



On Earth As It Is

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2010

## "I Never Ask"

Matthew Specktor

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### Recommended Citation

Specktor, Matthew, "I Never Ask" (2010). *On Earth As It Is*. 35.  
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# on earth as it is

*prayer as story, story as prayer*

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AUTHORS

CONTACT



*photo by sean carman*

## *"I Never Ask"*

*Matthew Specktor*

What do you want from me? Where should I go? What am I waiting for? What's your name? What about the other guy? How 'bout those people I don't know? Help that ugly girl, the guy who cut me off in traffic, the woman with the bad breath, those Craigslisters, the people who can't spell. Help the Un-readers, O Lord, the people with Kindles, the Amazon shoppers, those folks who send too many Tweets. Bless the Status Updaters, who bore me, the breakfast-detailers and candid photographers, the ones with the burpy babies, the dying fish, the new puppies, the Ecstasies. Tell me what it's like to be in love again, Lord, by making it happen to other people. Make me wealthy in spirit, by punishing me more. What about that traffic ticket? Can I have another? It's not like I only broke that law once.

Give me a venereal disease, then give me penicillin. Give me hope for the future, then take it away. Give me happiness and grief. Do I even have to ask for these things? Give me sickness, just...not yet. Give me an ex-wife, and then an ex-ex-wife, a future ex-wife and some girl I'll never marry. Give me misery and then make me happy for no reason, so that driving along 26th Street, I'll pull over and remember how this happened once before. The Country Mart on my right, the red barn with the fire pit and the pushy pigeons and the squalling kids. Bless the people I cheated, the unknown parents whose names I signed with greasy teenaged fingers, the rotisserie chickens, the french fries, the sauce. Bless the urologists, and the punks who sold me bad dope, Lonnie who died of an overdose while I was in college; his bad skin, which looked like an affliction, cratered and purple. Bless the next door neighbors, the ones who chased me, bless the people with the trampoline, the jungle gym and the shed. Bless everyone except Matt Baxter, who once called me an imbecile, but if he ever apologizes, you can go ahead and count him too. Bless my sister and her lymphoma, my mother in her big pine box, and yes, my dad. Make him wait a

while, though. It won't hurt him to wonder. And when you're done—

Don't finish. Bless everyone except me, so when I count my own blessings, I have to hunt for them a little. Or a lot. No wonder every room I've ever lived in looks like a bomb hit it, like Led Zeppelin's hotel. Toss the mattress; smash the TV. By the time I'm finished, not there either, I'm beating at the glass with both fists. Help me, God, help me! Only I don't mean it, I never have. Help me, by torturing me a little further. Help me learn to laugh again at myself.

If there were a sincere bone in my body. If there were anything for me to believe. You think I'm serious, here? Or do you think I'm kidding. If A, then B. Or else D, None of The Above. None of the above. What was my father's nickname, 'Nun,' because he didn't have any. See how deep is my sense of tradition? Allow me this, my error, my own evaporation. I'd like to embarrass my very name.

Talk to me, fucker. For I have begun to bore myself. In fact I sound suspiciously like me, which is a sure sign You are here, even though I seem to be alone in some bar, perhaps the Hotel Figueroa's, some dowdy room with brick red tiles and hideous chandeliers, some barkeep who's ignoring me and a tarnished mirror showing the faces of John Fante, Denis Johnson, people I've never met yet would like to, if only so we could ignore one another, also. I'm tired of going places like this and waiting, waiting, waiting for an angel to appear. For then one does, and nothing happens. It's not as if you've never given me proof.

So then, you do. Don't blame me if I'm too stupid to know what to do with it. I am exactly as God made me, sir, goes that mincing fop in Spinal Tap, or somewhere else; Now that you've answered my prayers, answer them again. Or unanswer them. Turns out I liked it better when my hope was a question. Turns out I just can't stand it, all this...responsibility.

Give it to me, and then take it away. Please. Do I even have to ask for that? Because I know, you'll do it anyway. And then you'll do it again.

See? I'm not that stupid. I've figured it out so far. You dash my hope and that is the answered prayer. OK, then. Alright. Thank You, for your ingenuity. Thank you for making it hurt almost too much. Thank you for making me thank you, and thank you for all these perverse and scarifying thoughts. Thank you for making it happen, just once. And then thank you, Lord, for making it stop.

Matthew Specktor is (still) the author of *That Summertime Sound*. He has recently completed his second novel, and is at work on a short nonfiction book about film. He holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College, and his fiction and essays have appeared in *Open City*, *Salon*, and in various anthologies.

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