" is now seeing his own psychiatrist!*

Dear Woman With No Name,

An English girl I know is very flirtatious with me. She confessed to me at a dinner here at the Hotel Zug that she (and I quote directly), "stopped sleeping with strangers and now only sleep with people I know."

"Anyone I know?" I inquired innocently.

I knew of course that she'd been having a torrid affair with a writer of rather poorly edited and badly imagined philosophy texts (the last work, in German, I have included here).

Editors Note: No copy of any book of this sort was found in Von Spatzl's possessions.

She paused for effect. "No, I think not," she said. The snob.

Well, what's that all about? Pique my interest? The creation of alternative selves as a means to avoid her own death - the death, the living death, of her own self, something so unfathomable to her- is, I realize now, evidence she has little or no choice in her actions. Like so much venison at the butcher shop. She is now seeing my old shrink. That is, she's having an affair with him as well. Talk about Black Holes!

It doesn't surprise me people stay in therapy for a long time. Securing a safe place so they can go out and lie to the world around themselves - and themselves as well - and then rush in to the stolid little room with the bearded man or the decrepit wise guy and confess it all, substituting tears for self awareness!

Some claim innocence, others are totally blind to what's going on with them. Most are just angry. Few are capable of love, and those few, probably not all the time. Indeed, people kill each other and tear each other's hearts out for reasons they are completely unaware of... This is one of the great tragedies of mankind.

I honestly hope this never happens between us.

So, I ask myself: What happens if you believe you are a tragic figure? Do you try to alter your fate? If you are a comic figure, you probably go along with the laughs. Who could complain if laughter befits the life-long mood? You could also be a mixed bag of laughter and forgetting.

It's interesting to think of a calling, isn't it? If you think about it and discuss it, how much of a calling is it really? More like jock itch, I think. But the "calling," whether real or not, is compelling as we fight to fashion a heroic character out of just so much protein and water: One day superwoman/superman, the next day plagued with Kryptonite poisoning. Or a noisome rash.

How ridiculous I must seem! You must laugh out loud at me, like you did at Young Werther. How can such a man exist? Why do you love me? I can't figure it out.

I have enclosed a drawing I've made of a little bird, a Spatzl, in fact. He sits on my shoulder and coos your name.

With love,

Von Spatzl

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The following letter is remarkable in Von Spatzl's canon in that it not only indicates the extent of Von Spatzl's romantic and philosophical delusions, but Von Spatzl's aspirations to seduce The Woman With No Name with feats of fiction as well. He claims to have written and published his mighty *oeuvre* in both English and German, but not a single copy of any of these fictions has been found in any language, not even baby talk or gobble-di-gook. The point of this 5-page explanation – for his absence? For not having written sooner? – to The Woman With No Name is to impress and shower her with the fruit of his intellectual labors, all of it testament of love, he claims. The unveiling of the self in the fictions he's mounted, attempt to serve as proof for the inevitability of their union. At the very least, it is one of the most curious documents in the Von Spatzl dossier.

Dearest Woman With No Name,

I am so weary with exhaustion!

How can I describe the aching in my bones! I'd have to write yet another book!

My sore muscles, my arms, legs and back all ache with delicious pain! I have not stopped writing for months on end! But I have come to the triumphant end of my "Lover's Cycle," a work in 15 fantastisch volumes, that I believe will set the world aflame, peel away the deceit and the double talk and reveal – finally! finally! – the very *real* possibilities that lie in our death spiral of finitude. The entire cycle has already been published in German and will shortly appear in English, perhaps next month!

But let me tell of my literary journey!

My debarkation/embarkation point was, of course, the lengthy novel, *The Miller's Fantasy*. Here, as I've described in detail to you previously, the miller, a man named Miller, is milling his grains in his moulin rouge when, upon separating the wheat

from the chaff for what seems a lifetime, he falls into a reverie *non pareil*, from which he does not awaken – ever! *The Miller's Fantasy* chimes in Chaucerian tones, and scales great heights of ecstasy and yearning. The miller's pilgrimage (for it is certainly a religious throe) is marked by an increasing awareness of the fantasy he is in, just as the dreamer often recognizes the dream that has swallowed him whole. Here, he succumbs to the fecund body of the virgin, Milkmaid Mary, who lives down the lane and regularly produces milk for him. A lonely bachelor with barely useful legs, he is awakened – and set to dreaming – by a kiss from the said Milkmaid and together they run wild through the fields surrounding the Village. They are subsequently caught in a heavy downpour, return to the Mill where, in a freak accident involving a kerosene lamp, they die in an avalanche of burning smoky wheat. The dream ends and Miller is in fact discovered by the town Minister charred with Milkmaid Mary in an unholy embrace!

(Oh my editor Klagenburg didn't like the carbonized Miller and Milkmaid, but after a seven-martini lunch, he admitted it did match a pretty strong vision of Hell. I decided to wait until I'd finished the whole next section before filling him in on the progress of the cycle.)

From *The Miller's Tale*, I wrote as if in a hailstorm of passion, my pen guided as if by Hermes! The 200-page tale entitled *Bill's Dog, Red* explored, I believe accurately, the distinctive characteristics of the man-animal schism and the essential qualities of sound making, (grunts, barks, etc.) thus, the origin of language and consciousness, and therefore the enormous possibilities of deep intellectual love. It playfully mocks the James brothers (Hank and William) while Red the dog, of course, dies in the end (run over by one of the fire trucks he routinely chases throughout the novel), a tragedy for Bill, but it sets up the 3rd book in the series, *A Smaller Beer*.

Here, Bill again is featured, yet without Red, the loveable dog he has buried in his back yard and marked with a stone that reads: "Here lies Red, He was very well loved." Bill, now a downtrodden and lonely alcoholic, spends all his time and

money at the local tavern, swilling down grog and wailing about his destitute life to Xavier, the barman. While spending his last *sous* on the smallest possible beer he can afford, he is told (in an abridged form) the tale of *The Miller's Fantasy* by Xavier, and, immediately quits the tavern and heads off to America (his own long repressed fantasy). Upon arrival, he is beaten by thugs and cruelly drowned in New York Harbor. Sad and brutal, but exactly my point! *A Smaller Beer* explains why we are destined to drown without a higher love – be it a dog's love, or a Milkmaid's. Intellectual love doesn't cut it. America is the New World – that hope against hope, a broken fly screen, home to swarming maggot sensibilities; an empty vista with nothing on the horizon except clouds of black flies. He dies at the watery "*pallier*" on the slope of a great but vanishing hope.

At this point, I fell into a very productive period, and over the course of the following month, mapped out the next phase with the story of an American child with a debilitating social disease, *The Nervous Boy With the Red Hair*. This nervous boy, a native first generation American, takes the dream of Bill but inverts it, refuses love and goes on a bank robbing spree that has him wining and dining with hobos, eating ham sandwiches and knocking off small town banks. It's absolutely rollicking! He spends his spoils recklessly and, by the middle of his 20s, is addicted to opium, a broken human being. His last words are: "Fuck it." The subject of his comeuppance in the next novel, *Nothing at All*.

*Nothing at All*, is not so much about *The Nervous Boy's* destitution as it is about his reconstitution. Alone, suffering from a lack of money and opium, life takes him from cow town to cow town where his adventures reflect the rough edges of other neurotic excesses bleeding over onto his blank canvas of a life. He has become, in spite of himself, a kind of Buddhist, his life a school that teaches *nothing*; he is the headmaster and the only pupil. He lives his entire life "wanting nothing, anymore." He eats rice, and sometimes simply lives on air. *The Nervous Boy's* tale ends with the 400-page tome, *People in Jail*, a broad look at the aimlessness of life told in the first person narratives of 25 shiftless inmates who come in and go out of a local county jail. *The Nervous Boy* finally dies

in the arms of a prostitute named Judy, who asks again and again: "What has he done to deserve this?" to anyone who will listen. His very last words are "Fuck it." The scene resonates with New Testament imagery, which obviously disturbed Klagenburg, a devout but completely misguided Catholic.

Klagenburg, without alcohol coursing through his veins to give him religion, was difficult to please, and he ranted to me: "What have I done to deserve this?" I think that maybe Klagenburg was not up to the task, and Hertzmann, his boss had to take over as my editor. I've had my problems with Hertzmann in the past, and I know that he is a difficult man with whom to discuss large-scale literary design. His specialty was always "Geschenken," selling stupid little calendars and word-a-day agendas to Hausfrauen. I don't know if he drinks. But nothing could deter me from plowing ahead....

*The Exploding Star and its Effects on Judy* wafts us further into the unfolding of modern ethics played out in desperate economic circumstances. Judy, a prostitute in that very same jail as *The Nervous Boy*, is thrown back into the world (America), and through a picaresque tale, told in the first person, she discovers her mother in a Chicago boarding house fighting with the mice for a ham sandwich. Judy moves in but the mice get her, too. Mother and daughter die together in a purely accidental fire – their kerosene lamp is upended by the wind of all things! A death born out of the ferocious gnawing of society and nature. Terribly sad! Terribly moving! (Hertzmann wants to produce a picture calendar from *The Exploding Star* with woodblock engravings by Maissenbacher. Oh dear!)

Yet, Judy returns, in her spiritual reincarnation in *The Girl with the Grass Skirt*, a discourse on primitivism that is explored in a tropical-themed nightclub in Los Angeles. Judy, as *The Girl with the Grass Skirt* ends up pregnant and moves to the suburbs of LA where she wallows in diapers and welfare payments. She ends up distressed and her child is orphaned to a couple of wealthy alcoholics in Sacramento.

*The Angry Bottle*, Judy's daughter's story, takes us back to LA and immerses us in a fable of lost dreams and a weakening of the will. The daughter, also named Judy, has rejected alcohol but this does her no good. She is raped and murdered by people she never met while attempting to take cash out of her ATM on Wilshire Boulevard.

We rewind to the very essence of hope in *The Lost Bicycle*. Here, a younger "Judy" archetype finds a bicycle. Orphaned and without prospects of a modicum of hope, she simply mounts the two-wheeled vehicle and heads off East, towards mysticism and her eternal selves – all 80,000 of them. Each page reveals 800 selves. The book, after the initial narrative is a list of selves – of other, former lives, rejected and recycled.

And indeed Klagenburg has been dismissed, but much to my surprise, Hertzmann has not taken over the enterprise; he was run over by tram after we last lunched. Now it seems that my project will be supervised by Lustiger, the Austrian, which is fine by me. Lustiger is an excellent chessman, and published a monograph on Nietzsche that I read years ago and admired greatly for its economy and wordplay. His chess craft is marked by early sacrifice however, that often gets him in trouble in the endgame – he's got precious little left to work with! I have never lost to him! But Lustiger, having followed the cycle thus far was fairly bowled over by the next book in which I unwrap the grand Oriental package.

*The Secret Life of Buddha*, leaves "Judy" for the story of her double, a boy who finds a bicycle and launches an entire religion – without his knowing it – around the simple and elegant idea of self-propulsion. The authorities naturally have problems with the boy-philosopher-cyclist and imprison him, but it is too late... millions have taken to the streets in self-propulsion devices.

*The Writer Crying*, has our boy rotting in a Peking prison, where over the course of the next 30 years he relates the story of his life before incarceration, and his honest appraisal of it – that is, his consistent fear of death. Alas he dies in

prison, but his writings do not. In this last "movement" of the set, *The Japanese Vagabond*, a fellow inmate, takes the writings to employ as a pillow, and leaves the prison (after a short stay) with the treasure back to his homeland. Back in Kyoto he is reunited with his lost twin brother, who reads the texts and publishes them, inciting a revolution of human values and a new wave of bicycle enthusiasts.

Lustiger was fairly amazed at the turn of events here and, at a recent cocktail party waved my manuscript in the air (he'd been drinking) telling all that "Here is the true promise of literature!" I was pleased, but deeply embarrassed and left by the service entrance back to my pen and paper...to conclude the cycle.

I knocked off the first of four in the final stanza, *The Bad Weather Report*, in a mere three weeks. Starting from London and extending through the great capitals of Western Europe, the Old World is smothered in fog, a smeary yellowish haze, at first lightly then fitfully choking. Followed by rain, hail and thunderstorms, *The Bad Weather Report* is all bad news for the entire cradle of Western Civilization. For 40 days and 40 nights, the world is pitched into the dark and roiling contagion of anarchy.

No one dares become the hero, no light is lit, all are blinded, the Apocalypse has begun. *The Bad Weather Report* ends with a tremendous earthquake that shatters all known civilization into pebbles. The Old World's great libraries are hardest hit, and books end up spilling in the dark and the rain and the mud across the continent. The *grande histoire* culminates in *The Lost Letter*, a slender volume written by an anonymous sufferer of the darkness, (and told naturally, in the first person). It is discovered by a curious boy who having been born in a dark world, teaches himself to read by reading this letter by candle light, for him a recent invention. It is a revelation of Biblical proportions: The history of man in the face of unendurable suffering. It turns out to be a double-edged sword: the door to hell and a magical key to that self-same door: A holy grail of pestilence and penicillin.



Alone, cast away, the boy forages like Robinson Crusoe on an empty planet, devoid of all human contact. No Man Friday here to talk to: Only the torn and scattered pages of the world's literary and scientific history to be read a page at a time, between meals of crab, minnow and banana leaf, in no particular order. Millions upon millions of pages blowing in the wind: The insane asylum of nature as the Library of Congress lending a bizarre order to the sequence of knowledge and learning. *The wind as arbiter and editor of the history of mankind.* But to what end this random digest of knowledge – How to construct a steam engine? Elementary biology, scenes of Jane Eyre, fragments of The Theory of Evolution, The Life of Sir Walter Raleigh, a paragraph from a brochure on the manufacture of the cotton gin, the history of slavery, a primer in Italian, a torn bit from a biography of Dante. This is the world without hope, love or friends – a 20th century surrealist manifesto on the state of psychological compression: *The Pages.*

Finally, the nail in the coffin: *The Day God Talked to Me Personally – on the Phone.* Two hundred years later, (in a light science fiction), a boy, working at a low level job in public relations for nuclear power company, gets a most unusual phone call. It is God. He writes it all down furiously. And this book – all 500 pages – is God's message at the turn of the millennium! It is a *coup de grace.* A *coup d'état* and a real *coup de pied* in the arse of all those who call themselves "civilized." The boy goes on a daily talk show to deliver the message. He needs to go on every day at 4 pm to get it all out. Needless to say the message is derided and the boy, at once a celebrity and an outcast, writes his own story – *The Day God Talked to Me Personally--on the Phone.*

Lustiger is now dancing in the streets of Zug. We breakfasted together this very morning. The German edition is already in print and rapidly ascending the best selling lists. Hertzmann, rest in peace... poor poor Klagenburg....

You see my dearest, this is the world... and you, tethered to me so strongly at the other end, are my hope, my joy, the reason I'm alive...after all these hundreds of years of

wandering the planet. When, after all I've been through I should be resting quiet in my grave, you hear me! You are my inspiration! My reason to continue fighting against death!

Lovingly yours in *lorem ipsum*,

Von Spatzl  
Hotel Zug  
Zug, Switzerland

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Dear Best Friend Whom No One Knows,

You are quite correct in your assessment of my personality.

I am selfish, self-centered, lonely, jealous, diseased, afraid, angry, disturbed, hurtful, hateful, stupid, dull, insipid, pointless, empty, banal, tasteless, distressed, disorganized, confused, dreary, solitary, remote, forlorn, tedious, vapid, tiresome, greedy, lustful, absurd, inane, asinine, foolish, a bungler, a moron, a clod and, of course, a hopeless romantic.

I do not blame you for your anger. I am sorry I could not have been a better friend to you.

