

# The Cenacle



Number 101 ◊ October 2017



Most things I worry about never happen anyway . . .

-- Tom Petty, 1994.

October 23, 2017  
6:55 p.m.  
Zaskin Donut shop  
<sup>my corner table</sup>  
Zombie Town, Mass.

One arrives at a moment, passes through it, then the next, then, then. Some moments return in memory, or otherwise. Some do not seem to.

I've used this space in October issues of The Cenacle, going back to 2003, for letters to President Obama. Now he's left office, those letters seem a complete set. The new man in the White House is an ancient, deeply troubled (troubled), furious monster of a man. My thoughts toward him a twist of fury & helplessness.

What then? Come here on a cool Monday evening, found my corner table; Polixipod now playing Felice Brothers; less than a dozen people at lounge at its shiny orange tables.

A moment in passing.



-5-

I lived in this town north of Boston for some years, years ago. I used to come here well past midnights, with my notebooks with my Stephen King novels, with my Walkmans & rock cassettes. Laid off, few nearby friends, poor.

Novels from the library. Few clothes, wearing out. Maybe some home-made CDs too, or Diskmans. Listening to the all-night UFOs show on the radio. Chasing tail through cyberspace when the flesh space kind showed no interest.

Came here tripping high on exotic & obscure psychedelic chemicals. Writing dialogues to faraway faces, a soft hands. Believing it could save me, could give enough comfort & meaning to my trot through the explain-less world.

Across the street a Korean church & its back alley for the occasional 2 a.m. piss. The walk through dark streets here, & the walk home near dawn.

Those moments again. And this one,



—6—

So what isn't then-here & now-here? What else is welcomed? What of future-here? Throw a book up, out, here, higher, higher, higher now,  
then lower, lower, than to land, I catch look around

It's a little different here. Coffee & donuts still? Yes, I suppose Still cars passing by on the street, getting their drinks at the drive-thru here?

Yes, till it's long past too late.

Do they still nap on the Red Sox, Bruins, Patriots, Celtics?

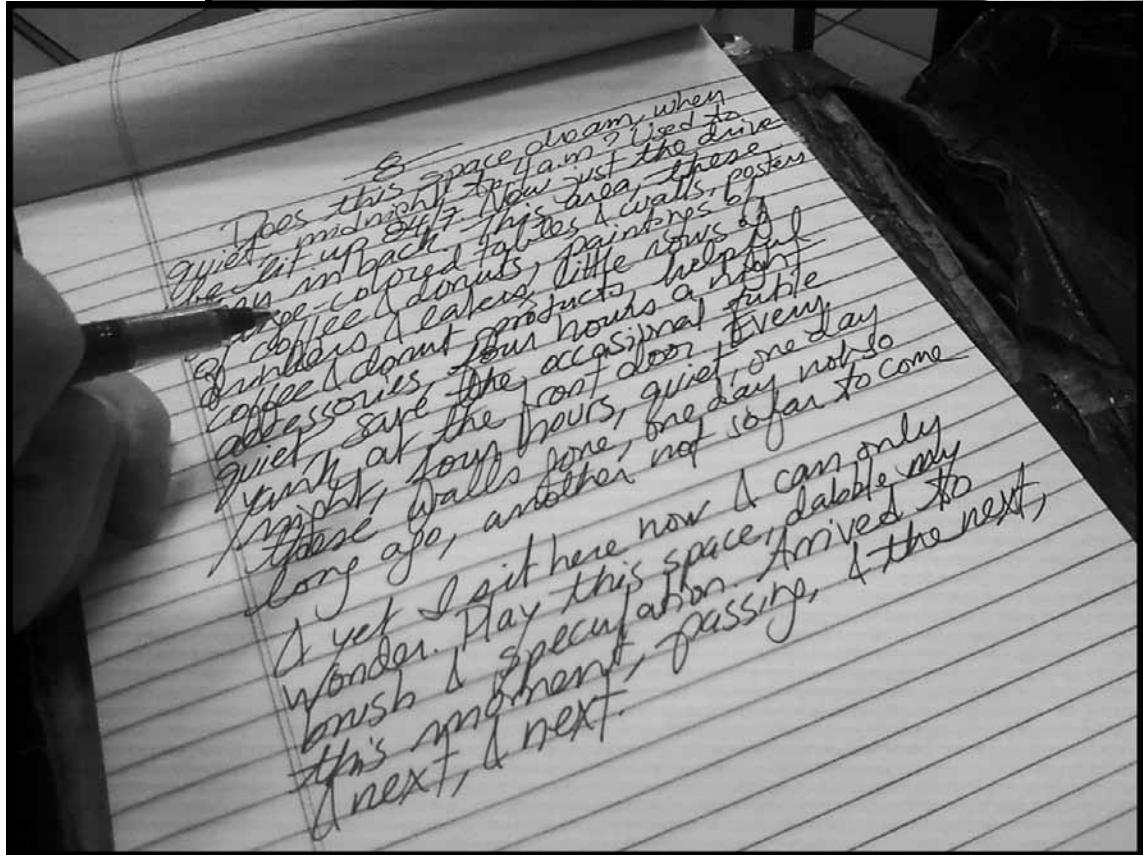
Tell jokes about women, blacks, immigrants, cripples, anyone who can be pushed around, at least in words & thoughts?

