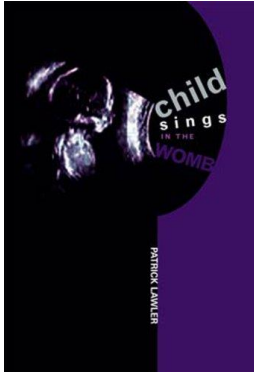


CHILD SINGS IN THE WOMB
(The Bitter Oleander Press, 2014)



SAMPLE FROM *CHILD SINGS IN THE WOMB*

Dearest Akeem Benedicta

DEAREST AKEEM,

Thank you for your email explaining your dire situation:
The death of your father. The 9.5 million dollars.
Your request for my private bank account information
In order to transfer the funds to my account.
And your generous offer of 5% for being the guardian
Of the bank account. Thank you for trusting me.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Today I received a letter from the president of the college where I work.
It says: "I was saddened to learn about the death of your father."
I am shocked to learn my father has died again.
"I write to express my sincere condolences on this occasion to you and your family."
I check the internet and see that an Edward Lawler has died.
Surviving is a son Patrick. I see that Edward has died
At exactly the same age as my father—and in exactly the same VA hospital—
Except twenty years later.
I am assured that I am in the college president's prayers.
I don't believe I have ever been in his prayers before,
And quite frankly it makes me feel uncomfortable.

DEAREST AKEEM,

These are catastrophic times.
Craziness all over the place.
Many unexpected deaths.
Some double deaths.
Oh, it is good to know that someone
Like you lives in this world.

DEAREST AKEEM,

I once had a psychotic student in a summer class.
I'm not using the word in a pejorative way.

More like a term of honor. (See Szasz.)

In my first class he stood up and started reading
A story about his father.
How his father picked him up from school,
And although his father was speaking
In a foreign language, he knew he
Meant to do him harm.

My student said he grabbed the steering wheel
and tried to kick his father out the door.

Because it was a creative writing class,
It took me several weeks before I realized he was psychotic.

I think if he were taking a class in theoretical physics
or in philosophy, no one would ever have suspected.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Exactly what is 5% of 9.5 million dollars?
I am thinking of my future purchases.

DEEREST AKEEM,

Today I receive a mass card from the chaplain at the college.
I decide this has gone too far.

But why should I apologize for only having one dead father?

DEAREST AKEEM,

I read your email over and over.
Sometimes I feel like I am living inside your head.

I feel my brain turning into a radio
And all these thoughts wind up
on the shores of the Ivory Coast.

My tonsils like broken wind chimes
With your words flowing over them.

Sometimes I feel like I am gnawing on a piece of electricity.

DEAREST AKEEM,

I just figured out what 5% of 9.5 million dollars is.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you 475,000 times.

DEAREST AKEEM,

I sought the psychotic student out for conversations
After class. "So what did you do this weekend?"
"You know," he said. "I was listening to the Professor
of Musicology on the radio. You were interviewing him."
That was when I decided to follow the psychotic student home.
I wanted to see how he lived.

He once asked me, "Do you ever feel you are turning into a bee?"

Afterwards, a person from Continuing Ed at the college asked me,
"Do you think he is paranoid schizophrenic?" I said, "Well, he didn't used to be."

DEAREST AKEEM,

I want to say to the officials at the college,
"Where were you when my real father died?"
But that seems petulant and a bit absurd
Since I wasn't even working at the college twenty years ago.

We all can use as many condolences as possible
Even if these aren't our times of need.

I don't know how to tell them the truth
About how their kindnesses, even though not entirely deserved,
are not going unnoticed.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Dearest one, I know this will come as a surprise,
But the more I read your email the more I display
A deep affection toward you and your generosity.

Now I must solicit your deepest confidence.
This is by virtue of its nature as being utterly confidential.

When I was following the psychotic student home,
I wasn't sure it was still him.
For all I knew he could have been my father—

And now even yours.

Thomas Szasz says, "If you talk to God,
You are praying. If God talks to you,
You have schizophrenia."
I wonder what it would be like to follow God—
Just to see to whom he was really talking.

DEAREST AKEEM,

On my way to an appointment with my psychologist,
I once thought of suicide. Then I thought
About how if you cancel your appointment
You have to let him know 24 hours in advance
Or you get charged. That made me mad.
And then I realized that anger can provide
A very powerful motivation to live.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Please be patient to peruse my proposal, soliciting
Your noble assistance. It gives me great trust, confidentiality,
And enthusiasm. You ask me to provide my bank account
Information, but at this time presently I will need to open one.

I believe there will be no suspicion if I open it
For \$475,000. If you could be of my service, I would appreciate it.
Could you provide your credit card identifiable information
so I can open the bank account for which you can benefit?

DEAREST AKEEM,

A woman I know was preparing for a bachelorette party.
She asked for a male stripper. The agency thought
she asked for a man with a big clock.
Time is the ultimate subject. Time and sex.

I am very sorry. I should have had two fathers.
One dead and the other alive.
Maybe everyone should have two fathers:
The one they love and the one they hate.

I will have to follow this Edward Lawler home—
Find out how he lived. Discover my lost sister.

DEAREST AKEEM,

The problem with my second dead father
Was that he was kind of distant. Remote if you will.

It is a terrible grief to have two dead fathers.

I think I may have crossed a line when I looked into
The window of the psychotic student.

The house was a fairly normal suburban house--
With a neat lawn. But I had to see how he lived.

I walked up to a window that appeared to look
Into the kitchen. When I peered in, I saw something terrible.

DEAREST AKEEM,

I hope my emails are following you to the Ivory Coast.
To your village, to the sad part of your heart
Where your father is still dying.

That old urge to follow a stranger has returned.
Tonight, for example, I followed a stranger to a room
Where people are reading poetry.
I will follow him home when the reading is finished.
There is this feeling of exhilaration.
I don't know where his life will lead me.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Do not let my new love for you influence this transaction.
I cannot forgive myself that I was not there for you
When your father died. I would have called him my third father,
And I would have had emotions toward his bank officials.

I will refrain from giving out more operational details
Until I receive your response. I am still a virgin. I hope
This will not make you feel uncomfortable with my love.
Of course, I have included some exaggerations.

Kindly accept my undying interest in what you can offer me,

DEAREST AKEEM,

Suppose the person you are following
Commits suicide. What are your responsibilities?
Suppose it is too late to cancel any appointments.

DEAREST AKEEM,

At the end of the semester, the psychotic student
Stood up at his desk and thanked the class.
He gave me a book on bees. The card that accompanied it said,

“Thank you for listening to me.”

DEAREST AKEEM,

Am I following you now?
Will we lie in each other's electrical entanglement?
Will our heartbeats be synchronized?

DEAREST AKEEM,

Time follows us.
What is a man to do who has two dead fathers?

I want to say: When I grow up, I will be a bird.

When my father died the second time
I was doubly sad.

At the funeral there was a naked man with a big clock.
And he was not crying.

DEAREST AKEEM,

There are many truths and some of them are false.
I followed the coffin of my first dead father,
And wound up staring into the grave of my second dead father.

DEAREST AKEEM,

Right now I am in a room full of about 30 people.
I am going to pass around a sheet of paper
And I will ask them for their names and private bank accounts.

I did not attend the funeral of my second dead father.
It seemed somewhat redundant.

I am thinking of sending you a book about bees.
Thank you for listening to me.
How hard it is to find the right person to follow,
And how easy it is to step out of this world and into a new one.