Sincerely,

One Hand Clapping

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Editor's Note: Von Spatzl had an intense correspondence with a speech pathologist, CR3, who had advanced a theory that Neanderthals lost their place on the evolutionary checkout line at K-Mart because they couldn't argue back. The sleeker Homo Sapiens with their Gucci-designed right-angled vocal tracks killed them, perhaps because they were literally "dumb," or couldn't organize themselves verbally and so the

earliest social banter was probably: "Get the dumb ape!" Thus, the Neanderthals died on the vine, or line, as it were. It was a theory that fascinated Von Spatzl.

Dear Mr. CR3,

As you say ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Essentially, man evolved from worms. Ontogeny being development. So, simply, the human embryo's gills are apparent at a certain stage of development...after a few weeks? And they reflect an earlier stage of evolution, that of fish. Humans, with their 9-month recapitulative evolutionary tour – something perhaps our Buddhist friends would liken to their 86,000 turns on the carousel of incarnation – swim upstream through time, morphing from amoebas, to fish to lizards to cows to apes to conscious sentient consumers of filtered cigarettes.

Carry this forward, as you indicate, and you have a range of adaptations, including, once we hit land, language and stock tickers. Capable of speech and consciousness and writing letters of complaints, bad novels and laundry tickets, suffering, fearing death, humans pack in the experience like a day at the theme park. But language in the evolutionary puzzle, you say, derived from direct physical changes that advanced the speaker over the non-speaker. Thus, the announcement: "Calling all shoppers."

With the vocal track, newborns, as you have noted, have slacker jaws and a wider angle of the skull, allowing them to nurse and breathe at the same time. At three months out of the oven, a child's skull structure – particularly the jaw – begins changing; at 12 months the infant's skull physiology is more adult-like, and nursing generally stops. They are ready to bargain.

Lieberman, (Brown), you say, is the owner of the idea that "The right angle vocal tract is better suited for human speech." So, if I understand this correctly, Mr. CR3, can I ask if certain versions of early man better were suited to speech because of their development of vocal tracks? And those

Neanderthals, who lacked a right angle tract, once coming in contact with "speaking" early man, were they: 1. Afraid? Intimidated? Horrified? Offended? 2. Or the reverse? Were they ostracized? Or worse, 3. Simply beaten to death because they couldn't navigate with a shopping cart?

And today, what safeguards does evolution provide for those who talk *too* much? Will they be the victors or the vanquished in this race to the exits?

Forensically yours,

Von Spatzl

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Editor's Note: Another mystery correspondent is a man referred to several times as Mr. E after the B.

Greetings to you Mr. E after the B,

I am fine, watching the future closely for regurgitated signs of the past.

It's the present tense that troubles me most...as it did Nietzsche. You know, the pebble in the shoe, or that stubborn piece of *lardon fumé* lodged between one's two front teeth. Unsightly, too.

Obviously I am wishing I became a professional golfer instead of a Pig Iron Industry Magnate.

Yours sincerely,

The President of China

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Editor's Note: In a letter to a couple Von Spatzl knew only from having appeared on the Jenny Jones show, and referred to as

the BOAT PEOPLE and as Mr. Jojo and Miss Jaja, for reasons that remain unclear, he is by and large quite joyful. It is the only letter found in his stacks, but whether it was sent or not can't be determined.

Dear Mr. Jojo and Miss Jaja,

I had a splendid time in Croatia, met an interesting English tour guide who lost part of his foot by stepping on a landmine, but he shuttled me around and gave him enough material to write several books, I believe, of mammoth importance to Western Civilization.

I returned to Austria (with The Austrian Girl) with a residual and repetitive, it appears, bout of MALARIA, which I obtained in RUSSIA some years ago by drinking out of a foul water tap. I have a high fever and sweat profusely but the Austrian Girl gave me some SPECIAL orange flavor Vitamin C tabs laced with valium, a Shaman of Yamon staple, and I was miraculously cured.

I am now teaching The Austrian Girl simple Swedish and various bits of slang French which she finds titillating... an example:

*Enlève ta croute que je swingue dans l'pus.* Which of course means, "Take your scab out, I'll fuck the pus."

It's so dirty, so nasty, so wicked, I'm thinking of using it in a new work, although I'm not quite certain yet of the form. The Austrian Girl repeats it all the time, these days, much to the confusion of the Viennese psychiatric circle we are involved with here!

It was The Austrian's Girl's birthday today, and I took her out for Chinese Soup, which seemed not only to lift her spirits but put the SOCKO KNOCKO to the MALARIA as well, and thus raised my spirits enormously. Needless to say, we might indeed fornicate!

I am practically done searching for a PURPOSE IN MY LIFE. In this search I received an appropriate mysterious message from a Mr. Wagner de Oliveira Santos of Luzerna, Brazil: A photo snapshot of the MOON. It was obvious what this mysterious message was trying to tell me: There *is* life after death, hard as that is to believe.

And there is of course a not-so-hidden message concerning your magic vessel and all the wonderful places you go, which is no joke, of course, I am reminded of the many times I prayed at your STERN and vomited into the briny drink.

You are well aware that with the world-weary life I've lived, you have Mr. Jojo and Miss Jaja, become my surrogate saviors, mentors, friends, guides, and loyal acolytes. Oftentimes, falter, slip and fail, and you correct me in all my wayward ways. For this, I am eternally grateful. The boy Tokyo and his sister Princess were with me today and I felt particularly well with the world, in spite of my breakdown and recurring relapses. And so, I've been drawing pictures of birds and numbering things to salve my wounds, broken heart and insomnia.

Yes, The Austrian Girl has left me again, but only to lecture in Vienna for a conference on the fruitlessness of frontal lobotomies.

I would be PLEASED AS PUNCH to see you at the END OF ROCKTOBER. Perhaps by then I will have completed my purpose in LIFE and the SOURCE OF ALL MY SORROWS will be drowned in NECTAR instead of NAPALM.

Here's to all aboard the merry vessel,

Von Spatzl  
The Shaman of Yamon™

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Editor's Note: In this letter we found taped into his Day Journal Vol. VIII, Von Spatzl exhibits a great deal of anger. We can't be sure how Von Spatzl arrived at an alter ego of Mr. Pink (or Dr. Orange for that matter), but it is clear the writing issues from his very own typewriter. We do not know the Dr. Black Von Spatzl is writing to, nor to which "cleanly typed two-page letter" he is referring.

Dr. Black,

Okay, my succinct reply to your cleanly typed two-page letter: Beautifully written that letter of yours. And I said as much. You obviously sweated bullets to produce it, and I appreciate that. You've earned your nickel.

I agreed (and agree now) with your thesis that arrival of Mr. Pink (who deposed Dr. Orange) was and is a formidable foe. He looms large on the horizon, like storm clouds warning. His dark narrow view of the world is indeed filled with resentment – obviously – for a plethora of sins committed against his "goodness." A psychological Rubik's cube. But of course this is a goodness that came into existence with strings attached: A mother's love becomes suffocating, a father's healing words cut the deepest. Attaching strings signifies the presence of the real Mr. Pink. The one who is not sympathetic or caring at all. Alas, his problems multiply like rabbits. Mr. Pink, is gruff, angry and impatient, and acts like he (me) is being robbed and cheated. And he is! As we are all!

I am indeed controlled by a tiny dictator, and this little tyrant is (like me) a self-loathing, aging specimen of humanity. Just check my pillows for signs of disintegration. Be that as it may, I remain a very demanding and very spell-it-out romantic. Very cut and dried and clearly a with-me-or-against-me type of person. It's incredible that I didn't see this before and I thank you for pointing it out to me.

On top of that, Mr. Pink is very envious, extremely threatened, very hasty, defensive, jealous (did I say that already?) and the owner of a large pile of smelly shit, owing to his unique diet of hard-boiled eggs.

Of course all this upsets me, because I do see and understand the world as only an ungenerous person does and can. I am someone who only gives things to people (such as friendship, advice, money) because of the strings attached to them and in which to ensnare his "friends," thereby turning them into nothing more than debtors, and himself into a captain of usury. You should have witnessed my earliest education.

I certainly hope you have a copy of that letter you sent. Your irony is ironic and if you apply yourself carefully and flesh it all out, perhaps you too, can win a Nobel Prize in Stockholm.

On another note, I'd sure appreciate it if you could pay me back the nickel I lent you to take care of that dog of yours that apparently died within days of your receiving my check. (Why is that?)

Geh doch abspritzen,

Mr. Pink

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear God,

...failure (or, viewed more optimistically, its long-delayed success...?) ... lace is built from holes...

Sincerely,

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Flower Man,

I saw you walking with your flowers tonight. You were walking walking, walking – hauling your flowers to sell, poor flowers, you were walking them, they were already dead, you know, hi here's a dead flower, enjoy it, how sad, poor man, the



seller of pretty death to pretty girls, to men in suits. And so you walked and I watched you walking. I can't tell what's more sad : You walking or me watching you walk.

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Woman With The Burnt Face,

Forgive me for staring.

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Dante,

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur  
sadiptscing elitr, sed diam nonumy eirmod  
tempor invidunt ut labore et dolore magna  
aliquyam erat, sed diam voluptua. At vero  
eos et accusam et justo duo dolores et ea  
rebum. Stet clita kasd gubergren, no sea  
takimata sanctus est Lorem ipsum dolor sit  
amet."

Sincerely,

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear The Austrian Girl,

I just want to thank you for a wonderful evening last night. I particularly enjoyed your rendition of Hallelujah on the accordion.

Your voice is lovely, and you should definitely think about recording before you ruin your voice talking das Gebabbel with me.

Yours,

Von Spatzl

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Mother,

I remember once when I was a little boy I got lost in the shopping mall and I was soon enough in a Catholic Supply Shoppe. I spent a curious half-hour inspecting the splendid crucifixes on the wall pathetically thinking the old chubby church ladies in their mothball perfume were angels.

Now I realize they were. And I embrace the Holy Wow.

Von Spatzl

## Part Three

# The World's Food Supply

Von Spatzl served to the human race by protecting the world's food supply. He was just "that kind of a guy." A guardian, a centurion, a vigil, a fighter, a dreamer, a scientist, a traveler, a man of both his word and the sword, if Von Spatzl were a Christian, people would say he was the "right kind of Christian." Although he wasn't, of course. But people said, "he had that certain something," and people said that "history would remember him long after his survival machine expired." People in general and in particular – and Von Spatzl himself – recognized the value to future generations of survival machines.

Having traveled extensively, Von Spatzl understood one of the major problems facing the planet, that is the transportability of disease, pestilence, vermin, death, and war, and he was doing his part on a volunteer basis because, well damn it! *that's why* he was on the planet.

Von Spatzl *killed* the flies. (See picture of fly).

Brutally swatting them with a sharp wet towel, or tricking them like a slick Buddha with two hands slapping during vertical take off, Von Spatzl made a ritual of picking their spot of bloodied carcasses off the walls with tweezers (as he did in his hotel room in Italy). Laying the dead solidiers into the cobblestone streets of Fierenze, Roma, Venezia where pretty Italian birds tip-toed on branches and waited for a signal to swoop down for dessert, our hero would watch. Oh yummy! Flies!

Sad Von Spatzl was, but satisfied nonetheless. It was volunteer work. And such work was never finished. And such work yielded other revelations.

As Von Spatzl navigated the world's capitals, playing in chess tournaments here, or delivering scholarly papers here and there, he considered the miracle of each door, each window, each sink, each toilet, each bed. The *whatness* of things. In the morning he considered each shoe tying and shirt buttoning. The *isness* of actions. How he wanted to sing through the fog of subjectivity and get to the thing in and of itself as a fly skittered past, or landed on the bridge of his nose, inspecting the meaty quarry that was Von Spatzl.

Getting to the *thing in and of itself*, however, was the kind of story in our superhero's life that would draw him in like water to a dried out sponge.

Take Tim the Tower of Tim's Towing for example.

Many years after the Warsaw Conference on Poetic Licenses To Kill (Von Spatzl delivered his celebrated paper on the Value of Nonsense), when the wandering around had stopped and Von Spatzl surprised himself one night by bowling a near perfect 298 at Flushtown Lanes. Von Spatzl, fluent in Latin and Greek, and a half-dozen European languages, as well as Hebrew, and an ability to chat socially in Chinese, had never before bowled.

Tim was busy getting loaded.

"You bowl a great game Von," said Tom.

"Gee, uh..." replied Von Spatzl, who later admitted in his Night Journal Vol. XX, how scared he was of beating Tim the Tower at his own game.

Tim had bowled a lowly 108. That evening Von Spatzl slept in his Old Turquoise Chair, enrobed in a red checked woodman's shirt. He slept with his eyes open, however, and watched the stars fade and morning come up.

Was he crying?

Yes, he was. What did it mean?

It meant he was afraid the new reality of his prowess as a hotshot bowler would force him into league play. So, the following evening, he substituted rice for pasta, moving the rice to the pasta jar and the pasta to the rice jar. What did that accomplish? It was really *about thinking* and *not feeling*. It was a strategy to manage *whatness* and *isness*. He was laying the groundwork for his War on Flies. A major step. It is true, he re-questioned the switch from rice to pasta, and then tried to "feel" the switch, which he believed would reveal itself as a "shift." (His eggs eyed him suspiciously).

"Err...thanks, Tom."

And in another shift (around dawn, moving from Night Journals to Day Journals, sunlight and milk bleaching the face of Flushtown), Von Spatzl tarried from thinking and living and not thinking and not living. In this, Von Spatzl detected a kind of mold growing on his ego. He should have, one believes, figured out what "green" was all about. At least by now. It was life reasserting itself.

He was healing, wasn't he? Letting go of things like ego and want and need. It was part of the war on terrorism. While he "realized" the cloud of subjectivity would never leave him, indeed, the fear that invaded his every cell. And this in spite of the fact that he had so much dinero (even if he lost all of it the dividends would replenish his war chest), he understood the social fabric of reality came with buttons, as well as handles, knobs, knockers, Dingen, trucs, whatever. Call them accessories. Or call it all *whatness*, for in the end that's what a hill of beans really meant. The *whatness* of the beans, and the *isness* of putting them there. As far away as he moved from civilization, he would always be at its center. And fear would be at his center.

His argument: "Well, I'm like you in the end, aren't I?"

He knew this was not the case, as exemplified by his 298 score. The way he protected the food supply – as a volunteer – he correctly understood, was all an accident, a chance in several thousand billion. That he was there, doing a job. Protecting. Setting up the dominoes for a future no one could imagine. Some tiny event horizon taking place at the crack of dawn.

So, what was Von Spatzl's problem? What made him look for that expanding life-changing event? Was it just the money? No, of course not. Was it to put a name on the Woman With No Name? Possibly. Was it The Austrian Girl? Hard to say. (What can you say to a complete fiction?) Or that green sweater? Or the crucifixes? His mother's flabby arm? The space trip courtesy of Vic and Tim? The moon as described by Von Spatzl's father? How had all his subjectivity yielded up this? Why take on the arduous role of Protectant? To safeguard the *whatness* and *isness* of it all?

The Woman With No Name, and the way she appeared in his dreams, had much to do with "it all," if only as a trigger to the gunshot that opened his heart onto the world once and for all. Was he filling in one hole with the salve of human sacrifice? Yes, one could easily be seduced by a black bra strap, a glimpse at any girl's lace underthings, or just her nothingness, the holes that make lace "lace."

Sure, he felt his love was like a continuous pulsing. A love stream.

Neverendinglovestreaminspiteofthefacthewascaughtwithhisfingersattachedtoaginsuknifestabbedintoanelectricalsocketzap. A pulsing that extended into the far reaches of the Universe... but without the bounce back, without the recognition, the reception, Von Spatzl knew he was very much on his own against a rapidly multiplying army of insects who had more eyes than he had teeth.