Is this all gone one day, one year, one century, many Centuries hence?

Is it become dead earth I ask?

Does it begin with the monster in the White House tonight, or is he long forgotten?

Do I know then what I do not know now, among the Stars, or nothing again like I was before I came, all those eons? Rio of times now.



-7-

Getting crowded in here. Lots of donuts, lots of coffee, how did ancient beings ~~wander~~ this patch of earth wake up to work, keep on when long nights demanded it?

The crashed spaceship below this donut & coffee stand, what kept in its pantry? Sandwiches, candies, frozen seafood from a thousand light years away, food made of light & music?

Has food always been shared amongst us, like human families, at the holiday table, wild animals at their captured meat? Always been ritual, always been survival?

Is that spaceship still humanity deep in the earth, alive, at ease? Waiting, one day again to rise (open) this place so alive & well-lit tonight, is low gone, dead earth laid loose, nothing to keep it from rising up again, now ready (now repaired), here it comes, music thrumming from it in a wild variety of sparkly colors! Is that you or me now?

8

Does this space dream when  
quiet, midnight, to 4 a.m? Used to  
be lit up 24/7. Now just the drive  
thru in back. This area, these  
orange-colored tables & walls, posters  
of coffee/donuts, paintings by  
drinkers & eaters, little rows of  
coffee/donut products, helpful  
accessories four hours a night  
quiet, save the occasional table  
yank at the front door, every  
night, four hours, quiet, one day  
these walls gone, one day not so  
long ago, another not so far to come

I yet I sit here now & can only  
wonder. Play this space, take my  
brush & speculation. Arrived to  
this moment, passing, & the next,  
next, & next.

All we have is moment, is place.  
All we have is imagination, dream.  
All we have is work, everything.  
All we have is everything.  
All we have is everything.  
All we have goes, but never gone.

1923/2017



*Edited by Raymond Soulard Jr. ☺*

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Tom Petty (October 20, 1950 - October 2, 2017). Great musician, good man. *Rock on in the stars now . . .*



## Feedback on Cenacle 100 | June 2017

### **From Ace Boggess:**

Tom Sheehan's "Photos at Low Tide" took me to a place in a way that I couldn't help but see. In just a handful of short lines, the narrator conjures up that shoreline and its birds, boats, waves. At the same time it conveys a strong sense of longing as though the narrator wants to be there, but can't for whatever reason. It brings the Wallace Stevens sense of the poet looking at the world through windows. I was mesmerized by the poem. I had to read it a few times to burn the images into my brain.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From Jimmy Heffernan:**

I was startled to find myself at the shore reading Tom Sheehan's "Photos at Low Tide," but somehow or other it transported me there as if by magic. What evocation of the sights and the feels, even the smell of the sea air, this lovely poem brought forth in me! I could just see the surf and the cumulus, the sails of the ships, and feel the moist, salty air move across my face as waves gently lapped up onto the beach. Mr. Sheehan has a gift for painting with his poetry, and I always look forward to another opportunity to gaze.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From Charlie Beyer:**

I agree with Tamara Miles in "Not the Pilot, but a Drone": The horror of a bad experience cannot be translated. We can sympathize, but not emphasize, until it happens to us. A broken heart seems common to us all, and we can emphasize, but to lose a hand, a leg, a brain . . . you are alone in your pain. By

analogy, the rich will never understand the poor, never understand the lack of possibilities that the poor face every day.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From Colin James:**

Tamara Miles' poetry punches you in the gut with its compact realism. I know these people, am reminded by these poems that we can never stop being of them.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From Judih Haggai:**

Very much enjoyed newcomer Patrick Gene Frank, who uses minimalism to express wonderfully haiku-ish thoughts, with a touch of graffiti and Kerouac.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **From Tamara Miles:**

Charlie Beyer's "Prostate Panic" is one of the most honest, vulnerable, brave pieces I've read. Anybody who loves a man needs to read it. Any man facing impotence needs to read it.

