Part I: The Body Breaks Open

Snake
July 2025

I was walking through a forest unlike any I had ever seen before. It was a strange place.
I could hear birds calling and insects buzzing, but I had no time to have a look around, because I felt something in my left side. It hurt. Something was there. Or rather, something was coming out of me. A thread. A thin white thread. As thin as a spider's web, coming out of my body.
I pulled at it, wanting to get it out of me. Gently at first, then harder. But the only thing that happened was that more thread came out of my pelvis. I felt tension, fear, revulsion. At the same time, I knew that something wanted to come out of me, no, had to come out of me, and that I could not stop it. Or was not allowed to stop it.
Suddenly, a man emerged from the bushes. He looked like a doctor. Somehow, I knew he was a doctor. He wanted to help me, though his face showed no emotion, no concern. He was cool, almost distant. Perhaps doctors are trained to look that way: calm, neutral, as if distance were a form of authority. Still, he had to see the terror in my eyes. My fear. My helplessness in the face of that thread. He took the thread from my hands and began to pull.
At that moment, the spider's thread became a snake.

A white-green living snake, with red spots on its damp, writhing body. The doctor pulled harder and harder, and more and more of the snake emerged from me, wriggling out of my left side. It kept getting thicker, and the doctor had to step back and pull harder still. He planted his feet and pulled with all the strength in his body. But more snake kept coming. Meters of it came out. It was as if the snake had been coiled up in my pelvis for centuries, waiting for this one moment to reveal itself.
Then suddenly, the doctor was holding a machete. He was about to chop off the snake's head.
I jolted. And at that very moment, the snake shot back into my body.
Then I woke up.

Fingers

September 2022

His world had grown smaller, Dromer thought. Almost invisible. He felt as small as a mouse, hiding in the cracks of life. Every now and then he'd cross a room, but most of the time he sat writing under a blanket at the back of the garden. Things used to happen all the time. Almost automatically. As if life were living him. The phone rang. Messages, commissions, and gigs came in. He was free to write, play, create, and travel. He traveled with other musicians, but just as often on his own, and he liked that just as much. He took a deep breath and let the air out slowly. He missed the conversations and the silliness. The excitement of that one evening, that one hour. Creating art while people watched. Putting something out there that could never be taken back. And then the applause. The visibility. Getting proof that he existed.

His guitar had given him almost everything. Yet somewhere along the way, something had broken. Or perhaps this was exactly how it had to happen. Did he have to fall, before he could move on?

The first time, he fell, literally. In front of the V&D, on Tilburg's shopping street. That palace of consumerism is long gone now. A nice place to fall, Dromer thought. On his knees in front of the store window. Lin was walking beside him. His right forearm was blue, and his fingernails were purple. He was so startled that his legs gave out. He sank to his knees and couldn't get back up. Was it the shock of those blue fingernails that made him fall? Or was it some other force that pushed him down? You're on the ground. Falling. Failing. Start over. Now.

Dromer lay there amid the hustle and bustle of late-night shopping. The flowing crowd stepped over him, walking around him in a wide arc. As if they didn't see him, or didn't want to see him. He was ashamed. No one stopped. No one asked if he needed help. Lin remained calm. She looked at him and helped him up. As he leaned against the glass wall of shoeshop, he asked, "How do I look?"

"Fine," his wife lied. "Are you staying here?" she said. "Then I'll get the car. Let's go to the hospital for a bit. Just to be on the safe side."

He knew she was lying. He could see that she was hiding her fear behind her bright, light-blue eyes. Beautiful eyes, everyone said. Eyes that sometimes seemed to glow. Lin was the strongest woman he'd ever met. She was wise, had been through a lot in her life, and she knew right away that she couldn't give in to his panic. He didn't remember much about the hours that followed. But after two days in the hospital and many tests, the results came back: there was nothing wrong with him. He was healthy. He exercised a lot, and that helped, the doctor had said. Everything was fine.