The Woman With No Name would have made a lovely bride. She could have "diverted" him. Instead of picking individual stocks, he would probably have invested in mutual funds. But

then The Austrian Girl was also quite a prize, wasn't she? She would have made a superior Braut. And maybe The Austrian Girl was the reason he went long on fiber optics and storage. Certainly The Austrian Girl was fertile and she never refused Von Spatzl. She clearly bore a fine set of genes. She could drink with the best of them, and sing it out as well! Her accordion playing was second to none! And The Austrian Girl could cook a mean Schnitzel to boot. Think of the Kinder! Then, perhaps we'd know the ontogeny from the phylogeny. We'd know the horse from the buggy, the acorn from the tree, the kiss of passion from the kiss of death.

"Gotcha!"

You kill one fly now and you eliminate the future of a billion flies. It was all in the numbers. You just had to believe in the future, and that Watson was the tricky part.

Indeed, at this particular crossroad, Von Spatzl's problems could have made:

1. A good case study.
2. A poor case study.
3. A lovely problem.
4. A poor man's beer.
5. Many mice.

Before the buzz buzz of The Austrian Girl Fiction, there was the buzz buzz of The Woman with No Name Fiction, who stole Von Spatzl's heart (another fiction), and then tore it to pieces. And before that tearing action, there was little Von Spatzl up in his room fantasizing in full suicide mode about Stockholm and moonshots, night trains in Central European capitals and a cycle of books that would shift the human landscape. But there he was hiding from Vic and Tim, going without dinner, and when he came in contact with them, he was threatening everyone with a knife held to his own throat! That would cut off his own line of "volunteers," and render a branch of humanity toothless.

The Woman With No Name, was, of course, American. Americans frightened the young heart of Von Spatzl. "Americans are so violent," he told his father, after his father threatened to beat "the living piss out of him" for not eating with the family. Von Spatzl had earlier complained to his mother that she was serving crickets. Vic and Tim thought this was funny, but Von Spatzl only cried. His burden was immense, and his childhood, out of necessity, a terrible secret.

So, (eventually) he said, "Goodbye."

Empty streets and vulgar language, chess, philosophy, languages, mathematics, linguistics, theories about anything and everything drew Von Spatzl. He found in roaming Europe, the Balkans, Scandinavia, even sunny fucking Spain, flies everywhere. He fought them in trying to reclaim his essence. His what. His is.

After the accident, after The Woman With No Name, before The Austrian Girl, before The NASDAQ and Flushtown.

"What do I gotta do to make you want me?" he sang. "What do I say when it's all over?"

He was just 17. He was happy to be away from Vic and Tim; they were nasty, mean, undignified, sloppy, stupid, fat, ugly, angry, distasteful and so on, and they denied the dire truth of America, that is, that *America was death*. And that death is what eventually killed them. They were killed by the death they bore within them. God's secret.

To be great, Von Spatzl believed, one has to move, and it is best to move 1. in silence and move, 2., alone.

As a result of this effort, Von Spatzl was alone for these many years abroad. Alone with his busted legs, distorted face, his heartbreak, and his hotel stationery writing letter upon letter to The Woman with No Name. And alone with her answers that were non-replies. He was also alone with his Nietzsche, with his chessboard, with his books, and often alone with the occasional Fraulein for Schnitzel, or the dirty date over in



France, or the philology professor and the obligatory glass of sherry spilling over the casually spread theory about chaos. Alone against it all. What and is.

Indeed, Goethe proclaimed, "Feeling is all!"

*What is that?*

He studied Caspar David Friedrich's *The Polar Sea* (1824) and his *Reisender über dem Nebelmeer, (Wanderer Above The Sea Of Fog)*, (1818). Holy Wow! Spirit over substance. Paint and canvas and nickel a look.

He memorized words by Lord Byron, and it assuaged him:

"There was in him a vital scorn  
Of all:  
As if the worst had fallen  
Which could befall,  
He stood a stranger in this  
Breathing world,  
An erring spirit from another  
Hurled;  
A thing of dark imaginings,  
That shaped  
By choice the perils he  
By chance escaped."

In the endzone of Flushtown, loneliness for Von Spatzl would find in its full expression, and open up a whole space, an entire room (which was the world) rather than a mere feeling. Von Spatzl, encircled by ever larger "blue bottle" flies, dove headlong into the New Economy: It was *the nothing* after the something that should never have happened: A vacuum that refused to fill.

Of course, it wasn't like that in Zug at all! In Zug, where the Young Von Spatzl took in the night air and dreamed (even foppishly) out loud of one day actually "going to the moon"

once to a beer maiden, a juvenile attempt to seduce, which, incidentally worked.

But after all these travels, Von Spatzl was launched not to the moon, but into a room. And walking into it, that room rose around him like a cloud that enveloped, bedded and finally married him. A silly marriage, and an impulsive one that came in a bottle of booze, or something hatched on the toilet. The nuptials didn't last long and the room collapsed around him. , Like most, it was a bad marriage. Thus was Von Spatzl's legendary agoraphobia born and he swam anxiously through the cubic meters of air that was his life, until, eventually he hit a wall like the flies he swatted with desperate force.

Divorced, separated, cleaved from his former lives, Von Spatzl suffered a breakdown of mammoth proportions. He tried to vomit it out, but he couldn't. So he held on to his Old Brown Chair rubbing the cigarette burns on his fingers. The phone would ring and ring. Yes, at least, he was relatively safe. But he was scared. Vic and Tim were dead. And he was next, he reasoned. After a lifetime of trying to off himself with poisons, air jumps into the void, electric currents, exhaustion, razor blades... his plan unfurled in a slow death. *Life*, in all its brutal mathematical simplicity, would kill him. And he would simply, in return, become the poet eulogist.

So years went by: The Rambler rotted and the phone rang... He prayed for the Woman with No Name to come and find him, bring him back to life... but instead he sank deeper and deeper into the Old Turquoise Chair. Flies multiplying, tiny vultures waiting to make a meal of him.

What saved him? The Old Brown Chair. It was sitting outside his house that day, a character in search of an author. That was the day when Von Spatzl moved from a horizontal position to a vertical one, and slowly rejoined the Race to Nowhere.... To the *whatness* and the *isness* of being. *It was a good jump in spite of the fact the parachute did not open.* Thus: Eggs.

During his American breakdown, he ate hundreds and hundreds of dinners and whatever it was he ate, if it

resembled meat, or legumes, or cheese, he always posed the same question: "What is this shit? It tastes like crickets." His food supply was being sabotaged. Which is why he eventually -logically - switched to hard boiled eggs.

In fact his earliest Journal entries concern the "Quality of the Fucking Food in This Place." He'd smear a sample on a page and label it: "Crickets." And as he did, invariably a fly would buzz past and Von Spatzl would remember his superb backhand, and summon the potent stroke to zap the buzzer into a mass of blackish plasma and broken wings.

"I am," he noted in his Night Journal, Vol. I, "but a volunteer."

Von Spatzl knew at the time he wrote that sentence (3:30 am) sitting in his Old Brown Chair in his little house in Flushtown, The Woman With No Name was fast asleep somewhere, dreaming of running through wheat fields. Vic and Tim were fast asleep too, but their dreams were floating shapes of gray, and they were not running through any fields, but lying buried beneath one. The genetic inheritors of the flies Von Spatzl killed, ate away at Vic and Tim, and snacked on the gray shapes they dreamed in their sweet deaths.

## Part Four

# The Itinerant

Von Spatzl Driving, was once upon a time Von Spatzl's favorite thing. For a boy who once lay perfectly still in a self-made grave, it was, in a word, a change. And, to have a "favorite thing," that was something as well.

"I am Von Spatzl, driving. My favorite thing. Driving."

"Floating," "gliding," "flying" and "slipping" were among the words he used, in addition to the word "driving," along with descriptive clichés "like a hot knife through butter." In Von Spatzl's mind, the highways were labeled "ribbons, Bahns, passages, chemins," and they were, in fact, wordy mythological paths for Von Spatzl. They led, once upon a time, to large spaces of cool uterine serenity, they led to Heaven, a place without gravity but *with* Newton and Einstein, pen and paper. He would get there in his Rambler... eventually.

Von Spatzl would drive and drive and float and float. Higher and higher. A bit to the left, a bit to the right, straight-away, zoom, up and over that little hill, then down, oh watch out for that squirrel! Yikes! Birds! Oh! Excuse me, little fellows! Yes, yes, yes! Yee-hah! And he was off and on his way into the clouds, easily resisting gravity because gravity belongs to God.

"I am innocent after all," he'd say as he floated upwards past the dark shapes of his guilt.

Driving on Earth, Von Spatzl loved best of all buzzing along with the windows down and the icy winter day slapping his broken face, the car heater blasting his torn legs. Von Spatzl sensed the religiosity in these moments. He bowed his head deeply to the road, to the "what's out there," to the *nowness* and the being the *whatness* and the *isness* of the road, to the death it eventually held for him, and the life and the wind that carried him presently with an intensity of a devout Buddhist monk. Returning to the perfect crime scene.

"Real time...now," he said. "The Holy Wow."

It was okay to die, wasn't it, if he slipped into real time and felt the hands of the Holy Wow on his face, cupping the scarred flesh. Scared but fresh? Scarred but flesh. That's what he asked the sky and the moon and the wind and the little unborn Von Spatzl's inside him stamping out what seemed like infinite variations of his DNA recipe.

(But that was many years ago, before the twins were dead, before his mother was dead, before his father was dead, before he was alone facing the hostile world on his own with a pack of cigarettes, a bottle of Jack, a grocer's arm and a bank of computers as his only defense.)

"Every day I am closer to Heaven, even if I never get there," Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXX. "Fluffy clouds and bunnies in short skirts and cancer-free cigarettes. Heaven is tricky, isn't it boys? Heaven is a minefield up there in the clouds. My life as a mathematical condition on Earth, my death a poetic masterpiece constructed in the sky."

Driving, Von Spatzl would see whatnesses rain down out of the sky. These whatnesses were sometimes rain, sometimes hail, sometimes snow. There were leaves, flies, mosquitoes, sometimes bird shit, several times birds, once a frog. The gods were warning him of what was to come. Death surely, but when? He'd already failed in that category a dozen times. In the meantime, one could easily understand the paralysis anticipating it.

Accurately reading these warning signs, the BIG BAROMETER, was not one of Von Spatzl's talents, however. Once, at night, a deer stepped in front of his Rambler. It was outside on the edges of some hamlet in the middle of nowhere but which Von Spatzl recognized as "here." He saw its sauce pan eyes in his headlights. Tiny beacons of fear. He'd read about this sort of thing. The deer flew up in the air and crashed back down on the hood of his Rambler, bounced off and when Von Spatzl got out of his car to inspect the damage (and the death he anticipated), the deer was gone, and he said knowingly: "Gravity belongs to God."

And he was not wrong.

But *not* being wrong doesn't necessarily help in divining the future beyond the realm of NASDAQ. "Signs were temporary at best, because things and *whatness* and *isness* keep changing," he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXX with a fancy gold pen he bought over the Internet. North eventually becomes South, shifts to East, then West. Mountains become plains, lakes become parking lots, people become dust. What stays the same? Nothing. So many vectors! How to read the crap falling out of the sky? It was damn well exhausting.

The only question then, was: "When?" Meaning: When will all this crap hit the fan?"

And the only answer was:

"Now," he said. "Now and again."

ALONG THE WAY VON SPATZL WOULD STOP AT HOTELS. One star, two star, three star and four star hotels. Sometimes no star hotels. Once inside his room, Von Spatzl was busy testing the beds bouncing up and down on them like a 4 year old. He'd test the showers, playing with the spigots and soaking himself in the process. He'd flush various objects down the toilets – a deck of cards, a tuna sandwich, an uncooked egg. Then he'd sample local food, read the local newspapers, drink the local beer, the wine, brush up against the local customs.

To see how the world might accommodate this traveler, Von Spatzl, on his way to being.

“Ach ja, ve knew dis Von Spatzl character... he vas here, ja, very quiet, seemed to like the Schnitzel though...”

Sometimes our hero, and he certainly felt himself to be a hero, digging out of the foxhole of death, sleeping in the car – a coffin with the lid open and an engine attached to it– listened to the local radio station as he sat just off the highway or parked in some lot in some forsaken downtown. Country music spun lines like: “If the phone don’t ring, it’s me.”

He’d drive with the lights off sometimes. He once put Jack Daniels in his gas tank. He once picked up a hitchhiker, a girl in her early 20s and had sex in the woods with her on a blanket of lichen. He stopped to help a farmer put in a fence and then shared a cool lemonade with him. Another time he picked up a dog that had been hit by a car and drove the poor beast, a crippled collie, to the local vet who knew the owner and called the family. A 12-year old girl came, tears in her eyes and gave Von Spatzl a dollar in nickels. The dog’s name was “Fetch.” Fetch died in her arms.

He once drove with the doors open.

One time he drove backwards for three miles in the dark just for the thrill of it.

Von Spatzl sometimes pulled over by the roadside and flagged down people to say his engine wasn’t working properly, only to open the hood, have them look inside, touch a wire or two as he sat in the driver’s seat and attempted to start the car up. And, because nothing was wrong at all with the Rambler, the car revved up in a healthy burst of life. Von Spatzl thanked them profusely for their “magic touch,” shook their hands vigorously in thanking them, gave them \$50 for their trouble, and wished them well on their way.

He adored the landscape.

He loved the stars at night.

Driving was a *gift*. It solved the problem of *whatness* and *isness* by blasting through it.

Then the accident years ago. Accelerating and complicating it all. It was and is the story arc of his life.

You see because Von Spatzl was in that car, on the way to the concert, a concert of music, (was it Hot Tuna?) and Vic and Tim were driving. Vic and Tim were sipping home-made Long Island Iced Teas out of a thermos, already high and listening to an 8-track tape (Hot Tuna?), Von Spatzl in the back, reading snippets of Nietzsche and eating carrots, why was he going? *Because she might be there.*

Vic and Tim were passing back and forth a bong, as if they needed it, stoned on amphetamines and Quaaludes and Long Island Iced Teas.

Bong, bong, bong, all that laughing. What was really so funny? How scared Von Spatzl was – suddenly. That’s why they were laughing. It was a silent struggle of different Heavens.

Von Spatzl, the youngest the most frail, a veteran of nearly a dozen suicide attempts, couldn’t and wouldn’t say anything to Vic and Tim, and mumbled to himself in the back seat: “Heaven.”

He was trapped in that “now,” and he was afraid because it was less than holy, and rightly so, as his older brothers careened to the left and the right, killing any animal that got in their way (dogs, squirrels, birds), laughing, laughing, laughing on their way into the curve before the drawbridge.

“You’re going to kill us all,” Von Spatzl said finally, in whispered fear, both a warning and a prophesy. In any case, they were the last words he uttered to his brothers, the twins, Vic and Tim. Now dead.



"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha," they laughed as they swiped the guard rail and lifted off into the air over that bridge after. After. And the air. The God rail failed them. The laughing. "We're going up up up!" Yes it was funny if you were already in Heaven and this was on Heaven TV. A regular laugh riot.

They were coming back from the beach and going to the concert (she might be there!). In the winter. And Vic, who was driving, put all his weight into the gas, and they flew over the drawbridge. Zooom! Ha ha ha.

There was laughing on the way up and it was all slow motion, the climb into the air, a dismal attempt at Heaven, the world going by, trying to get higher. Coming down on the other side, the Cutlass hit the highway in its face.

They called him "Face," and they lost theirs to the road.

Getting out of the car was not easy. It was a test, a test of a lifetime. Von Spatzl was reduced, reduced, reduced to a point. And that point was his soul, was it not? Either stay in the car and complain about how unfair life is and get incinerated alive, or get out and find God in the aftermath.

Von Spatzl had to crawl through the tiny smashed window. His legs were not working. *I'll never get to Zug this way.* The car fell backwards and its front was exploding. The laughter of Vic and Tim had ceased. There were no calls: "Hey, uh, Von you alright?"