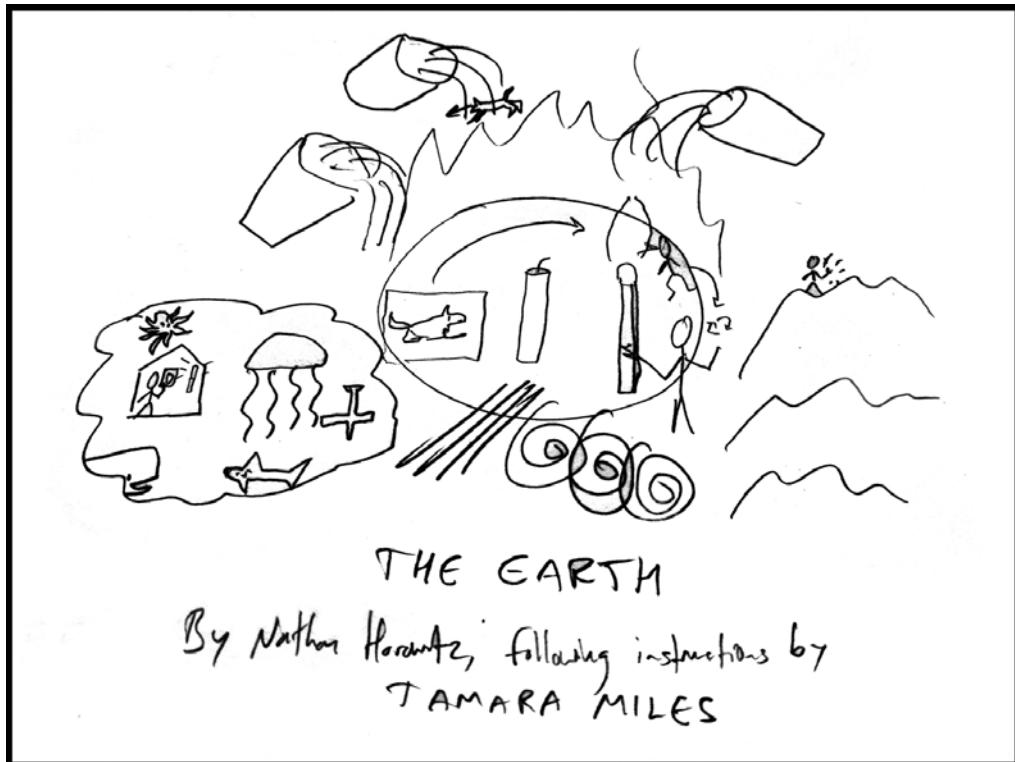
The many approaches to the narrator's impotence problem (Viagra and its Indian alternative, medical pump, porno pump, penile injections), and his descriptions of the ongoing problem ("the flopper stays flopping," for example, and my favorite, "like a dog with its head out the car window")—as well as his somewhat alarming episode of success.

\* \* \* \* \*

**From Nathan D. Horowitz:**

In “Prostate Panic,” Charlie Beyer tells a long and wonderful tale about a man’s attempts to find love and erection after prostate cancer. Though he is weirdly un-PC—I respect his right to yank my chain—this piece is well-written and entertaining.

Tamara Miles taught me how to draw the Earth. So here is my try at this:



\* \* \* \* \*

---

*Joe Ciccone*



### The Daffodils

Again the buds have opened  
along that patch

on Milestone Road and  
among the markers at the

Native American Burial Ground  
The flowers show yellow

among the grays  
Winter is rough

too easily numbed by toxins  
Some never make it to Spring

The buds are opening  
frail yellow against an endless gray

and frail yellow they die  
We close the tomb at Tom Nevers

for a war which has not yet  
reached our shores

\* \* \*



**Joe Ciccone**

**Portrait of the Whaler**

I can not tell if these dark figures  
are in the sky

or in the back of my own eyes  
In grey charcoal I'm

drawing his lines  
the simian skull

the bowed legs  
I'm drawing the many bumps of bone

old healing tumors  
drawing the water around his brain

drawing my first  
incorrect conclusions

\* \* \*

**Downwind Run**

With hands like anchors  
I pull wind into wind

create the absence  
of motion

I could sail for centuries like this  
collecting yarns

with not a breeze in my hair  
tho my rainbow spinnaker is full

\* \* \*

### Old North Cemetery

The ghosts of the sailors  
blow down these graveyard lanes

whistling rebel tunes  
in a lightless October fog

There's always a new beast to fight  
a new war to chase

Above a tide of moving tombs  
loose for centuries from their

moorings one learns to separate art  
from artifact

What's real has vanished  
the leaves of these skeleton trees

the bones of the whales  
and beyond the pasture

the tall masts fading

\* \* \*



**Joe Ciccone**

### This Way Lies the Abyss

At first the scattered fog is ominous  
like in the old poems

accumulating over the moonlit sea  
like vapors on a battlefield

but as it thickens around my  
keeling ship it starts to feel

more like a cloak of some kind  
and protective as a spell

I imagine it embracing the sandy soil  
on the edge of the moor

where my cottage lay softening  
its shingled edges at last growing

impenetrable as I sheet in the  
main diving even faster

into the blind as if what I know  
to be out there is really not

\* \* \* \* \*





*Tamara Miles*

---

## Same Moon Shining

[**Memoir Excerpts**]

### *Crossing the Street*

In the 1920s, a woman named Florence Mallory Shelton had a massive heart attack in the middle of the street where she lived in Oklahoma. She and her family were moving from a house on one side of the street to another one just across the way. She left behind several children including Edwin and William (twins), Lucile, Albert, Marie, and Clinton, who was the eldest, in the care of their alcoholic and regularly absent father, William, Sr.

