

Free the Prisoners

**100 Poems by
Andrew Sweeny**

Paintings by Daniel Mirante

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Dedication to The Liberators

Your Luminous Nature Loves the Elaborations of Beauty
—TK

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I- ANGEL

II- DREAM

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Angel 1

You who behold the angel
 you must remember
 to hold fast to the earth

You who behold the angel
 you must remember
 else she destroy you

For the angel is not a mere peace
 for the angel is of a fullness
 to which you cannot conceive
 to which you cannot imitate
 to which you cannot humanise
 to which you cannot represent
 to which you cannot become

But what you can do is stand before her
 wholly human, wholly vulnerable
 silent and awed

But what you can do is be bold
 in heat of rapture
 in the coolness of space
 and behold her
 For we might see her only once
 or get a glimpse of that fullness briefly

For if you glimpse that angel you might lose everything
 be vaporised in a burning green sea
 go mad in some humid tropic or blue arctic

For she is the mark, the blazing sign, the way
 your gift to her
 (though she needs nothing)
 is everything...

Angel 2

The angel does not respond
to the abstract prayer
she does not come
when you grovel to divinity

The angel is already present
it's just that we don't see her
She is the very substance
it's just that we don't know her

In rock and space
memory and brow
psyche and sea
she joins all contrary things

In the space between two isolates
at the end of mind babble and opinionating
she appears

Not as some wispy abstraction
not as some sexual persona
not as some kind of radio dial
or as those things which we capture
and put in our various cages
no, she is not your woman on a leash
In truth we should never say the word 'angel'
so baroque and timid is our image of her

We should rather listen
with pure longing
"soon, soon" she will say

but not yet

First turn away
from your machine
toward elemental being

Let the sun be again your mark of time
the wind be your breath
let water and fire
not memory or mechanism
be your measure

For she is all light and all iron
All gravity and weightlessness

She is the way you shall tell the time
And she will say:
"In me, time shall be a kiss
and that kiss shall be a rainbow"

"How can it be so?" you will reply
stranded there in all the fires
with her name on your lips

Angel 3

What world is this?

a world without vertigo or abyss
with 'nothing above and below'

A world of technocrats and mad men
running fictions called countries
without even the sun and the moon as their guide

A world that is flat and barren and without fruit
that blindly tears up its own soil with machines?

Is a world without angels (and devils) a world at all?
or simulacrum, an absence, a scream

And those who drive their deafening machines
through the still waters
who live sealed in palisades
entombed in kitsch and replica

They think themselves very powerful
they think themselves divinely elected
in truth, they are the assassins of angels

Still, she knocks at their door
still, she beckons them with another rain-shower
another dawn...

Still, she fills the mornings with dew
the evening star with tenderness
still, She never complains

How helpless is that angel in this world
how terribly beyond, how terribly sad
that we are so deaf to her music

And yet if only one human listens
if only one human will stand before her
fully embodied and adorned

then all the angels come rushing...

Angel 4

In country beyond despair,
without hungry ghosts
I saw you there

Where a symphony of birds
gathered on a tree of red and gold
your breath

No, I do not think
you are up there in some ether
but you are right here in bloodstream and bone
in the nerve constellation and brain
in the heart enigma

No, I do not think you are a ghost
but pure mercury
flowing through absence
filling the hollow spaces
populating the blue air
with bright flashes and syllables

Angel you are the sign of our longing
the door to our becoming
the wind which blows inside our cages
which dares us to liberty

Angel you are: dare
motioning us through flame and ice
tempting us toward abyss
Angel you are: intemperate,
chaste but only to elevate our desire

How deep and wide is that desire?
how uncompromising is that aim?
how hard can you be to meet her gentleness?
how gentle can you be to meet her flame?

The props of your culture
cannot endure that space
where the angel resides
you can throw them away now

For no clever irony, nor pretty picture
no niceties or pretence, no stiff garments, no solemn occasions
no consoling words, no puffed up speeches
no consensual laughter, no timid glances will do

And when she burns down the entire ghost town
what will remain?

Only that autumnal storm
summit and abyss
earth and crown
invisible monument
where all opposites meet

Angel 5

Perhaps the angel I call upon
 has little resemblance to the cherished image
 perhaps she is found in some charnel orchard
 and not on some astral plane

Perhaps we find her in mud and muscle and sinew
 in shovel and spike
 in deep terrestrial meaning

We the ones
 who have lost the wing
 and remain haunted by some remembrance of flying

Perhaps all our bomber planes are thwarted angels
 and all our machines are crude replicas
 and vague remembrances of flight and vision

But verily I say:
 bind yourself to that earth
 and not to machines
 for machines are not angels
 (or devils either, they are only dust)

Bind yourself to that
 ever-giving bounty, to leaf and stem
 to piston and root
 Bind yourself to your heart's becoming
 and not some poison factory of ideals

For it is in the binding
 that you find wings

It is in the binding
 that you find means

It is in the binding
 that you find verticality and flight

It is in the binding
 that the impossible task
 becomes possible

In the shadow of her wing
 spirit is nourished
 in the shadow of her wing
 wondrous visions
 in the shadow of her wing
 in blood and feathers
 in the binding
 we grow

Angel 6

I would not pretend to know her
 I would not divide or dissect her
 I would not put her on that cold grey operating table
 I would not design to make another cult
 to honour her - there are enough of those

Go call her name
 in empty spaces with no crowds or cameras
 in moments when your teeth chatter with terror
 and you are chalk white against the sun

For you cannot capture her in frozen camera lens
 you can only be subsumed
 when she floods the retina
 with vibrant red trees

No, I do not think she is up there singing
 but rather down here
 in the hot and cold hells

No, I do not think she will give you your wish
 or pander to your lesser desires

I rather think she will unstitch your heart slowly
 until your greatest desire
 is made plain

For she does not abide sentimental displays of wealth
 but she is always there among the poor
 who call out for her

For if the note is clear
 if it has the right pitch and intention
 it cannot fail to reach her

If the melody is fine and transparent
 and the words are plain
 and the key is longing
 She will come rushing....