The radiator letting out, expanding in the heat, and then the fire of gas and plastic that was now burning the dashboard, and probably starting on Vic and Tim's clothes. The fire grew in intensity, and was now ripping through the burnables, consuming everything.

It was 2 am. In February. Outside it was frigid and dark, and after the initial explosion, very quiet. Quiet burning if you were 100 feet from the car watching it; inside, a roaring hell. And no one was around. Just the winter stars witnessed this beautiful moment.

Before Von Spatzl abandoned the Cutlass, he tried to reach Vic and Tim, but instead of his twin brothers he felt a mushy hot wet bloody mess. When flames engulfed the car, that was when he felt the point, his reduction. A drunken feeling, actually. Not knowing which way was up. Like when he was in his mommy's tummy sucking on the uterine milk.... Was today his birthday? In fact it was.

Was Von Spatzl going to hell?

It was the number one question Von Spatzl, who had learned Morse Code in that freezing attic just two days ago. H-E-L-L... an assemblage of dots and dashes that now raced through his mind "Hell " in Morse code is:

• • • • • • — • • • — • •

Von Spatzl was alive. Von Spatzl got out. Got out with his life, and only that. His soul a point and nothing more. What was left: The guy with the acid face, the woman with the limp, the guy with the broken arm. The churchlady dancing.

Where did they go--Vic and Tim? Were they up in Heaven having cocktails?

Then pulling his body – wet, bloodied, dirty, his legs broken in five places, probably (definitely) – pulling his body forward by stabbing at and snaring tufts of grass and bits of broken asphalt it was clear suddenly Von Spatzl wasn't going to go with them. Wasn't going anywhere anymore with Vic and Tim. Breathe, Von Spatzl, breathe.

The point that was his (my) soul responded.

Yes, yes, they came into the world together, these inseparable insufferable twins, and they went out together. Their points disappearing. Only photographs of the cameras remained.

Von Spatzl would have to wait on Earth, in the endless now, to think about it all, to pick up the photograph of the camera taken by the photograph, to hold it close and inspect it in between shifting in his Old Brown Chair.

Von Spatzl was working off on a different timetable, a different trajectory. He'd eventually get to Zug and then to Stockholm. But would he ever get anywhere, really beyond Flushtown? With these broken legs, with this broken heart? Would he ever stop bleeding? His genes, selfishly, had created a broken but functioning survival machine. All he had were nickels to keep it going.

Nietzsche collapsed on a street in Turin. He'd grasped a carriage horse stop its owner from whipping it. Von Spatzl had to decide if he'd ever been so brave, and then, who he was in the triangle: The horse, the master or a version of N. He drove on. Von Spatzl driving.

In feeling his feelings, then, and now, he realized there was a physical feeling, a phantom Von Spatzl, crawling through that fiery birth canal again and again. His former corporeal incarnations seemed to express themselves in his hands; he inspected them locked into the 10-2 position on the wheel. He recognized and didn't recognize them. Surely those burn scars were his, souvenirs from *this* life. But there were other feelings. Like the feelings Von Spatzl paid his shrink to net for him, the ones that were slippery and elusive, and obviously teetered on fiction.

Found not more than 100 feet from the wreck, still flaming, still cooking Vic and Tim - by then a crushed assortment of bones and roasting meat, a regular Long Island barbecue! Von Spatzl changed from Von Spatzl the boy to Von Spatzl the Polaroid.

Years later....

Amsterdam the first time walking around with Heinrich, German guy. Heinrich seemed fabricated to Von Spatzl. So he drew a picture of this German machine, traced his hand and tossed both into the canal. Heinrich said something pretty sharp to me. About my face. Never saw him again.

Met a girl named Liesbeth. Went to a bar. The Two Swans, (De Twee Swantjes), got drunk, sang some songs, and she told me about her sister who died in a fire and then cried in my arms. Said the sign over the bar said: "Tomorrow, The Beer is Free."

Went to Anne Frank house. Cried. Am alone. Liesbeth left me when I told her I noticed the word "lies" in her name. "I hate that about Americans," she said... and I told her I wasn't American. Went back the next day to the Two Swans to get the free beer.

In Prague I wrote *The Story of My Life Mathematically*. It totaled exactly 54,321 words and calculated, among other things, the possibilities of dying from pneumonic plague (1 in 54,059,705), dying from a rail way accident (1 in 524,753), dying from a falling object (1 in 373,787), dying a motor vehicle accident (1 in 6,585), dying from heart disease (1 in 388).

Counting the words I was reminded that I had driven only once over the drawbridge. And lived. Another time, I drove over the drawbridge and saw men fishing for flounders. If I could have only see the future - what would transpire in this very place at another time. That was before real time.

Hitch-hiked to Bucharest and observed, was observed. Played chess in the parks with stinky smelly old men who recognized my accent. "Czech!" Lost on purpose, giving up my rooks to crooks, who happily stole my Deutsche marks. Wondered if I was really living amongst the giants of my time. Left for Moscow to see their Metro.

Submitted my thesis on Nietzsche's *Present Tense* to a publisher in Paris (Editions de Minuit Moins Quart), who said they'd get back to me. Sent a copy to the Woman with No

Name, hoping she'd see that *We Were Present Tense*. No word.

Called my mother and father asked them to come join Von Spatzl in Rome, to count the bullet holes in the Pantheon. My mother said: "Who is this?" Before I could say "I'm your son," the line went dead. Went to Rome anyway and stood in front of the Pantheon and counted bullet holes made during World War I and World War II. Total: 1,234 of them. Drank the local vino, got drunk in the Piazza Novanna, threw up on a 500 year old statue. Went into a Church and prayed. Fell asleep for hours in the sacristy.

When I awoke, I thought about killing myself again. And decided to head to Paris.

Wondered aloud if I was a victim of love. (Did I love Vic and Tim?) Tried to suffocate myself with my hotel pillow, but only coughed. Apparently it's impossible to kill yourself with a hotel pillow. Went out again, had raviolis and met an Italian anthropologist who invited me back to her apartment in the Villa Medici. We drank white wine and she told me she hated men, but said I was different. Her name was Elena; her last name sounded like a kind of amphetamine with an "a" tagged on the end of it.

We made love and then she peed all over me. I left her in her soaking cold piss of a bed and went back to my hotel room on the Via Garibaldi and bathed. Then I wrote a letter to my mother telling her I was accepted at the Academy, an outright lie. Mailed it and sat on the Spanish Steps and cried. Thought about killing myself - launching my launched in the air off the Spanish Steps. The Italians would have a fit. I went to lunch.

During a lunch of antipasto in the Villa S— I noticed the fly population had increased nearly exponentially since I was a child.

VON SPATZL LEFT AMERICA BECAUSE HE COULD, because Vic and Tim were dead and Von Spatzl felt dead in their death,

and because his heart was broken by the Woman with No Name who resided in a Post Office Box on Long Island.

"I'm not going to marry you!" Von Spatzl wrote in her own girlish scrawl on a postcard of The Spanish Steps. He dotted the eyes with little purple hearts. He liked that touch. It was very convincing.

His heart smashed, he put together his small pile of pennies he'd politely asked for from large corporations in the form of refunds. Yes, Von Spatzl, the little tyke, had figured out a way for companies such as IBM, Phillip Morris and General Mills to deposit a dollar here, a quarter here almost on a daily basis into his savings account over a period of 15 years. Each day the small checks would arrive. Whether it was for some piece of broken equipment he didn't own, or money he claimed he lost in a telephone booth, a candy bar with glass in it, or simply his own "accounting irregularities," sent to them in the form of invoices (\$3.67 here, \$2.13 there), the checks would accumulate. And then, the interest, compounded daily, made Von Spatzl a well off little boy. Certainly well off enough never to hold a serious job other than the time he was a janitor at the AA, but that was only to see The Woman with No Name, a ruse that failed, unfortunately; she wasn't there, of course.

Von Spatzl told not a soul about his penny ante scheme. Certainly not Vic and Tim. They were already stealing the money from his sock drawer, piggy bank, and secret secret secret hiding place a spot in the attic where Von Spatzl monitored the world via short wave radio. But they only got pennies, not the big cash hoard that was protected by the FDIC. And so when he was a Young Adult and old enough to fly, he left the New World for the Old One, where he spent years living in hotels and writing letters to his mother and father about the great capital cities and the marvelous cultural institutions he encountered.

Quite frankly, they couldn't care less. Which he knew.

Nonetheless, it was in those tiny hotels where Von Spatzl made one of his greatest discoveries of *Modernische Leben*:

The pleasant miracle of cable television. It was also where Jenny Jones with her big hair boasting about her recent boob job on a game show came into his life. It all happened in the Hotel Zug in Zug.

Von Spatzl spent days and days and nights and nights reading and writing, studying chess problems and watching the Jenny Jones show on cable television. It was also where he formally began the correspondence with The Woman With No Name, sending reams of paper promising thousands of kisses to her Post Box on Long Island in the United States of Love.

He listened to the radio, too. A song came on where the singers sang: "Is this hate or is this love?" Von Spatzl wondered if he one day could ask such a profound question to anyone. So he wrote to the Woman with No Name. She responded with No Answer. The next song included the line: "If the phone don't ring, it's me."

Meanwhile, Von Spatzl was formulating an understanding of the stock markets.

"If companies don't pay their shareholders real dividends, then owning stock is a fantasy play, a Ponzi scheme whereby some sucker pays another sucker more for the same thing for reasons that emerge out of the fear and greed bog of his or her brain," he wrote. "Without real dividends, one hopes for someone to appear (and they do, don't they?) and pay more for what you've already bought. Equally true in short selling, borrowing shares you don't own, and selling them, hoping to buy them back later at a lower price. Pocket the difference. There is no reality to stock ownership, as voting rights are more or less meaningless. The only meaning in holding a stock is given by someone else willing to pay more for it. And the same is true with anything – even gold, especially love."

## The Very First Meeting With The Austrian Girl

It was in the Hotel Zug in Zug that Von Spatzl heard a sound that would change his life. Lying in his bed, 24 hours another failed attempt to kill himself, (a combination of baby aspirin and Sekt), he heard – no, felt – a violin singing up through the hotel floor, rising through his bed and entering his body, vibrating into his bones.

“What is that beautiful sound?”

Von Spatzl stepped lightly through the corridors tracking the sound until he came to Room Number 13, exactly one floor below his. He knocked “gingerly,” a word he hated, but which described exactly how he knocked. He expected perhaps a gypsy family, or an old stinky chess player with the radio on too loud, or someone addicted to amphetamines and reading William Shirer’s tome of Nazi Germany.

Von Spatzl waited patiently, baby aspirin on his breath. Through the door he said: “Ja, hullo, ich bin Von Spatzl, ein Nachbarin von Ihr...”

And when the door opened and he saw The Austrian Girl for the very first time, he saw a golden statue with frizzy blonde hair, holding an old and valuable Stradivarius and wearing pink underwear, pink bra with black straps. Her teeth were crooked. Her lipstick was slightly smeared. Von Spatzl knew in some deep way that his search for Quality...

“Kom doch herein,” she said, unembarrassed. “It’s so heiß, forgive me for being praktikally naked,” she said.

“Ihren Muzik...” Von Spatzl said. “Die Qualität...”

It was then he discovered, of course, of course, of course! The Austrian Girl! She was, it turned out, waiting for him her entire life. Waiting for this exact moment, when a strange man with a strange accent she couldn’t decipher, walked into her life



with his herky jerky manner, and sat down, holding his walking stick. Von Spatzl said not a word. Not a one, but instead calmly listened to a short program of Mozart and Beethoven which she topped off with a couple of funny hill tunes on her accordion. He didn't get up to pee, not once. Von Spatzl just watched her in awe and utter wonder and, absurdly (for him), paradise.

They traveled. All the major European capitals, but Paris was first, she was dying to show him The Opera, which she said she "adored." The young lovers sat through an edgy rendition of early Balanchine flip flops and some sideshow of a scene out of *Figaro*. The Austrian Girl was deeply disappointed. "Gibt es hier was für einer Qualität? Nichts!"

Yes! Yes! That's it, Von Spatzl readily agreed. The search for Quality! Strong arching backs, smooth streets, robust aged wines, logic, logic, logic. But The Austrian Girl did not revel in Von Spatzl's revelation - *poor* quality was the sign *he* was looking for, in fact.

"Your crooked teeth, my broken heart..."

The Austrian Girl recovered from her disappointment during a dinner of escargots, thick entrecotes and a good bourgogne enough to ask, "Tell me your story Von Spatzl, I veddy much vant to know..."

While their friendship took the shape of Continents in Drift Formation, Von Spatzl was a train wreck happening with an Einsteinian explanation. No, he never said a word, but suffered suffered suffered as his misery moved at the speed of light and his face in the mirror exploded into thousands of representations of his former, present and future selves. How many times did they cross the Seine with Von Spatzl's heart leaping out nearly ahead of him into the gray-green arms of the river, only to have The Austrian Girl tug on his sleeve and point out some funny man doing a dance in the street, or a fellow accordion player missing notes! Yes, she was his savior!

Nonetheless, Von Spatzl began counting windows in buildings, buses or trains at that time – whether it was on the Metro running on the elevated platforms, or in a taxi – and would blurt out “458,” while pointing to some new *gratte ciel* or other. No, he never let The Austrian Girl into his heart until his heart had nearly expired, until the Woman with No Name’s green sweater was moth eaten by time, and her tears and her denials could no longer spoil his food supply. Until so much of him was dead, and he could fight back no longer. But it wasn’t, was it? Thirty Night and 30 Day Journals later, back in the New World, in his small wooden Flushtown house with the rickety screen door, and the small yard out back with the savage red cardinals, the molting Mulberries, and the sneaky squirrels, and the long sweeping depression that washed over him again and again and again after the black and white Crash and the boom and the bah of Vic and Tim, his now was then, and his then was now.

But in answer to her question, Von Spatzl told The Austrian Girl, “‘In a nuclear war the living will envy the dead...’ That, my dear, was Kruschev speaking, but that is my story as well. Champagne?”

## The Austrian Girl

Because she kept one of her own, and knew the potential secrets of the hand-produced personal fiction, she plunged easily into the Von Spatzl *oeuvre*.

The Austrian girl wrote every night, concocting her life out of sheep-ridden, hill-bound Trattenbach. She detailed the not-at-all hesitant little Austrian Girl, shiny and bright, and drew a dazzling self-portrait of post-Nazi love. The Austrian Girl, who knew too much for her own good, was a born spy with few political allegiances. With yellow curls and turquoise eyes, she grew up into an agent without a master, posing alternatively as cheap broad in a dime novel or a high-class roller in the casinos of Deauville. Or something else entirely. The Austrian Girl consumed sugar and tobacco in equal but vast quantities, learned how to throw her left as well as her right. She casually pickpocketed men on the trams, "for fun," she said.

When she was 18, The Austrian Girl left her mother and father to their sauerkraut and wieners and moved north and west, towards the Rhein and snookered the small towns along the way – little shows in the taverns, *Gästhausen*, and in shopping malls – applying lip gloss and getting paid for it. Clever banana, her. The Austrian Girl settled down in Karlsruhe for no apparent reason if only to be asked where she was from by the mad businessmen trafficking in cement and metal works, rebuilding her homeland into yet another efficient machine. She lived well, ate well, practiced the violin and the accordion in her modest rooms on the *Wilhemstraße* and then prowled the cafés at night, looking for something she could neither name, nor if she found it, recognize.

The Austrian Girl soon tired of the suits that pawed her, and the dirty *Deutschmarks* she found in their wallets. She moved

her roadshow to France where she learned how to drink Chateau Latour and Côtes Rôti, and smoke Maize clopes. Her French improved and she attended The Opera at Garnier nearly every night for the three years she lived on Rue Chat Qui Peche in the Latin Quarter. The Austrian Girl voraciously read all the French classics, and continued to pickpocket, still more for fun than anything else. She attended the Sorbonne during the day and had an affair with her anthropology professor at night.