When he was able, at about sixteen, Clinton started working at various jobs, including assisting a veterinarian, until he was able to provide secure housing for himself, and then he began bringing his brothers and sisters over one at a time to live with him. He sent them to school and cared for them. At 21, he married a young woman named Marie. At 22, he went to work for Sheffield Steel in Kansas City as a crane operator, and he remained in that position for the next thirty-three years until he retired, even though he lost his leg in a workplace accident.

On the side, he worked at fine leather craft, making beautifully carved purses, business cases, and gun scabbards, among other things. He and Marie were divorced within a few years, in 1930, and she at some point went with their son to live in New Jersey. In 1932, he married Alma Cox, and although they tried for ten years, they could not have a child together, and so in 1942 they adopted my father from a temporary home for babies called the Kansas City Cradle.

They named him Thomas Ashley Shelton, and the story of this boy became in time the beginnings of my own. It is a story of loving and leaving, of wondering where a loved one is and if he or she is happy or sad, or missing home, there in that mysterious other place so far away from knowing, where nevertheless, the same moon is shining.

\* \* \*

### *Traveler's Aid*

Before Dad ended up at the Kansas City Cradle, he lived for about three months with his birth mother, who at nineteen had found herself pregnant by a husband who had an itchy foot. When she went looking for him at his parents' house, she was advised to move on, and when she did catch up with him, he wasn't in the mood for decorating a nursery. She had him arrested for cruelty and desertion.

As the record shows, it was not his first encounter with the court, but he was released on parole, presumably to give him the opportunity to support his wife and child. He declined the offer, and since neither his family nor hers would help her, she relied on the kindness of social organizations until such time she brought my father into the world at a local hospital on

June 15, 1942.

Having no crib for his head and no infant clothing, neither did she offer him her breast, but did consent to take him home to a basement room she had lined up and try to be his mother. It seems the husband went along for the signing of the rental agreement but left the same day with no plans to return. The landlord agreed to let her earn her keep, but by early September, she had failed to do so and admitted to the Juvenile authorities that she would have to turn over the baby for adoption.

At this time, Kansas City was known as the hub for adoptions in the United States. Women came by train from all over to give themselves and their babies a new start. They came from a variety of backgrounds and, depending partly on that distinction, were welcomed at either The Willows, St. Anthony's, the Fairmount, Veil Maternity Hospital, or another such establishment, where they could stay until they had given birth and for a brief time after that.

The Cradle, however, was not a place for both mother and child. It was a temporary placement center for infants only. In 1941, the Eastside Hospital had sent directly sixty-five babies to the Cradle for adoption. From the year before, when the census was taken, we have a public record of its "inmates."

My father was taken there by a representative of the Juvenile Court. "You were left on the doorstep," was all that Clinton told him when he was older—he did not mention which doorstep, and at ten, my father did not ask. Clinton and Alma were his parents; he had no need for any other. For two or three more years, this would be enough.

\* \* \*

#### *Coming Home from School*

When my father first told me the following story, we were sitting in a Burger King in Atlanta, Georgia in about 1992. We were getting to know each other after twenty years apart. He was about fifty, and as he recalled what happened when he was a boy, I could see it was a struggle to talk about it. He refers to his adoptive mother here by her first name, Alma, which is his custom.

"I was about thirteen. It was 1955. I came home from school (Northeast High), and I immediately saw the note on the table along with Alma's wedding rings. The note was to my father, but I read it, and I don't remember exactly what it said, but it was not a long letter. She was just explaining to my dad why she was leaving."

Alma had left with Clinton's brother Albert, who had been living with them for a while, sleeping in the back bedroom. They were headed to California together.

"I waited around until my Dad got off work, and when he came in, I showed him the letter and the rings, and he read the letter, and didn't seem all that upset about it at first, but he was quiet for a while. That night or the next day, he told me that the people across the street, I can't think of their names, but Dad and the man were friends and he was a bus driver—would look after me.

"He said everything was going to be fine," his voice broke, and his eyes filled with tears, "but I knew it wasn't going to be fine. He said he was going away for a while, but he would be back. He didn't know how long.

"He said, 'I've just got something I've got to do,' which I believe was to go get drunk."

"The people across the street looked after me, helped me with food, etc., and anything else I needed. Dad may have paid them for things I needed. I didn't stay with them; I stayed at the house, but it was a lonely time. I think it was two weeks or more, and then he came back, and everything was fine.