No, I do not think that she will save you
 but she may show you a friend

No, I do not think she will liberate you
 but she may show you the labyrinth

Her gift to you will be a density
 for that is the paradox of the angel ...

For she is as heavy as she is weightless
 her singing fields are equal to her dark metal
 for she has two wings...

And if you balance on lightness
 you may fall into dark
 if you face squarely that darkness
 she will fall like rain petals
 into your arms

Angel 7

And yet she says:
celebrate this paradox
of mortality and flight

And yet she says:
go back to breathing forests
and moonlight
be forgetful of the monuments of man

You only have to look
not with inquisition or grasping
but with tender regard

You only have to look at the fat man
and his edifice of flesh
to see that the angel resides therein

You only have to look at the skinny man
who is always hungry
yet possessed by a blue flame

And all those fat skinny men and women
who are possessed by the angel
on the Tuesday morning commute

Yet paradoxically
though she is here
she is not heard

Paradoxically
though she is always near and never far

the task is monumental
the work is arduous
the way dark and slippery

For there are so many
layers of pretence
so much slime and afterbirth
so many insects on the window

The angel is Joy
though she is weeping
the angel is sublime
though she is seen through a dirty window pane

You, wind that sparkles
river that cools, sky that is undivided

You who is ever-present
in famine and feast

Though I hardly dare to call you by the name
Gabriel or sky
please hear these words

Dear angel: I call upon you
not from wishes
but from the convulsions of a violent dawn

Dear angel of fire and flower
wing and talon
dear angel of rain-shower birdsong
moonset and eclipse
dear angel of avalanche and evening star

Do you hear me?
do you hear this prayer that is also a command?

Angel 8

Each false thing returned
each unblemished desire
must be angel

Each lapse of control
every blackout
has to be angel
for the sundry concept
the petty conceptual thieves
the truism and cliché
these strategies will fail to move her

That is why we are thrown here
to unburden ourselves of those
mechanical things

That is why she gives you
crisis and conundrum
groundlessness terror

For only by losing the lesser concerns
can you earn her trust
only by triumphantly failing to adhere
can you become faithful
For each angel is the fullness
that you have lost
the paradox of embodiment
the inseparability
of flame and space

And while you know about her from rumour

you have been sold the similitude
 bought the reproduction
 been fooled by those bright things
 that are dark at their core

Each angel is
 the curve on the horizon
 the infinite expansion
 the total intimacy

Each angel is
 a drop of rainwater on a leaf
 the fine ink drawing
 the outline of things

Each angel is
 the location of a shiver
 and depth of a sign
 the endpoint of skin
 the door to a waterfall

Each angel is
 the unwritten masterpiece
 the raw matter and bone
 the summation of everything

Each angel is
 your ardent longing
 the swan's curve of neck
 the spiral conch
 the grappling love embrace
 the forgetfulness and unmaking
 The unburdening

of all that false clothing
 the lingams trust
 the doves sign
 dawns obscenity
 tooth and wing

Angel 9

Between the clashing
of air and wing
of light and blood
of sea and star
is her abode

Where all contrary things are enjoined
in the hollowness of space
and fullness of flower
the metal and melting
the wretchedness and sublimity
is her mark

Before her
you are paralysed with fear
before her
your mission is surely jeopardised

For you will find no comfort
in that place where the angel comes

and yet something else will be revealed -
the very source and reason
for a bird's migratory path
that upward spiral of leaf and vine

No, she gives no comfort or utility
logic or deliverables
but a secret too deep to speak of

The more poison you extract from the root

the higher that sunflower bridge grows
that mediator of earth and sky

Yet even that sunflower
bust its seed and was torn down by that winter angel
for not even the king sunflower survives her

Because she comes in unbecoming
in the shedding of husk
in the natural dying

But some, the brave and magnanimous ones
will meet her in life
in that overgrown garden
with its grinning skulls
and laughing children

Angel 10

Why then, do you write of the angel?
 why do you draw her back into the world?
 surely She has left this place
 surely we have abandoned her for good?

Is man the assassin of angels?
 did we sell her for black gold
 strip-mine her, empty her oceans?

Haven't we gutted her precious substance
 and built terrifying monuments of power and subtraction
 in her place?

Why then do you want to draw her back here
 into a world that is plummeting toward void?
 where machines replace honeybees
 where human ciphers shuffle blueprints of doom?

Why would you want to language her?
 hasn't she been enslaved enough by words?

Do not think you would spirit her away
 do not think she will save you
 for you have made a pact with her
 and now you must fulfil your end of the bargain

This is not an angel of sentiment
 not that kind of dollar store angel
 that can be easily found and cheaply bought

This kind of angel is the very quintessence

of your deepest song

No, she cannot be managed as resource or weapon
 no, she cannot be subdued, made a personal plaything
 for she has none of those boundaries

Don't you see?
 that is why she is so terribly feared
 because you cannot circumscribe her

The angel principal is the high principal
 yet she depends on earthiness

The angel principal is the vast sky principal
 yet she depends on your depth and gravity

She is the way of your footsteps
 on the curve of the earth
 the intersection of horizon and star
 so why invoke the angel?
 why supplicate her?

Because all other strategies have been exhausted
 and I know in my heart that no one else will come