Dissatisfied yet again, she took the ferry from Cherbourg to England where she acquired a sense of history, and a whole new vocabulary – a vulgar one – and cut off her hair to live out a scene she'd read about Elizabeth the First, The Virgin Queen. With her new *coiffe*, The Austrian Girl fit right into the art scene, many thinking (correctly as it turned out) that The Austrian Girl had a preference for women. It allowed her, she reasoned, to have intelligent conversations with men, while women continued to discuss nail color and fishnet stockings to the point of distraction.

Although she got into the London scene quickly, having several affairs with women writers and painters, she just as quickly left it, with no apparent regrets. The Austrian Girl, back to the Continent, took the overnight train to Berlin where she met a series of Russian men and handed them film she'd taken over the past 12 months. Prague, Sarajevo and Venice followed, and she hunkered down in the flooded city for a week to read and drink strong coffee. She had a brief affair with a waiter named Antonio who had the unusual habit of rubbing olive oil into the spaces between his toes each night. She ate well and put on some weight. She bought red shoes and wore red dresses as she sat in the sun at Piazza San Marco, admiring the rising and falling sweep of pigeons and tourists. She especially liked the little children who chased the pigeons. They liked her too, touching her curly hair and smelling her golden skin. "Kiss, kiss?"

Yes, little children (both boys and girls) wanted to kiss The Austrian Girl. And who wouldn't? Who wouldn't want to drink from those luscious lips and curl your tongue around hers, and

dream that this is all there was, a kiss, an eternity? The Austrian Girl complied, speaking in a quiet and charming Italian to the bambini, making them giggle with her crooked teeth, and making them dance by tamping spoons on the table and the cups and the water glasses. Then she would leave her red signature on their cheeks like Zorro in a movie. Her real name was Zara.

Zara had been around and she continued to move, anxiously; the dime novel turned into an epic, a life, looking not so much for a plot as for a story arc. The spy game was dull. It was the same war over and over. There were no winners, only players.

Where were the great loves? Where was the great passion? Shiezer! Where was the fun? She wanted to know. All she had in life was a low-grade addiction to expensive wine and cheap tobacco and the ability to attract all sorts of men, and women. It depressed her, but she wasn't finished. And by and by she began the wholesale reconstruction of her life, from her first accordion lesson on a hill in Trattenbach overlooking a herd of sheep and the distant Tyrolian range, to her well-conceived plan to go to Zug and practice her music. So she began to record all her leafy questions as well as her replies. This "work," all laid out like a bed of lettuce in her series of MEAD CLASS PROGRAM notebooks with the black and white speckled cardboard covers, became her soul.

"Square Deal" read on the inside cover. There, periods 1 through 8 (x axis) fell in a grid against a Monday through Saturday (y axis), topped off with Name, Address, School and class. She wrote her first name only: Zara. There were 100 wide ruled sheets per book, that is 200 pages, each 9 3/4 inches x 7 1/2 inches.

Zara's books, which numbered 10 in all, were filled with dates and times at the beginning of each entry. Fastidious girl. They were nothing like Von Spatzl's journals, which were thick, bulging and bullying, lined up like soldiers on a pair of parallel shelves, 60 of them in all, the top 30 for night, the bottom 30 for day. Roman numerals marked each one in perfect order, a

greasy white scribble on the binder, a bright but soft red velvet. The numerals were a kind priest work. She felt the smallness of hers: Supermarket on-sale specials.

Noting in her blonde brain the time and date she first touched Von Spatzl's collection as if it were an anniversary of something that would never happen again, like everything important that had happened in her life, she ran her fingers across the narrow frames. She pulled down the last volume, Night Journal Vol. XXX, and opened to the first page.

There she found the red sentence, orphaned and surrounded in a hospital of white:

"I never loved her"

....in a school girl's script. The following page consisted of this same sentence written 50 times, perfectly lined up with the same pubic charm. An exercise in penmanship?

She thumbed another page.

This one featured a single entry, dateless like all the rest. It read: "My father is dead." Typed on a plain off-white paper, then torn, then fixed with slabs of black electrician's tape onto the journal page. Beneath, an arthritically penned koan: "Is darkness faster than light?" This smudged leaden message was footnoted with an asterisk (\*), and was followed by a large, carefully drawn question mark in light lead pencil.

*\*Von Spatzl had explored this question several times without satisfactorily answering it. Perhaps he didn't understand the question. --Editor (See Day Journal Vol. I, and Night Journal Vol. II).*

The Austrian Girl, transported to the American wasteland out of love for her creator, was in actuality, a question mark. The photograph of the camera. Her physical presence, as erotic as a peach, hard and fuzzy, offered an infinite and difficult promise.

"I never loved her," she read.

She wanted to map out the spaces calculated within that sentence. To spell it out, write it backwards, mix up the letters and recant each combination....

*Was she the one he never loved?* "Did he mean me?" her blonde cranium cranked forward. Von Spatzl could hear it working as if it were a printing press spewing out the day's news.

"Boy oh boy," he wrote 1000 times for a total of 3,000 words on the next page. As if her questions were answered on each page she turned to, a dialogue as wily and sensitive as the breath of God.

She said the words aloud, loud enough for Von Spatzl to hear her: "I never loved her," as if love staked one to the Earth. Her \$10 tent was being pulled by the wind.

Von Spatzl was pleased as punch. Why? Because here, between her pretty Austrian ears, was the imponderable! Love was as deep as Pi was infinite. And in the labyrinthine pattern of numbers, strewn for miles beyond the decimal point, there was her curving beauty. Flesh and spirit! And yet, there was doubt, too. And how he wanted to caress her, reassure her with his witty lies for the thought. How he wanted to hold her. Here is Von Spatzl – a ladder! Climb across this space, the architecture of your dreaming. It is all. And he realized once again, everything (everything!) was defined in the climbing. *No, he would not send that letter to her! No!*

Yet like all geniuses, Von Spatzl was a master flip flop artist. His greatest fear: She won't love me. She'll think I love the other fiction! Poor Von Spatzl, so confused, so obtuse, so arrogant, so hurt. An unsigned post card from Lisbon confirmed his fear and love in a single line:

"It's so beautiful here!"

Problem: Von Spatzl had sent it to himself via a false address. It was returned, as he'd planned. So let there be no doubt. Who was he fooling?

Von Spatzl's solution: Alcohol and nicotine, mostly, to haze the life around him, and better to concentrate on the numbers. But he was brave enough to say (and to write in his Night Journal Vol. XXII, which The Austrian Girl pulled out): "Read on, my dear Austrian Girl, read on...it's all here."

IN THOSE WONDERFUL LITTLE BOOKS, Von Spatzl recorded the illustrious story of her meeting Von Spatzl in Zug in her hotel room. He described in his curly-Q prose their walks in the countryside, arm in arm, young lovers living on borrowed time. Why borrowed? His numerous failed suicides, each another bookmark in this elaborate fiction – in the end perhaps a human plan to run out a plot, to have something to say, when in the end, Death (see the chapter on Vic and Tim's untimely end), had the last word. And that last word was well-timed silence. She continued reading.

It was all there: The stolen kisses, the picnics, the little notebooks they both busily scribbled in detailing the wingtips of strange yellow and blue birds, the odd shapes of clouds, the varied colors of the grass, the bottle of Brouilly they chilled in a stream and then drank quaffing their thirst like teenagers. The butterflies they named fluttering alongside them in the expanding paradise of their honey-dipped love. Schmetterlingen!

Von Spatzl wrote it all for her, not to inculcate her with feelings she didn't own, but to layer, like a painter, her insides and outsides with feelings she expressly desired, feelings she tacitly approved of... Yes! Yes! Yes!

She was completely enthralled. Addicted, actually. The drug: Von Spatzl.

Even after the concert was cancelled – she so much wanted to hear the young Munich soloist playing the sad and pained



melodies of... who was it? – t didn't matter. She sang for him, and even for herself: She wore special clothes for him, did her hair up in bouncy curls for him, spritzed on perfume for him and Von Spatzl duly recorded them button by button in her diaries. She put on lipstick for him, the shade a bit risqué. But, Von Spatzl, reasoned: "Let's live! Why don't we?!" (And yet he continued to plot his own death!) She wanted him to be on top of her quicker than a hobo on a ham sandwich. And that, Castro, was the musical program...that was *the* truth. Recorded neatly, like any good German would. Even when she picked a bugger out of her nose once, he wrote that down, too, clearly and precisely. (In both his and her journals).

The Austrian Girl learned quite a bit about Von Spatzl in this stealthy sojourn, picking out fragments concerning his erotic life, that after years of solitude were "just so much wallpaper. Sally Moon wallpaper, Judy America wallpaper, Melanie wallpaper. There is no true erotic charge in the memory." She saw that the charges were alit only for a select few – Vic and Tim, his mother, his father, herself, and the Woman With No Name.

"How sad," she said, moved enough to cry. She turned a page and read: "She sat on the bed in her green sweater and cried," 50 times for a total of 550 words.

It should come as no surprise, Von Spatzl had written her notebooks as well, bagging those little green peas and setting them on ice. The Austrian Girl was frozen in her notebooks, (there would be no more, and she'd have to wander amongst the 10 volumes of those Mead Supermarket Specials, 1000 pages in all, 2000 if you count front and back of each page). Von Spatzl understood in some vague way how much ice ran through his veins in keeping her this way, her story told, her phrases stuck on repeat. Her past, present and future tied to the thin reality of someone reading her. It is perhaps something only Von Spatzl having tried to kill himself so many times could only create: The extensive and exhaustive labyrinth he'd constructed with cracked mirrors and cigarette smoke.

Yet Von Spatzl was not unkind. And The Austrian Girl knew this, and not only felt vindicated, but felt a certain freedom in the labyrinth, for Von Spatzl wrote about her feelings towards him. Yes, he did, and he was generous as well, annotating descriptions of her sadness and sensuality with observations such as: "Von Spatzl looked at me with his beautiful blue eyes that seemed to say 'Yes! Yes! Yes!' I care for him deeply. I believe I love him. We will go driving, he promised. I so want to be with him! I can not imagine my life without him. He is Austria's highest mountain, it's cleanest, purest air. And yet he is a mystery to me."

And then this: "Making love, he has made me a woman."

"Yes, yes, yes," she cried, closing the Night Journal, Vol. XXX.

## The Von Spatzl Interview

In your most well-known work, "I Never Loved Her...?" your addition of the question mark is curious indeed. Are you asking the question to yourself or is the reader left to figure it out?

*That's the thing about you Americans I like so much. You can ask a silly question about love and get away with it. Much like your politics.*

Your relationship with The Austrian Girl is very enigmatic. We are confused as to whether, as you write, she "represents The Woman with No Name," or is, in fact, "your fairy godmother."

*I have a lot of respect for The Austrian Girl, and certainly I love her still, after all these years. From the first moment I saw her in Zug in Room 13 of the Hotel Zug wearing those incredible pink panties and playing the violin in the stultifying heat, and then here in my other life in Amerika, when she joined me and the boy Tokyo. As to whether she represents The Woman with No Name or is in fact my fairy godmother,*

*well to be honest, I do not think there is a DNA test for love. But I did discover that she had a real talent for consuming Jack Daniel's, and of course, in the end, she managed my 401K very well.*

Do you still have contact with The Austrian Girl?

*Well not in the 3-dimensional way no. We communicate via dreams.*

Dreams?

*Yes. Sometimes I dream a question to her, or I make love to her in the dream and she dreams back an answer or dreams back an orgasm. It's very lovely, actually and, if you'll pardon the joke, the sheets don't get as messy as they might...well, you get the picture.*

*The Austrian Girl is one of hundreds of creations that went down in my Titanic's miserable chilly ocean spray. The minor tragedy was that I survived - unlike Kruschev. Imagine! Here I was married to life on a rowboat without an oar...as a single yellow car burned on the shoreline at the foot of a drawbridge. At 3 in the morning. I should have been home living a normal life! Nietzsche's Present Tense indeed!*

Did you really write *The Twelve Suicides*? It seems as if *The Twelve Suicides* was produced by someone else, for example, the narrative is in the third person.

*In all relationships there is always a third person, whether real or imagined.*

And you did all that shit? I mean, bury yourself?

*It's not so much what I did, it's more what I didn't do. The Oxblood I didn't drink, the oxymorons I didn't make. I mean, La Salle, looking for the mouth of the Mississippi, got lost. His men murdered him. Cook was murdered in Hawaii. Scott, lost and disheartened, died of exposure in Anarctica. Franklin died*

*in like manner, his ships trapped in Arctic ice. Just read Michael Andre, God!*

Yeah, whatever. Are you in love now?

*Love is a very misunderstood concept. A simple yes or no doesn't suffice. I am married to my work, and I bowl in the blue league here in Flushtown.*

What of your earliest works – *The Sky Blue Notebooks*?

*The Sky Blue Notebooks? Oh, you must mean the ones I produced as a child. I've never called them The Sky Blue Notebooks. These notebooks, such as Every time I Cried, Amphetamines, Habits in the Treetops, Electrical Wiring, Understanding Childhood Diseases, Some Numbers, Dust, S'Memory and B'endgame are youthful, certainly. Their value is overestimated, although I recently saw copies of them on eBay. The things people will buy!*

What is your next project?

*Well since Tim and Vic died in that horrible accident years ago, smashing my mother's yellow Cutlass with the 8-track tape player into the highway on the other side of the drawbridge on the way to the concert and going up in a blaze of fire and smoke, crushing them in a mass of blood and charred flesh.... and since my father died, and my mother died, and of course since I lost my mind I've really only been working on a single project. And that project is to feel my feelings.*

Have you progressed much with that?

*In some ways yes, I've progressed, but given the depth of those feelings, that project is not likely to end anytime soon. Needless to say, I've cried a river. I do plan, however, to cut out every word of Einstein's Theory of Relativity and put them into a large brown burlap sack.*

How has the death of your father affected your work?

*The sad part is my father's death was the natural end to my journals. There is little to report after that and in a way I've "healed" as my shrink likes to say, and The Austrian Girl and I, as I've said, have commenced dreaming together in a new and wonderful way. I suppose my father's death allowed me to dream rather sweet dreams as well; I'm no longer afraid to sleep. The risk has been removed, where as before I had to steal dream sequences, make them up, to fabricate sleep and the dreams that go with them in order to stay awake long enough to run with the markets. Psychologically, it is all indeed a mystery. Much the way bar codes are to the average shopper. You can't negotiate with a bar code.*

Have you applied for American citizenship?

*No. But, I've applied for a driver's license by mail, actually. This is the first step, I understand. My lawyers in Zug and abroad are petitioning the King of the United States for me. We'll see what develops.*

The United States doesn't have a King.

*Whatever.*

And what of your mother?

*Well my mother, like all mothers, concerns me greatly now that she has died. I tried to get her portfolio in shape by selling off the companies that represent dead technologies and moving her into companies with promising returns over the next decade – a select group of fiber optics, a bit of networking, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, some software for integration across the network and some energy. Oil will hit \$75 in no time. At this point, I'm not recommending she short the markets, but rather that she go long for at least 6 to 12 months, until we have a better idea of where the baby boom is headed. For now, my mother's account is pointing towards maximizing these growth industries while capitalizing on safe stocks. Although she has died.*

No, I meant what about your mother now that you and her are the only members of your family still alive? Does she influence your work in anyway?