"Soon after he came back, I was out of school for the summer, and he told me we were going to take a trip out West. He bought a brand new '55 Chevrolet, and that is what we went in. We went through Kansas, through Colorado. We didn't see much in Kansas but, in Colorado Springs, we went up Pike's Peak and saw some sights, including the Grand Canyon.

"Then we went on to Arizona and stopped in Flagstaff. Dad thought Alma was in Flagstaff at this point. He didn't leave me at any point that I can recall to go look for her, so I don't know.

"I don't remember staying long, maybe a couple of days, then we got on the road again, and went down to Texas and we went to Dallas. Texas is a big state. We were on the road a lot, trying to cross the state, and then we went on up into Oklahoma, to Tulsa and Oklahoma City, and we visited some of his kinfolks."

Recently, Dad told me the story again, and I asked for clarification. I suspected parts of the memory were all bound up in raw emotion, in the thirteen-year-old's stubborn repetition of his explanation to himself, as he lay alone at night at his house. He had told himself this version of events for many years until he firmly believed it was true.

"But, Dad, where did your father go for the two weeks? You said he went to get drunk, but where?"

"I don't know, somewhere downtown maybe. I think he got a hotel room and he stayed there, and he got drunk."

"Dad, that doesn't make sense to me. Why do you think that?"

"It just seemed that way to me."

I pressed. "Dad, I want you to think about something. The trip you and your father took out West. Why do you think you went there? How long did the trip take?"

"It was about two weeks."

"Did he talk about Alma?"

"No, and I didn't realize it at the time, but do I think he was looking for her."

"Yes," I said, "and I believe he had already made the trip once."

As I spoke, his eyes grew clear with understanding.

"Maybe so," he said. "Yeah, that does make sense. Yeah, maybe so."

Sometimes, you know, when a child is consumed with pain and uncertainty, memories can be confusing. Sometimes there is little to no memory at all—at other times, there are scattered fragments and a story we made up to try to piece it together somehow, and we cling to it, or we just don't think about it. I have found this to be true myself.

Sometimes there are gaps as big as canyons in what we know.

\* \* \*

*Babe, I'm Leaving*

Well I guess this is it, babe  
 reality has hit home hard  
 no need in puttin' it off anymore  
 just turn away and let me walk  
 out the door  
 —Shelby Lynne, "Leavin"

In an article called "Child Abandonment: Historical, Sociological, and Psychological Perspectives,"<sup>1</sup> Michael Burnstein, M.D. considers both the child who has been abandoned and the parent who made the decision to leave a child behind. He refers to one study's characterization of mothers who walk away as generally fitting into one or more of three categories: 1) women who have been abandoned by a male partner during pregnancy; 2) women who had a rough start in life themselves (which resulted in "poor social and moral adjustment" and "difficulty accepting responsibility"); and 3) women who had become unhappy in their marriages, who were emotionally unstable, and/or involved in extramarital affairs. Within these categories, and beyond them, however, there are the complexities of a woman's individual life.

As for the child who is abandoned, he or she too is a study in psychological complexities. He is likely to continue to think of his mother and attempt to relate to her in her absence through a variety of behaviors, including expressions of despair or hostility, withdrawal, regression, denial, and searching for substitutes. Often he engages in fantasies of the mother's return. He may also be troubled by the idea that he has done something wrong that caused her to leave, or that he is "no good." In fact, Burnstein's observations of abandoning mothers do reflect that sometimes a particularly disruptive, willful, rebellious, disobedient child may contribute to the mother's feeling of being overburdened and unhappy.

Now, consider the child who has been twice abandoned, by different mothers. This was my father's experience.

Here are some of his thoughts about Alma, his adoptive mother, reflected in conversations with me:

"From what little I remember about Alma, she was a good woman, a good mother. I believe she really loved me, and I'm sure that everything was going alright until Albert came into the picture. She had me, as a good mother, until I was thirteen. She took care of me. You can tell from the photos of me as a baby that she always dressed me well, made sure I was clean and fed.

"I was unruly. She tried, she really did try. I wouldn't study, wouldn't do my homework. I was always doing something. I didn't want to shovel snow. I used to pick the cherries off the tree in the backyard all the time, even though I had been spanked several times for doing it. I didn't care; the spankings didn't bother me."

He also wanted to know my feelings about it all.

"Are you mad at Alma for leaving me?"

"I don't know, Dad. I'm sad that you were hurt, of course. I don't know exactly why she left you behind, although I imagine she thought you, a thirteen-year old boy, would be happier with your father. I don't know what her life was like. I wasn't in that marriage. Were you close to Alma?"

"I must have been, but not as close as I was to my father."

"Many children of divorce feel that they contributed to the marital failure, Dad. It wasn't your fault. Who knows what was going on in their marriage?"