But still he lay there, and still his fingers were blue. The doctor gently suggested that perhaps he should start thinking about something else. He mentioned the word “hyperventilation” and sent him home.

“We’ll be right with you.” The flight attendant’s voice abruptly snapped him out of his thoughts. “Please check the booklet in the seat in front of you for our special offers on perfumes and other luxury items.” Reality pulled him back from his daydream with the shrill sound blaring through the speakers. It’s always such a harsh sound on airplanes. A lot had happened in recent years. He barely recognized himself anymore. He was on his way to Ibiza, of all places, where he’d be reciting his poems on the beach. How is that even possible? he thought. How is that possible?

He looked at his hands. He stared briefly at his right hand, moved his fingers lightly over the keys of his laptop, and began to type. The following appeared on the screen:

Fingers

My fingers can do whatever they want.
They act as if they are immortal
when they pleasure, write, and feel.

My fingers can touch and give you warmth,
offer comfort when you're alone,
sleep peacefully,
or fight
when they close into a fist.

They can break
heart and bone.

These fingers sound like music
and give life when they play.
They can make you laugh,
make you shine
on an ordinary day.

They hold on when they do not want you to leave.
Fingers can fold themselves
lovingly around yours.

Fingers build.
Fingers marry with rings.
They form signs
of invisible things
without a sound,
as if there were no ending.

Truly, my fingers can do anything they want.

If only they would stop trembling.
If only they would stop trembling.

Spider

August 2025

I was lying on a bed in a large room. I had no skin. You could see my skeleton, and white fluid was oozing from the bones of my pelvis. It was a kind of juice, a whitish, greasy fluid, that leaked out and pooled to my right. There were other people nearby, but I didn't know them. A woman was standing behind me, looking at me disapprovingly. I know her because she was very negative toward me. That hurt me and also made me angry. There was also a spider, and it was looking at me, intently and with great interest. That gaze gave me chills.

Later, I was fully dressed again, and that black spider climbed over me. It wanted to crawl into my body near my neck. I felt its legs digging in. I was scared. I was terrified.

Then I woke up.

Mirror

September 2025

Dromer stood in the bathroom with his upper body bare. He couldn't remember whether he wanted to get dressed or undressed. He'd momentarily lost track. Take a shower? Just wash his face? He was still groggy from sleep as he looked at himself in the mirror. He stared long and deeply into his eyes. As if he were trying to see something that had hidden itself behind the gaze, behind the green. Then he thought of the spider dream, and instantly he was back in that place. Lying there, without skin. The white fluid oozing from his groin. The woman behind him. The spider staring at him with a gaze no human could ever have. He relived the dream and immediately felt the same anxious tension rising within him. At that moment, a real spider appeared behind him.

It was hanging from the bathroom ceiling and slowly descending. Right in his shadow, above his head. He saw it in the mirror, descending along its thread. Dromer wasn't startled, but rather bewildered, for the dream was coming to life.

A real spider took over the image in his mind and slowly crept toward his neck. A shiver ran up from his stomach, but at the same time, something strange happened. The fear receded and something else took its place.

Beauty.

Dromer could find no better word than beauty. It was as if the world had looked back at him for a moment. It showed him that thoughts can also live in the real world. An image took on a physical form because he gave it his attention. "Of course," he whispered. "Of course."

He turned around, gently picked up the spider by its thread, and carried her to the bathroom window. In the night, the spider had wanted to live inside him. Today, in the light, he set her free. He let her go, out into the world to spin a web there. A sense of peace came over him that he hadn't felt in a long time. Dromer felt tears in his eyes but let them fall. Only then did he wipe his face with a towel and looked at himself in the mirror again. There he stood.

For a moment, his mind couldn't grasp whether what had just happened was real. But it was real. A smile snapped him out of his astonishment. Excited, he put on a shirt and walked downstairs.

"Lin?" he called. "Lin!"