*Oh. Well she has repeatedly asked me over the telephone when will I ever give her a grandchild, and that – producing progeny is possibly my life's work. Who the hell knows? I'm still very depressed and likely to be for sometime. I'm not in the best shape to usher in yet another human into this world. But maybe I'll write a letter to The Austrian Girl tonight in my dream and see what she thinks. As for my mother, at this point she suffers mainly from a certain amount of bursitis in her left elbow and shoulder, but that's probably because she'd taken up bowling again...a way to socialize. Her situation is not too different from other mothers...women live longer than men, they take less risks physically. In the end, everyone dies, sad but true. Death consciousness if what's called for. But her bowling average has climbed to a healthy league leading 189.*

And what of The Woman with No Name?

*What of her?*

Do you still love her?

*I think everything I've done since I got out of that hot clothes dryer my brothers Tim and Vic dumped me in has been about loving The Woman with No Name. It's a sad story and I still feel weak when I think about it. Actually, my legs ache to be more specific.*

One last question. Have you actually ever read a word of Nietzsche?

*I think I hear your mother calling you. Thus spoke Von Spatzl.*

•••

Von Spatzl as mad as a \$3 dollar bill, critiques his own non-existent book in Day Journal, Vol. XV. The writing is oblique,

pseudo-academic and appears, even in its most poignant (and perhaps truest) moments, to be something he peeled off the Internet.

## The Austrian Girl: Love & The Loss Of Innocence

By Von Spatzl

Many critics these days question Von Spatzl's spirit in addition to his ability to write a clear and unfettered thought without embellishing it with sardonic self-pity. Yet critics have been wrong in the past, and they are certainly wrong about Von Spatzl's triumphant novel, *The Austrian Girl*.

Below, it will be proven that *The Austrian Girl* is the most dynamic example of Constructivist writing ever created, and it will be proven that most Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Animist critics are completely wrong about Spatzl's use of sensuality and irony.

My claim is buttressed by six points: (1) the Surrealist theme of revolution in *The Austrian Girl*, (2) Spatzl's adversarial relationship to the mid- and late-20th century Minimalist School while writing the book, (3) the author's brave employment of human nature despite the influence of the Conservative School, (4) the Romantic theme of coming of age in *The Austrian Girl*, (5) Spatzl's adversarial relationship to the Hungarian Romantic School, and (6) the author's use of farce, showing the influence of the post-Surrealist movement.

The protagonist's life is dominated by angst, and it should be obvious that Von Spatzl was never driven purely by the hate paradigm. Some of Von Spatzl's most enigmatic, though timeless and lovelorn writing, is in *The Austrian Girl*. Indeed, consider this quote:

"It was late at night when the old man died."

Wow, is all I can say. Holy wow, in fact. *The Austrian Girl's* discordant amalgam of subversive undertones and iconoclasm couldn't be more forceful. Still, *The Austrian Girl* was not originally seen as a *tour de force* by the intelligentsia. How things have changed!

In the prologue of *The Austrian Girl*, Spatzl writes, "She was not so much fat as unloved." (Von Spatzl 8) The reactionary implications of this are wide-ranging, particularly as expressed in the descriptions of The Austrian Girl's accordion music. In fact, where many other emigrant writers failed to convincingly portray destiny, Von Spatzl succeeds in his portrait of this itinerary of wanderlust. This all but proves my thesis, especially when Von Spatzl's employment of online trading in the book is taken into account:

"She sat on the bed and cried. He sat in his Old Brown Chair. His face was bright as he looked at her. He was ready for any unforeseen event. She sat on the bed and smoked, played the accordion. He shorted 500 shares of JNPR at \$244. All they needed was life." (Von Spatzl 121)

And, consider this tightly wrought confession:

"I subscribed to Minimalist beliefs. I subscribed to Christian beliefs. I subscribed to *The Economist*. The woman looked into his eyes. He drank the coffee. He ate a hard boiled egg and blew away the flies." (Von Spatzl 184)

Clearly remarkable stuff. Von Spatzl's quest for religion and equanimity on Earth couldn't be more forceful. And Von Spatzl's *Secret Journals* themselves strike a new chord of love and dread; they couldn't be more passionate as documentary proof of a document's ability to stand up in its own shit and scream: "Love me! Damn it!" And all of that came to a crashing and triumphant moment when he shorted tech stocks, a knife clenched in his teeth, his Bruno Unit grasped firmly, crawling out of the muck and the mire! In a word, triumphant – and against all odds!



When homophobes dismiss *The Austrian Girl* as a simple allegory, all I can say is, give me a goddamn fucking break! Wars have been fought over less. Read as an ironic autobiography, *The Austrian Girl* supports no such analysis. And irony is not *The Austrian Girl*'s only theme. The author uses *émigré* future-vision to transform Vic and Tim from simple bit-players into tragic bumbling stoned out dopes, an axis of confused evil. And, with words like "I am not," written 333 times for a total of 999 words, Von Spatzl stakes his claim like a lounge lizard in Vegas witnessing for the first time The Solid Gold Dancers.

Still, *The Austrian Girl*'s critics, those curs of ignorance, slaves at the heels of reason, rant on and on. Are they on drugs, or what? It is germane that scholars – by seeing Von Spatzl's Modernist/Constructivist views and thinking with their digestive tracts--have misinterpreted the character of *The Austrian Girl* herself in the book. She is the fiber in the sugarcoated revolution, she is the "rev" in revelation, the "om" in om pah pah. She gives substance while the world around her (and Von Spatzl) is dishwater soup and so much fat around the heart.

Just gaze at this minor miracle of prose:

"Life offered nothing. Money was free and easy. Feel your feelings." (Von Spatzl 288)

With these words, Von Spatzl devastated his critics; they're just in chronic denial if they tell you otherwise. Pathos and revolution come to bear here like never before. These words encapsulate nearly the whole of 20th century thought! Fucking A, man.

Love, too, is fecund ground for the stealthy modernist feminist in Von Spatzl. It's quite obvious Von Spatzl's sanity was tenuous at best by the time *The Austrian Girl* was completed, and critics of Von Spatzl's work often overlook this aspect. *The Austrian Girl* is like all of Spatzl's great works (particularly *The Miller's Fantasy*, *Nothing at All* and *The Bad Weather Report*), a quest for humanity in the face of feminist despair.

While this fact allays most of Von Spatzl's expatriate detractors, it has led a certain conservative critic – the execrable Norad Quigby – to proclaim lamentably, "In these few words, the reactionary movement was left in shambles." Most likely, Von Spatzl meant this as a critique of farce, and surely he was no pal of the absurd American. (Just glance at what Von Spatzl did in taking apart that Yankee's *Sin and Death in American poetry since Wordsworth* in his *Critique of Quigby*.)

The protagonist's life is dominated by hope, and the character of Von Spatzl himself is skillful as a symbol of the fallen patriarch. The prodigal son who *never* returns!

The Austrian Girl's exploration of sexual identity, too, is in keeping with its reactionary point-of-view. Some of Von Spatzl's richest and erotic writing is in *The Austrian Girl*. Just peruse the call girl scene. It turns sensuality and room service on its head! And while it's quite obvious that Spatzl's will to live was tenuous at best by the time *The Austrian Girl* was completed, Von Spatzl meant this as a critique of sensuality; the casual critic habitually misses this point.

In addition, most critics miss the entire symbolism of Tokyo and his younger sister, the Princess. "His spaceboy suit featured an anti-gravity belt." Von Spatzl point, is for all intents and purposes, the idea of death masquerading as life. And, while it is no great feat to realize Von Spatzl has written himself into a bit of a corner here, he masterfully expands the metaphor of the "innocent detour" or better, limbo, by employing Tim the Tower – not as a wrong-headed character – but as a secret agent of the plot. So, Tokyo is free to go and live his life! Tim the Tower begins a surrealist thread himself! To indicate that Tim the Tower is the work's villain, the author makes his dialogue insane. And it is through Tim the Tower that many of Von Spatzl's early 20th century influences show through. Most likely, Von Spatzl meant this as a critique of phallic imagery. (Take another, closer look at the bowling metaphor!) Von Spatzl's use of such imagery is most skillful in *The Austrian Girl's* brilliant closing monologue.

"I sat in the chair. The Old Brown Chair. The woman looked into my eyes. Tuesday was the bleakest day. Love lived in monumental bottles of regret. My sadness was deep, as if it wouldn't end. I was set in sad. I went bowling." (Von Spatzl 520)

As such, the words of the author ring true: "Autumn is the finest, and third, season. Perfect for sleeping. Alas..." This becomes relevant especially when one considers the book's third most famous line, "I have not been sleeping." (Von Spatzl 5). This line extends further into a dramatic play of late 20th century pessimism when one considers the book's fourth most famous line, "The moon my ass." (Von Spatzl 593)."

Many parents see the book's final paragraph as the most influential – especially when Von Spatzl's exploration of the patriarch in the book is taken into account.

"The father drank the coffee. I couldn't believe it. Four years had passed since the fun at the county fair. Salt in the wounds of religion."

Many contemplative teens see the book's first half as the most timeless. I, however, do not. This reasoning differs radically from traditional theories on the Positivist school. In the sixth and final section the teen reader is presented with a paradox: though the characters seem unable to escape pathos, they are simultaneously insane and renown. Needless to say, teens have a certain difficulty with metaphysics.

*The Austrian Girl* is, unlike Von Spatzl's great works (from *The Miller's Fantasy* onwards – and the slim best sellers such as *The Letters*, *Stock Tips*, *How To Fish*, *Gravity*, *The Story of My Life Mathematically*, *The True Tale of Tim & Vic*, *Safe Driving for Teens*, *Do It Yourself Car Mechanic*, and *Leave It The Hell Alone*, the most successful for diverse reasons. *The Austrian Girl* at its best is a portrayal of farce in keeping with its Minimalist point-of-view – and it's a laugh riot to boot. Von Spatzl's point here is clear: humanity and reason are one and the same, the irrational and the rational come together like a dog and his bone.

So, when women dismiss *The Austrian Girl* as a simple *roman à clef*, all I can say is, how things have changed and what a load of crap! The author uses loss of innocence to transform himself from a lost and failed suicide victim into a timeless literary hero.

Consider this: "The man and the boy talked for hours about absolutely nothing. Six of the men were homophobes; the others were revolutionaries. Her eyes were blue like water." (Von Spatzl 697)

Divine, *n'est-ce pas?*

Or this: "Never give a party if you will be the most interesting person there." (Von Spatzl 728) Indeed, Von Spatzl doesn't shirk away from interesting and important socializing tips.

The Romantic implications of this are wide-ranging, and these themes are most evident in the final moments of *The Austrian Girl*, for that is where Spatzl's often drug-influenced prose shines most ingeniously. As you can imagine, Germans (as well as the Austrians) took to the streets after the book's first publication and burned thousands of copies! But they would all indeed be shamed by the reaction in Stockholm.

Yet the influence of Von Spatzl's *The Austrian Girl* is still strong today. Perhaps it is time scholars reevaluated their estimation of the book. This book is perhaps the greatest example of literary love mankind has ever seen.

Though famous for portrayals of nature and auto mechanics in other works, Von Spatzl will always be loved for his skillful use of stock market analysis and teasing metaphor here, not to mention the erotic pictures that he himself either photographed, drew or pasted in from a variety of original sources.

Still, there's salt in the wounds of reality. Von Spatzl lusted for real religion! And his point here is clear: being and immortality

and non-being and mortality are pairs, or better, twins, and they are one and the same!

As a testament to reason and a celebration of truth, *The Austrian Girl* will always ring true. Though his contemporaries found Von Spatzl's use of sexuality a brainless meandering public relations ploy, history will vindicate *The Austrian Girl*.

God rest ye, Von Spatzl.

# Mother

Von was never my favorite child.

He was difficult to carry – I was sick as a dog for 8 months– and once he was out he was worse. I've never met a more upset and angry child. Everything upset him. Food, noise, flies and any kind of polyester blend. His brothers, too, of course.

Once he threatened to push a knife into his throat.

"I'll punish you all, damn you!" he yelled. Oh it was simply awful. Very upsetting for me. One of the last things he ever really said as a child.

He stood on a chair in the kitchen. As if he were on a soapbox! Only the fear of his father, who'd just walked through door, home from the office, stopped him. His father slapped his face, which was the right thing to do and sent him to bed without dinner. The next day he was fine. All was forgotten.

Other things he did were very unconventional. For one thing, he rarely came out of his room or if he was up in the attic, he'd rarely come down – except when his twin brothers went in or upstairs after him to play. So when Vic and Tim went in his room, Von would move his operation – his books and pads and pens and scissors – to the attic where it was hot as hell in the summer and freezing to death in the winter. Von didn't seem to care. He was happy up there, I guess. He liked to be alone. And since he was quiet I never really bothered to see what he was doing. Sometimes, even at 10 or 11 years old, he walked half mile to a local diner, where he'd spread his work out on a table and continue his "business" he called it. If I couldn't find

him around the house, I'd call the diner and a nice woman there named Thelma would pass the word on to him and he'd be back in 15 minutes.

Thelma – the nice waitress – said he was a quiet boy, courteous, but sure drank a lot of coffee.

[Editor's Note: Thelma had a theory of her own. "The reason I still have hair," she told customers, "is because I drink strong black coffee. I can't prove it of course, but I do drink strong black coffee and I do have strong thick hair."]

Von Spatzl paid for his strong black coffee out of his allowance. I didn't think it was a good idea for an 11-year old boy to be drinking coffee, but it was better than him putting a kitchen knife in his throat – I fainted that day, you know – in front of the children.

But around the dinner table, there were other problems. Von would pester his father with questions, questions no one knew the answer to...oh about religion, "Where is God?" – you know? Or electronics, economics, trigonometry...he'd tap his father on the arm to get his attention, such a pest! And sure enough, his father gave him a good one. The other boys laughed of course. Sometimes his food would go flying. Ah, those boys!

He seemed to have some friends. One was a boy who went fishing with him. An Italian boy named Johnny Rodino, who had a broken arm. They seemed to enjoy each other's company and sometimes brought back things they trapped or caught at the lake to examine and who knows what else? But Johnny seemed to disappear like a lot of Von's friends. He preferred to be alone.

Sometimes I saw him burying things in the yard. He said it was always a school project and he'd write up his *experiments* in his notebooks. Oh the notebooks! Von had lots of notebooks, the little one did. The others didn't really care to read much. Except for the Sunday Funnies. Like us, they'd watch shows. We all would. Sit together like a family and watch shows. Funny shows. Not like today. There's nothing

funny on these days. People don't laugh anymore. It's a shame. Although I do enjoy my game show channel...all those old favorites on one channel. To Tell the Truth, The Match Game, The Dating Game, The Price is Right... it's wonderful!

There was one little girl he seemed to like. Valerie something was her name. Never, never met her. But, Von was always writing letters to her and bothering us for stamps. Then he got his own stamps from the postman, Al, who was perhaps his only friend for a while, and the two would sometimes walk the neighborhood together. I wondered if he'd be a postman when he grew up, but he really never did anything, and I guess he never grew up. Just went on living in one attic or another. Making notes in his books. For what purpose I don't know. A mysterious boy, he was. Still is, I guess.

The little girl, well he liked her and asked her over with some of the other boys and girls from school. For his 11th birthday. He looked pretty smart that day. But no one came! It was terrible. And over the next few days little gifts would arrive in the mail for Von. The only one he was interested in was the gold paper wrapped gift from this little Valerie girl. Well I hate to tell you what was in there. You'd never guess. Some kind of little pink shirt. For one thing it was too small. And when I found it in his trash I could see it had been worn, a few times. I can understand his being upset. His brothers made terrible fun of him, but that's all it was, just fun, although he took it personally. Very personally. He always took things personally. You couldn't say a word without hurting his feelings. And he had feelings about everything. He had feelings about eating, and standing and sitting and sleeping. And he certainly had feelings about his clothes. Yes, he was always very odd about his clothes.