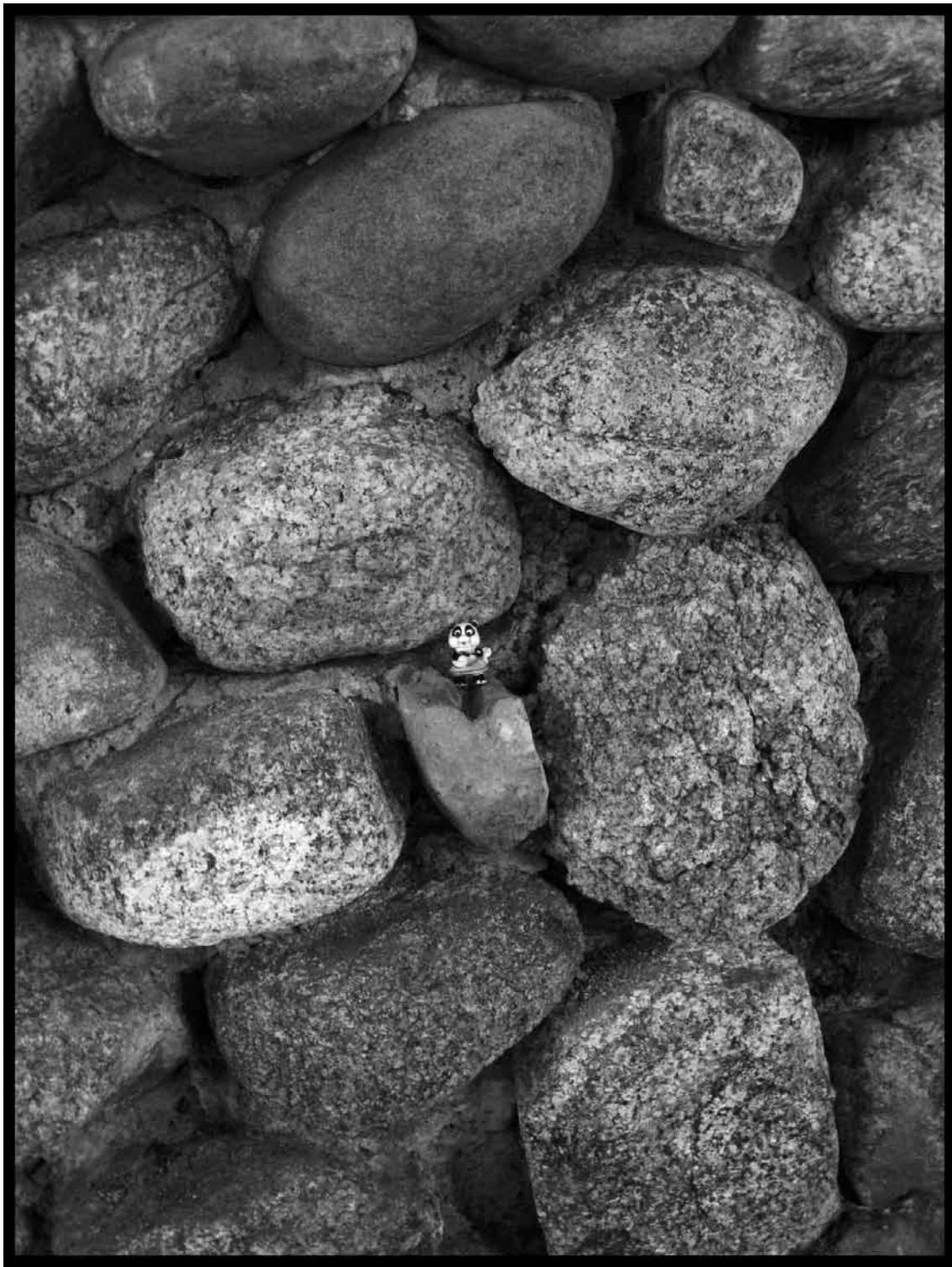
And here is where I run aground each time I think of Alma, actually. I find I cannot judge her harshly for her leaving, and it is not because I am a highly evolved spiritual person who has learned to overcome such judgments; it is more because I know that in some ways, I have been an Alma.

#### **Notes**

1. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*. 1981 Summer;11(4):213-21.

\* \* \* \* \*







*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

## Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,  
yet to be realized,  
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, “For Those to Come,” 2003.

### *xxii. Buzzing (Roddy)*

My White Woods, those I so dearly know,  
linger with me these many years later,  
many miles, long again walking in  
the world of men, my fine brothers.

Sometimes more than linger, sometimes  
much more. I iterated back there, back then,  
& sometimes I trip back, now reaches back &  
folds together, & again I am where  
I left, how it is because I never left.  
*I can't make it happen but happen it does.*

Fyodor the grocer & I sit together many  
times since I left there in that caustic rain.  
Still his balding head, thick thick moustache,  
heavy dark blue apron over his black tie &  
clean white shirt. Black trousers, leather shoes.  
Kind & patient smile each time I too long  
study his unaging visage. Is he just a  
dream figment now? What was he then?

What then was Iris? The Creatures?  
My red-whiskered friend?