When he was five Von had a cowboy shirt he wore all the time. I mean all the time. It was a gift from his aunt, who God rest her soul, passed away some years ago, and he loved it. Never took it off, but sometimes when I told him after two weeks that he had to wash it, well he submitted and stood in front of the washing machine and then the dryer until it was clean again and he put it right back on and went back to whatever



he was doing. What a sight, this little boy with his bare tiny chest, arms crossed, studying the washing machine cycle, then reading some book or something with his back against the dryer.

He learned how to use the washer and drying because even at that age about 5 or 6 he would pee pee in his bed, and you could tell, in order not be caught and teased by his brothers, he would wash and dry them, usually before anyone else was up. But his father, who left the house early would hear the noise in the basement and found him there in his underwear doing a load of wash. His father thought it was funny, or sad, or both, and left the boy in peace.

As he got older we saw him drifting away – from us and his brothers. He listened to the radio in his room, then took apart the radio and strung its pieces all around his room. The entire room was a radio. If you turned on the light switch, you would get talk radio. If you turned up the thermostat you'd get more talk radio, but in Spanish. He taught himself Hebrew for some reason and began writing his homework in Hebrew. His teachers called us in. He stated calling us Emah and Abbah. Then he started in on Dante and walked around with his *Inferno* book all the time. He had it with him almost all the time. He called into the air and asked Aenid for help. I think sometimes he said nasty things to us in Italian.

But most frequently he'd call out to the air.

"Show me the way," he would say.

"Eat your chicken," I told him. His father would give him a belt licking. That quieted him down. A year went by and he didn't hardly say a word. Which was okay because Tim and Vic were quite enough noise as it was.

When he got older and could drive he'd take the car for an hour or two and go driving, always returning it with a full tank of gas. Never had an accident. I wonder if he just went to the gas station to fill it up and then sit at Thelma's diner, then come home, to appear normal.

Well the accident, that was terrible of course and it took a toll on all of us, but Von, well that's when he went all silent. And he had to heal, his legs were broken in 25 places, his face was burnt, and his father thought he was going crazy, but he said, "Leave the boy alone, leave the boy alone," and so I did.

The police showed us pictures and in a stupid moment I sent them to Von. He never said a word about them. They were horrible, and it was cruel to send them, the black and white pictures of the accident. They were originally for the insurance, oh I don't know and after when he did speak to us he never said a word about them, just babbled really about a dell or a juniper or a cisco... I had no idea what he was talking about. Poor Tim and Vic.

They loved that car. The Cutlass. The yellow Cutlass. Those boys. They are together now, I'm sure, in Heaven, causing a lot of trouble...

Well it was a year after the accident that Von insisted we call him Von Spatzl. He sent us letters from his room. Signed them "Von Spatzl." Then he moved out and disappeared for years and we received letters from strange places like France, Austria, Yugoslavia and even Russia... I still have the stamps. All signed "Von Spatzl." Who could understand what he was saying? They weren't even written in English!

I first knew there was something wrong with Von when he was about 4 ... it was the spider thing that made him crazy.

Then it was always me or his father calling him when he moved back to America and lives who knows where? How does he get along?

With the two older boys having died in that terrible accident, he's all we have left.

I can't imagine what it was like for him. Poor Vic and poor Tim.

When he moved back to America, Von on the phone always said he was fine. He was meeting girls, he had stopped smoking, and he was writing an important book of some kind, but that it was far from finished and that he was thinking of moving to Stockholm... is that in France?

## Part Six

### The Woman With No Name

Yeah, I did know the guy... Von Spatzl? I met him years ago. At a bar, Horse Feathers. I was like, what? 19? He, this Von Spatzl, was playing 8-ball, and doing poorly I might add, putting his quarters up on the table and losing in like 5 seconds. And cursing in like five languages, none of which anyone understood. Muttering to himself, really. He couldn't make a shot, really, but I guess that was because of his legs, he couldn't stand up straight, and all those Jack Daniel's he was pounding down didn't help much either. He seemed lost, dejected, a real mess and he was, and maybe that's what attracted me to him.

When he crutched over toward the bar he dropped his face into his hands. It was a stupid pool game, I mean, who cared? But maybe that wasn't it at all. He was scarred – his face. Like he was burned in a fire. Not that bad, but you could tell. He must have sensed me looking at him because he lifted his face and looked over. His eyes were red, and he saw I was looking at his burn scars and he said the strangest thing to me. "Scared but fresh," is what he said.

Did he say "scarred," or "freshly scarred...?" I don't know. It was puzzling, and then something went buzzing in his pocket. He reached in and Holy wow! pulled out an egg timer of all things. Putting it on the bar – and drawing attention to himself – he fumbled drunkenly with the dial until it stopped. It looked like it was set to "Hard."

I said, "Come on, let's get a coffee."

He was surprised, said nothing, but put his egg timer into his pocket and followed me outside. We didn't get very far, just down the block. It was late, and nothing seemed to be open.

On the way, without much of an introduction, he launched into this story, kind of like a fable. I don't know, maybe he was

drunk, I'm sure I was. But of what I remember it goes like this...

There was a boy, and the boy was told by some guy, maybe God? Yeah, God. God told the boy to safeguard these magic seeds. God didn't say what the magic seeds were for, just to keep them safe. The magic seeds, of course, were the grains that held, he said, the tree of life. Where all knowledge and whatever could be stored. Even though God didn't say that, the boy knew.

"Be very careful they don't fall into the wrong hands!" God the boy was told. Well the boy didn't quite know how to handle that kind of responsibility. Who would? It's like having an atomic bomb or something. So anyway, the boy went a bit crazy with worry as to where to hide them. Where could he hide seeds? In his pocket? Yeah, but for how long? In his house? Well the boy tried to put them everywhere--in his closet, in the back of his drawer, in a safe, taped to the ceiling. But no place was safe. So he walked with them. He got about 10 miles and then thought, what if I'm robbed on the road? No, that won't do!

The boy was so fraught with worry. He sat on the road, knotting himself up. He sat there for like a very long time. Years in fact. Yeah, like three years, he said. Then, finally, the boy had an idea. How to hide them. He would bury the seeds. Deep. In the earth. In his back yard. So he could keep his eye on them. He did it very late at night because he was worried someone would see him. Particularly his family - they stole everything from him. What they stole, I don't know. So the boy buried the seeds and finally, he felt safe and slept for like 3 days. Of course, you know what happened. The seeds sprouted. And they sprouted into a glorious tree, like right away, overnight! Like they were watered with Miracle Gro or something like that. Zoom! Big tree, lots of flowers, then fruit - although I don't think it was an apple tree. But the seeds! They were hidden in the form of a tree. The tree of life, I guess, I'm not sure. So this tree, Von Spatzl said, laughing out loud, created other problems, particularly with the birds and the squirrels that ate its fruit. And then of course all the

people from his town found out about it and the tree became the talk of the town... everyone came and stole the fruit and ate it. That was Day One. What it did for them, I don't know. Maybe nothing, probably nothing. It must have tasted good, though, because more and more people came into the yard and picked away at the fruit. Lines formed, and late that day, his parents set up a gate, they sold tickets and charged for each piece of fruit. Or maybe they weighed it, like in the market. The boy awakening from his long sleep saw the commotion and felt heart sick – and scared. He was really scared.

Going downstairs to see the crowds, he asked his parents what was happening.

"It's a miracle!" said his mother.

"Don't push, don't push," said his father.

When the crowds died down that night, Von Spatzl said, and the stars came out, the boy went outside and stood by the tree. He half expected to be struck by lightning, or just vaporized. But nothing happened. Yet, the boy felt so bad about the whole thing, so guilty, I guess, he went and got a rope and tied it to a branch from high up in the tree, put the noose around his neck and jumped. Hung himself. It was like it was his fate. So sad, don't you think? The parents seeing their boy hanging from this miraculous tree the next morning were horrified. And they cut down the tree and told the people who lined up the next day to go away and never came back. That was it. End of the story. Weird.

It was a bit strange he told these kinds of stories...like he was some kind of sage that came down from the mountain. Like out of the bible. But he couldn't walk very well. Some kind of accident, he didn't really say, although I think he wanted to talk. His face was not in great shape either, but you could tell. He wasn't bad looking, even with the scars – with his red hair, he was cute. Must have been awful. I couldn't imagine it, being burned. Holy wow, you know?

He told me another story. He said he was in some city in Europe, like Prague maybe? I didn't really understand it and I wasn't even sure if I believed it. Well I understood it, but not really what he was getting at. So Von Spatzl says he's sitting at some café and he orders a pot of tea, some kind of herbal tea. Anyway he sits there and drinks the tea. Meanwhile there's a group of people sitting next to him. Von Spatzl – what a name, huh? – well he finishes his tea and then looks around for the waiter, and the waiter is not around. So he takes something out of his pocket and puts it on the table and places the teapot over it, like it's money – you know, to pay for the tea, and the teapot over it so it won't blow away? He's going to leave the money there, and the waiter will find it. But he's worried someone will steal the money, so he gets up and you know he's got this crutch, or a cane, or something – he's obviously lame, crippled, can't walk too well. It's obvious he's not going anywhere fast, right? So he tells the people at the table, or rather asks them, "Would you please tell the waiter I've left it for him – under the teapot?"

They all nod, like sure, no problem in whatever language they're speaking. Maybe Czech? Who knows, Von Spatzl probably spoke Czech, too. Maybe even Russian. So Von Spatzl ambles away.

Then Von Spatzl tells me, "You see, I didn't leave anything on the table, not a dime, not a shekel, not a sous... nothing. All I left them for the price of a cup of tea was a little game. I set in motion a series of deceptions." Strange.

So, the waiter comes back and the group says to him – and there's six of them, lots of witnesses– that the lame guy left the money for him on the table. And they point. The waiter smiles and walks over to clear the teapot and finds no money. He's a bit confused. These six people just said...

The waiter questions them. And of course, they feel they've been had, and the waiter thinks maybe the group is lying to him. But how much is a pot of tea? Why would they steal the lame guy's money?

"What's the moral?" I asked Von Spatzl.

"Moral?" he asked. "There is none, is there? Moral? I don't think there is one. Actually, there's not much point to the story except in the telling of it."

He was like that. Always with this kind of riddle. I liked him and so I slept with him. I was drunk. Who knows what I really said. I never slept with a lame guy before. He seemed smart though, and while he didn't really say much, he fucked pretty good. We went to a school yard and fucked. He picked some dandelions and gave them to me. He said he never gave anyone flowers, but I was an exception. Then we left and walked looking for coffee, but didn't find any.

Along the side of the road we found an old beat up turquoise chair, actually very comfortable, and I sat in it and told him everything about myself. And he stood there, with his crutch and listened, smoked cigarettes, nodded and smiled. He was pretty cool, I think. When the sky got light though I realized it was like 5 or 6 in the morning.

"You know," Von Spatzl said, "I'm sure I met you before... before Zug...."

"Well Mr. Zug, give me your phone number," I said. And he did. He pulled out a card that said "Von Spatzl" and his telephone number. No address, just that. I walked to my car and he walked in the opposite direction. I turned and saw him watching me. Then he waved. That was the last time I saw him. Unless he changed, and I didn't recognize him.

He gave me something. A little piece of paper: 'Mothers are the only goddesses in whom the whole world believes.' I'm not sure if he was being sweet or making fun of me. It's from a fortune cookie. And he wanted something from me. My green sweater. What for? "A souvenir," he said. What the fuck. "Here you go."

I thought about calling Von Spatzl a hundred times but things just happened, life just happens. You get caught up in things



and the next thing you know, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years have gone by...and you wonder whatever happened to those people you met, where did they go? Holy Wow. Like, are they still alive, you know?

## Part Seven

# The Addendum

With his father dead, Stockholm seemed ever more closer for Von Spatzl – not that he'd get anything from the Swedes other than a runny nose or a glass of the local moonshine.

Von Spatzl moved his Old Brown Chair outside and positioned it facing the Old Mulberry Tree, so he could be *in* nature, a vantage point where he would dedicate hours of silence to his grief. He sat there in the shadow of the Old Mulberry Tree for three days running, shifting only his body weight (itself diminishing), to the left, to the right. He imagined himself squarely in the gap, dragged by his DNA donor, between this life and the next.

How unspectacular was his father's death! Von Spatzl ruminated. How common we all are! Gods and worms! Put a nickel in us and watch us go – down. But even that wasn't so much a revelation as a reiteration. Nothing new there at all – a rerun of the tired water pulsing in the fountain of his feelings.

In those three days, he prepared himself to be planted and picked over by the birds and squirrels that ran amok on his little square plot of nature. Yet another dress rehearsal. Von Spatzl lit a Chesterfield and watched it burn in his fingers. When that one went out, yellowing his skin, he lit a second one, then a third, a fourth, and a fifth.

Have I fully prepared myself for death? he asked himself, and finally, after three days, he laughed.

"The acorn does not fall far from the tree," said his mother once, a cliché to be sure, but accurate in terms of Von Spatzl's last steps on the planet – or so he thought. The phone rang almost constantly. Most certainly his mother calling to remind him he was an acorn.

Von Spatzl sensed his father's death had set time in chromatic sequence, from black through blue, to the reds, oranges, yellows and finally to white.

"First this, then that... all is white, like the 'never' that happened along time ago..." he wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXX, five times for a total of 20 words. It was the first time Von Spatzl had picked up a journal in four days. On a facing page, he drew the letters for the word "white" in white grease pencil, and they were discernible only by holding the page at an angle to catch the light.

The chromatic sequence was evident; for Von Spatzl all things from that moment on fell into some time-color category. At the apex of their lives, the Mulberries for example, dropped like birdshit just when their skins were bursting with blue-red juice. After a day, the fruits lost their color entirely, and blackened; more time passed and they turned white, completely drained of their sweet blood. Birds, unconscious of this reality, paid neither Von Spatzl nor his half-baked theories of chromatic corollaries of entropy any attention and pecked away at this seemingly endless free lunch. But they did stay away from the white ones.

It was a fairly simple system. What did it mean though? What were the implications? Was it all about sugar?

"The food supplies are limited," he cautioned the birds five times for a total of 25 words, and, layered over it, drew another picture of a bird (see Night Journal Vol. XXX) with a brick body and tail. He scribbled some notes near the bird's tail: Replacement arrangement.

Surely some soul has come to replace my father? Surely entropy and the law of conservation is at work.

Hours, or days, or weeks later, Von Spatzl – still in his Old Brown Chair, the ash gathering around him in parapets of gray – could hear over the cigarette wall *I Love Lucy* reruns on a neighbor's television.

He noted in tiny script in his Day Journal Vol. XXX: "Oh! Ricky!" Ricky was his father's first name, he remembered.

Von Spatzl realized, not for the first time, the ringing phone. He removed himself from his Old Brown Chair in the yard to answer it.

"Is this Mr. Von Spatzl?"

"Uh....Who is this?"

"ABMR Bank, Sir... how do you do...?"

"Hmmm...."

"Is this Mr. Von Spatzl?"

"Ummm...Go on."

"I'm calling to offer you the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"Oh, and what is that?"

"We are offering you, Mr. Von Spatzl, a Gold 'Super' MasterCard, which will allow you to shop at more than 1 million merchant locations, and have the low, low, low finance rate of just 1 percent! Sounds super doesn't it?"

"Go on."

"Fully approved financing."

"Hmmm...."

"Merchant agreements, point programs, and a free Tupperware set...."

"Well..."

"That's it... What do you say?"

"My father died. That's what I say. He died from a heart attack while driving his car. I guess it's lucky he didn't kill another 30 people. Someone found him and put him in a golf cart and drove him to the golf club where he was known and laid him on the card table, removed his shirt and called my mother to come and look at him, then a white station wagon pulled up to take him away. He never went back to his house, he never put on his red shorts, or his white belt again. He would never say 'The moon my ass' again."

"Sir?"

"Oh, and my mother has bursitis."

"Sir?"