I call for a rest, when the trip comes on me,  
when I can. Find somewhere, a tree,  
a brick wall, whatever, to slump against,  
appear to nap. Relax back there, then, *now*.

But I can't always. One time we were in battle, choicelessly, on a moonless hillside, our peaceful camp beset by knights of the road, wanting blood, plunder, fun. We scattered to find a best place to defense the dark hours. Odom called. A cave, but logs gutted its entrance.

Several of us held off more than our number, had to fight to retreat.

“Roddy.”  
 These weren’t men of honor in fighting.  
 The King had long told us, “wound than kill, but *survive, & survive your brothers.*”  
 So I used sword & knife, & my big torso, took on two myself.

“*Roddy.*”  
 Swinging blindly now because what I saw was partly foes, & partly Fyodor, our armchairs, leather bucket of water.

I swung, I wounded, I staggered, finally I *plunged*, this one, that one. They fell, perhaps would survive if tended. I let go. *Arrived.*

A cool summer evening. My White Bunny friend & two small Giraffes in my lap, napping peacefully. Fyodor & I are both iterated now, but rarely talk of our other lives.

Those months in the Kingdom, though, pushed all of my old friends away from me. Travelled with me well, settled poorly. I slept heavy & dreamless & did not emerge rested.

*I'd left them to help save the world.*  
 This place we'd helped liberate, build up new, wasn't why I'd come away so far.

My tent was spare, where I slept my heavy poor sleeps & little more. My compass, my knapsack, my bed roll. Ready to leave here at a word. Eager for this word.

When did the nocturnal buzzing through the tent wall start? Nothing on the other side but bare ground. Patched the aging, thinning fabric but there was nothing out there.

Buzzing is how I thought of it. Not like the *hmmming* I'd known & loved with my Creature friends, then or in moments when I would trip back. It was quiet & furious. Would whelm me but for that tent wall. *Would find a way.* Searched nightly. I wondered if my heavy dreamless sleep formed another barrier. I wondered if my old friends protected me still.

So relief when we went. The others were unsure, wondering, hesitant. I wasn't. Loaded the boat with vigor, hoping to leave that buzzing behind. Maybe my dear old friends would near again.

No excitement this time in leaving, no matter our goal closer than ever. Because? We pushed off to the Wide Wide Sea again, quiet, foolishly busy.

Too early retired to my cabin, sleepless, & there was the buzzing again! I held to my bunk, decided to listen, to study. It was . . . different. Its malevolence gone. I didn't know what even as hours passed, even as I fell back to then, there, *now*.

Fyodor, our two armchairs, a beautiful night. Shiny-eyed fox & unicorn & snow leopard & owl in my lap, napping friendly, safe.

A third figure, sitting on the porch's edge. The red-whiskered man! Long red straw hat, feathery red whiskers, mashed nose. Long overcoat, tall old boots. A leather cup of the good water in his hand too.



So dear. *But the buzzing.*  
 "What is it, my friends?"  
 "What's lost. Your regrets," says Fyodor.  
 "Your fears," adds Leonardo. Took me years  
 to learn this name. I still forget.  
 "How do I quiet it? What does it mean?"  
 Would take the first answer if not the second.

Both silent a long while. Then speak  
 braided.

"It's the past pouring through your heart,  
 lost, angry, homeless. Now scared."  
 "What do I do?"  
 "You seal up your heart, & look ahead  
 to the Island solely. You look to your  
 brothers & their doubts, to what you can  
 offer them. You fumigate your heart's  
 chambers against those lost years."

"Cannot they come again?"  
 "*Nothing comes again if you fail.*"

They begin to *hmmm* to me, a deep  
 beautiful music, a goodbye, love,  
 faith, remembrance, *goodbye for now.*  
 Sleep, resting & dreamless.

So I give me to my brothers, leaping  
 to ride dolphins with Odom, drinking  
 with Dreamwalker, working by day,  
 singing & eating by night. Sealed heart,  
 loving heart, *unremembering heart.*

Down on my knees, a prayer to  
 this coming Island more like a begging:

*Please accept me & my brothers.  
 Please let us come with our task.  
 Please let us roam you safely.  
 Please let us find the Tangled Gate.  
 Please let us find the Beast.  
 Please let us somehow save the world.*

Fall prone to the floor. Long silence.  
 Then I feel Creatures gather around  
 me, like old, sniffing, friendly,  
 but not me back there. *Them come here.*

A sound from them. Buzzing? I panic,  
 thrash. More. I calm. Breathe, relax.

*There is no buzz. It was always hmmming.*  
 My heart is clean but not empty.  
*My heart is full of all of you.*

I will help my brothers save this world.  
 I will return to all of you.  
 You wait with a part of me still.  
 The rest will come to you again.

Then, Dreamwalker's shout. "Land! It's land!"