"You see, I need a plan..."

"Well, Sir, Mr. Von Spatzl, we have a plan, a very good plan...a Gold 'Super' MasterCard, which will allow you to shop at more than 1 million merchant locations, and have the low, low, low finance rate of just 1 percent! Sounds super doesn't it?"

Von Spatzl hung up the phone and returned to his Old Brown Chair where he put his elbows on his knees.

"Is it all really about something I might buy?" he said softly to himself.

The next day Von Spatzl found himself standing in his front yard holding his trusty buck knife. Kids were busy wheeling pieces of discarded wood on a pair of metal roller skates up

and down the street. Tokyo, dressed as an Egyptian Pharaoh and his sister, dressed as the Queen of Sheba, were shouting directions. They were building a pyramid. They didn't see him, so he returned to his Old Brown Chair in the back of his house. With his trusty buck knife, Von Spatzl carved the word "Dad" into the seat. He collected the "Dad" shavings and put them into a plastic bag and dug a hole with his trusty buck knife, buried them and stamped the raw soil, tamping it down.

"Done," he said.

Then he took the trusty buck knife and stabbed the earth to mark the grave, and remembered suddenly something he'd read, something perhaps Chinese - "He who sacrifices his conscience to ambition burns a picture to obtain the ashes."

Sitting in his Old Brown Chair as the sun was setting, Von Spatzl came to the conclusion that Linux would never never never unseat the Microsoft Operating System. He had shorted the hardware maker VA Linux from \$248 plus down to \$3, where he covered his 1000 shares. He was so certain that this action would take place, he never bothered to write the puts. It was just now, after all the euphoria and panic that he had this realization: It's over - my ambition. And now I have a picture, and that picture is of a million cigarettes worth of ash.

It reminded him of the times his father had called him on the phone to ask if he, his only remaining child, was "making his nut." Those times, Von Spatzl, who didn't like to talk about money, let alone ambition, let alone talk much at all with his father (or anyone else) joked, "I have squirrels living in my attic, so if I'm making it, they're stealing it." But when this memory washed over him, he grasped once again that his father was dead, and would never wear his red shorts again.

In his Day Journal, Vol. XXX, just before sunrise the following day, Von Spatzl scribbled these thoughts:

"America gives you all this and more: An Old Brown Chair and the chance to make a million dollars, then they count your white blood cells for a buck a piece. And yes, you can make

friends with your neighbors if you choose, and perhaps even exchange recipes.

“But it’s all a disaster. Spilled uterine milk and 6 billion people crying about it. Trapped in the gap. God and worm. Because your heart fails in one way or another and God is elusive and you die and you have a list of things that are divided up and taken away or buried.”

Von Spatzl drew up yet another list:

## List

Options

Rate cuts

The failure of fiber optics

The build out

The bust

The greed

The fear

The Nobel Prize

Today, Tokyo and his sister, dressed up as a magician in a tuxedo and a magician’s assistant in a yellow sequin bikini, knocked on Von Spatzl’s door. Von Spatzl was busy packing three years of cigarette ash from trashcans into thick clear plastic bags; there were five of them. While he no longer held any stocks, he watched the NASDAQ sink on his Dell as he held two sacks of ash. His attention, focused for a moment as he watched the sell off, he noted on another screen that E-waves suggested a short-term bottom, if it could hold 1968. It wouldn’t of course.

Tokyo: What are you doing?

Von Spatzl: Putting my empire in plastic bags, and you?

Tokyo: Want to see me cut my sister in half?

Von Spatzl: Sure, why not.

Tokyo: It won’t hurt the littlest bit.

Von Spatzl: You have a smoke?

Tokyo: Help yourself.

Von Spatzl: Thanks.

Tokyo: Do you know what happens when you die?

Von Spatzl: You file Chapter 11.

Princess: Hey Von Spatzl, there's a policeman at your door.

Moving towards the rickety screen door, Von Spatzl sensed, correctly, that the squirrels in his yard, and now in his attic, were key agents of the delicate ecology of his world, a world about to implode. He'd not seen this particular reality before today. Earlier, sitting on his bed, Von Spatzl considered his health. His heart was beating rapidly, he was sweating, he was out of breath, he clutched the green sweater and noticed he was thinning, as was his hair. The squirrels meanwhile had become more daring, entering his house through a hole in the screen door, and taking their Mulberry meals, along with the birds, in his kitchen. He was becoming more and more a part of the delicate ecology.

No, he hadn't seen his family in years, and they too, were, evidently thinning out. "I am thin," he said, and made a note in pencil on the wall above his bed, drawing a stick figure lying down, then an arrow, then the words: "Here Lies Von Spatzl, He Made his Nut."

Tim the Tower called, but Von Spatzl wouldn't dare pick up the phone and Tim the Tower left a message. Tim announced that he was now long 500 shares of Cisco @ \$20, that he was going to the bowling alley tonight and that Martha, his wife had finally left him, that they had been sleeping in separate rooms for years and hadn't had intercourse in 10."

Von Spatzl tried to feel his feelings for Tim the Tower but didn't find any in there. He reached underneath his bed. Besides a suitcase filled with \$100 bills, he pulled up the police photos of the Vic and Tim crash site, their mother's yellow Cutlass and its 8-track tape player mangled beyond imagination.

"And Vic and Tim inside," whispered Von Spatzl who tried in vain to remember what music they played on that 8-track tape player. Was it Hot Tuna?

He glanced at the dead twins, Vic and Tim, then rose, and soon found himself seated in his Old Brown Chair, which he had moved back inside, to his Old Brown Table. Von Spatzl pulled down one of the journals (Day Journal Vol XXVI) and cut up the photos of the dead twins into thumbnail-sized triangles, pasting them into the remaining blank pages. Beneath each triangle of black and white horror, Von Spatzl wrote the word: "Mother." Then changed "Mother" to "Earth," then crossed out "Earth," and rewrote the word "Mother." Yes, she had died, too. Von Spatzl acknowledged that she had indeed loved those boys, and he felt sorry for her. Her loss grew in him; he could feel his feelings for her.

As Von Spatzl was finishing up, tears streaming down his face, the phone rang and the answering machine picked up, soon broadcasting the voice of his shrink.

"Hope you are still feeling your feelings, Von... by the way are we bottoming or should I hold my shorts...?"

Von Spatzl muttered to himself: "Hold your shorts, hold your shorts, hold your shorts, hold your shorts."

"There's a copper, Von Spatzl," said Tokyo. "I think we're surrounded."

AS IT TURNED OUT THE POLICEMAN was not a policeman at all. But was in fact a representative from the Flushtown Department of Health.

"I'm here for the rats," he said.

Von Spatzl stared at him, then looked around his house.

"Which ones?"

"The big ones," he said.

"I have squirrels, not rats."



"Oh," said the man from the Department of Health. He looked at his clipboard.

"Well, what's wrong then? What seems to be the problem?"

"My mother has suffered enormously."

"Oh, well, uh, mine, too...must be the wrong address." He smiled weakly.

The Assistant Minister of Health left Von Spatzl standing at his screen door, and walked across the street. Von Spatzl, Tokyo and the kid princess watched him knock at the neighbor's, entering the house a few seconds after brandishing the clipboard.

"Rats again," said Von Spatzl. "Been there, done that."

(In all, there were 343 rats in Von Spatzl's Secret Journals, remembered. Each drawn at the lower or upper right hand side of the pages. The rats uttered one word, many of which were body organs, such as "lung," "kidney," "spleen," or "liver" but one featured the word "rat.")

At midnight, Von Spatzl wrote in his Night Journal Vol. XXX: "He took his Old Brown Chair outside. 'Come on,' he said to his Old Brown Chair. 'Let's go die.' "

Von Spatzl had found his Old Brown Chair in the street sometime around the year he moved in, not far from where his little house sat krapping in this nothing little suburb in the middle of America. Flushtown. Yes... Von Spatzl, world traveler, lived in a blind spot, a crossroads for nobodies going nowhere and looking for a coffee and a pair of doughnuts. But Flushtown had provided for him, after all: The Old Brown Chair.

He looked at it, and then sat in it and stared into the neighborhood. The Flushtown night air was cool; the moon was out, full and bright. Then, one by one, the lights went out all over Flushtown. It was just Von Spatzl, his Old Brown Chair and the Moon. Memories of his days in Zug flooded his mind.

"Touch me," he remembered, but couldn't attach a face to the voice.

Von Spatzl discovered ants, working the nightshift, crawling in a straight line in the moonlight. He went into the kitchen, using his Zippo as a torch to light the way held in the air with his Bruno Unit, found a fresh bottle of Jack, came back out, took a hit straight out of the bottle, and then poured a bit on the ants.

"Drinks on me tonight, fellahs."

Von Spatzl went back into his house, found a candle and a cocktail table, moved it outside next to his Old Brown Chair. Then he went back inside and brought out his Night Journal Vol. XXX which was nearly filled and expanded like The Austrian Girl's accordion. He flipped through the pages and sighed, then finally found a blank page and drew a crude black pencil drawing of an ant in the middle of the page. Below he wrote, in the red ink, the word "Martha" 888 times for a total of 888 words in a ring around the ant.

Days later, Von Spatzl was still alive. It was an amusing discovery, and he laughed.

He hadn't eaten a thing in days, and was down to his last carton of Chesterfields. Von Spatzl hadn't traded a stock in weeks; he barely kept track of the days, let alone the level of the markets. The Austrian Girl was gone, off to some conference in Gdansk, then the Accordion Squeeze Off in Paris. Tokyo and his sister had disappeared. He wondered how his mother's bursitis was doing, but didn't want to call. Then remembered she had died years ago.

Von Spatzl pulled out his Day Journal Vol. XXX from the shelf and brought it outside, poured himself a Jack and lit a Chesterfield. He wrote up this interview in blue crayon. It stretched across 10 pages because Von Spatzl wrote so big.

Interview

Von Spatzl: Hello.

Interviewer: Hello, Mr. Von Spatzl. If I may, I'll begin.

Von Spatzl: Please do.

Interviewer: Thanks for the drink... Okay, here goes. If you could quit your day trading what would you do?

Von Spatzl: Pray. Drink. Pray.

Another three days passed. Von Spatzl was now running out of Chesterfields and was getting hungry for a ham sandwich. He wished he was a hobo and lived on cans of beans besides railroad tracks and sang hobo songs on his guitar. He considered going down to the little market where the fat lady there would sell him cigarettes and then to ACE LIQUORS for a bottle of Jack. Maybe the fat lady would make him a dozen ham sandwiches. But when he stepped outside onto the front lawn and noticed the stack of damp *Wall Street Journals* and *Investor's Business Dailies*, he nearly tripped over Tim the Tower sleeping on the grass. Von Spatzl went inside, brewed some instant coffee and brought it out to him.

"Wake up!"

Tim the Tower stirred. No, he was not dead.

Von Spatzl noticed the day's headline: Fed Cuts Rates Again! He saw it was a deeper cut now, 50 basis points, and sighed: "Thank God we're not Japan."

Tim the Tower's clothes were all wet from the dew.

"Drink this."

"I haven't been the same since Martha left me," Tim said.

"Ants," said Von Spatzl. He then recited a poem he made up on the spot:

"Brick bird, Mulberry  
Blood and ice

Plague me,  
Frogs and blood  
Surround me.  
It's getting cold now.  
I have a tattoo, now and forever:  
A lion, roaring: 'I am.'  
Squirrels, everywhere."

A THICK FOG ROLLED DOWN AND IN FROM HEAVEN and covered Von Spatzl and Tim the Tower and all of Flushtown. Von Spatzl could no longer see Tim.

"You there?"

"You there?"

"Here I am."

"I'm here, where are you?"

"Here I am!"

Von Spatzl found his way back into the house and pulled down his Day Journal Vol. XXX and quickly wrote the word "Plague" 1000 times for a total of 1000 words.

He was running out of pages and this frightened him.

A red cardinal bird, lost in the fog, flew into Von Spatzl's kitchen window, smashing it. It scrambled about in his kitchen sink amidst shards of glass, its wings beating furiously to get some balance. Von Spatzl approached it.

The bird told Von Spatzl: "This is the end, isn't it?"

Von Spatzl wondered if God was manifest in birds. Or if God were present in the rusted chain link fence around his little yard. Von Spatzl felt a tightness in his chest and believed (not for the first time) that he was having a heart attack.

"Take me," he calmly dared the world.

He slowly ambled back to his Old Brown Chair in the fog. He located it with help from his Bruno Unit. He wrote in his Day Journal Vol. XXX: "I'm sorry, Stockholm, I can't make it today" five times for a total of 35 words. Then he drew a map of Scandinavia from memory in white pencil and scribbled a haiku below it, crossing out all the words. It looked like this:

The fog had burned off a bit, and Von Spatzl went to the front of the house he found Tim the Tower sitting on his stoop, holding his head in his hands, crying softly, like a five-year old lost at the zoo. Von Spatzl left him there to whimper. The phone rang. It was Von Spatzl's mother. She complained of ocular migraines.

"I have rats in my house," he told her. "So I might be going to Scandinavia anyway."

No, she was not dead after all.

When he hung up the phone, he put \$100,000 in cash – hundreds, all sparkling new – in a box and addressed it to his mother. Von Spatzl then called FEDEX for a pick up. When the man came 20 minutes later, he said brightly to Von Spatzl:

"Pick up!"

Von Spatzl got the package.

"Say there's a man on your stoop softly crying like a five-year old lost at the zoo."

"Yes, I know. His wife Martha left him. He has no place to go. He's here trying to feel his feelings."

"Ah, that. Right. Well, what do you have for me today?"

"Just a pair of shoes to send to my mother."

"No cash or firearms? No explosives?"

"Never."

"Sign here, please."

Von Spatzl signed *Pat Sajack*.

When the FEDEX man left, Von Spatzl scanned his dust-laden rooms, and nodded his head knowingly at his sanctuary here in Flushtown. "Yes, I know," he said to his dust laden sancutary. He saw his journals, the 30 Day Journals and the 30 Night Journals, his Old Brown Chair and his darkened computer monitors. He saw piles of cigarette butts in ashtrays, the giant clear plastic bags of ash, and more than 100 empty bottles of Jack lined up like the expired soldiers they were on the floor. His house was pretty neat, actually, considering his life was a complete mess.

"I am addicted to my addictions, this is my great work," he scribbled quickly once on the final page of his Night Journal Vol. XXX, and signed the entry with a flourish: "Pat Sajack."

Von Spatzl retreated into his kitchen and spied the red Cardinal in the sink. The B-I-R-D was now quite dead. Von Spatzl placed it into a Ziploc bag, sealed it with a snap-a-roo, and then gathered all his journals – the 30 Day Journals and the 30 Night Journals as well as Zara's books and several hundred sent and unsent letters – and tucked them all in a pair of cartons. In the hall closet, amongst a large pile of books, many by Nietzsche and several by Jeremy Bentham, Von Spatzl found his trusty rusty spade.

"You have to call a spade a spade," he said to his spade and a pang of worry flared through him. No, he wouldn't be able to write that sentence in his Day Journals now. He wouldn't be able to reflect upon not writing it in his Night Journals either. He couldn't draw a picture of his spade, or the fog or even Jeremy Bentham. It was the end of all that.

With the spade in his hand, Von Spatzl stepped to the screen door, pushed through it, scattering the insects into the cloak of a thick white fog that has settled again on Flushtown.

He called to Tim the Tower.

"Come on, Tim," Von Spatzl said wearily, searching for and then nudging the wasted man with the tip of his spade. And just as he did, the fog, pure and white and thick and real came down down down on them just as Von Spatzl announced to Tim, "Come now, Tim the Tower, we have to bury some old friends...And... It might do you some good to say goodbye."

Von Spatzl poked his spade into the dense white cloud, searching for a warm body.

"Tim?"

§§§§

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