\* \* \* \* \*

### *xxiii. Eclipse (Odom)*

*"Let's steal away in the noonday sun  
 It's time for a summertime dream."*  
 —Gordon Lightfoot, 1976.

In dreams you never leave me,  
 none of you. I return from the White Woods,  
 having decided. I will not leave you,  
 & you're waiting for me. My father,  
 the dear look in your eyes I wished I was.  
 Cordel'a, blue eyes & braids, loving me  
 like I was two brothers for one.

Iris. The smile you gave me that morning  
 in that half-built worship house. Like  
 I was what a good world had led you to.

The men I fished with. The women & girls  
 who made the meals, mended the nets.  
 Our encampment, meager yet filled  
 with our hearts & limbs & lives, &  
 near to the Creatures in those wondrous  
 White Woods. *Home.*

I am the youngest of our King's brothers.  
 Always a bit in Roddy's shadow, as he  
 had travelled with me first, & taught me  
 so much, & continued to with the years.

They all accept me, love me. I become  
 something of the fighter I need to be.  
 Never a big man, I have to learn when to  
 best retreat in a battle, how to make  
 sure my weapon hits true first when  
 a bigger opponent will not let me a second try.

But something else emerges as my skill.  
 The others notice I can deduce a  
 landscape at far view for its cover,  
 its terrain beyond the horizon, its feel  
 for occupation, men or otherwise.

I learn this from my brothers.  
 The way Dreamwalker calculates the hidden by waking or dreaming.  
 How Asoyadonna can sense a place's ease or disquiet.  
 Watching Francisco instinctively catalogue sky, water, tree.  
 The King's obsessive push past all what cannot tell us.  
 Roddy's gentle woodsman skills, the way  
 valley, Woods, mountain take him in.

When uncertain next, when we six  
 huddle together & no sure move,  
 a place evolves for me. I understand uncertainty.  
 I'll look about, sniff like Creatures, & again,  
 prompt something in the rest. Decide our direction  
 at a forked path. Push up further into hills or desist.  
 Rest tonight or walk by full moon.

*I am always looking for you.  
 I do not know how to do this.  
 Our quest is married, binded with my own.*

The years grow me up, from the moodiness  
 of youth to the melancholy of young manhood.  
 I rarely take out my coin purse with  
 its reminders of my losses & failures.

My dearest little friend has left me, though  
 on darkest nights, I will sometimes hear  
 her merry cackle in my dreams, wake to it  
 a few more precious moments still.

For a long while I'm able to live among  
my sadnesses. Embrace these handsome  
brothers. Believe all will be told, &  
recovered, & saved, eventually.

The girls, then the women in the places  
we travel sometimes go for me. My youthful face,  
my sad eyes. Many sweet couplings,  
somewhat tearful partings. The others  
the girls come to ride happy a night.  
Me, they stick on. Me, traps them.

I discover that within love, within want,  
within shadows of shadows, there may be  
cruelty. Wished for, made upon.

A sweet ass smacked rawly red, then  
fucked with the pain still fires wild.  
Hands binded, mouths gagged. Will  
to possess, completely be possessed.  
Will to eclipse the mind of wonder & woe.

Visions of burning Woods, poisoned cities,  
shown me long ago by the Beast.  
*Make it hurt. More. Oh don't stop. Yes. Don't stop.*

I mature well, become lean. Rarely  
smile as none of my brothers believe  
smiles are often in my heart. Save them.

The rest are enthralled by the King's  
rapturous love for Deirdre. His lifting heart  
lifts theirs for awhile. We pause our travels  
to build up the King's old homeland. We work,  
& rest awhile.

I avoid them together. *Her.* Her turquoise  
eyes, so like yours, Iris. Never seen in a girl  
since yours, Iris. Is she from where you  
were from? How can this mean anything?  
*Where are you now? Do you remember me?*

They don't know, will never know, that  
you came to my tent, one night  
near our departure. You came to my  
tent & you buttoned down its door,  
& you undressed quietly, & you lay  
down with me. You undressed me too.

"You are my Queen. My King's beloved," I croak.  
 "Not tonight, Odom."

Your face, in the moonlight upon it  
 from the open ceiling flap, is so beautiful.  
 Not love for me in it. Not what  
 you bear my King. Yet something intense,  
 just for me right now. They co-exist in you.

"What is this, Deirdre?" I speak plainly.  
 "You see her eyes in mine."  
 I nod. We face each other, nude.

"I'm here to tell you she's to be found."  
 "Yet here these many years & miles."  
 You move into my grasp, your turquoise eyes,  
 say my name, softly, how not said in so long, paralyzing me.  
 Your touch, your movements like hers, that morning  
 in the half-built worship house.

Not possible, yet so, your voice sweetens, lilts,  
 like hers.

"You will come to all those places  
 you remember from watching the images  
 on your coin purse as a boy." Pause.

Listen, breathless.

"The Great Tree. The Castle. The Island. The Tangled Gate."

Another pause.

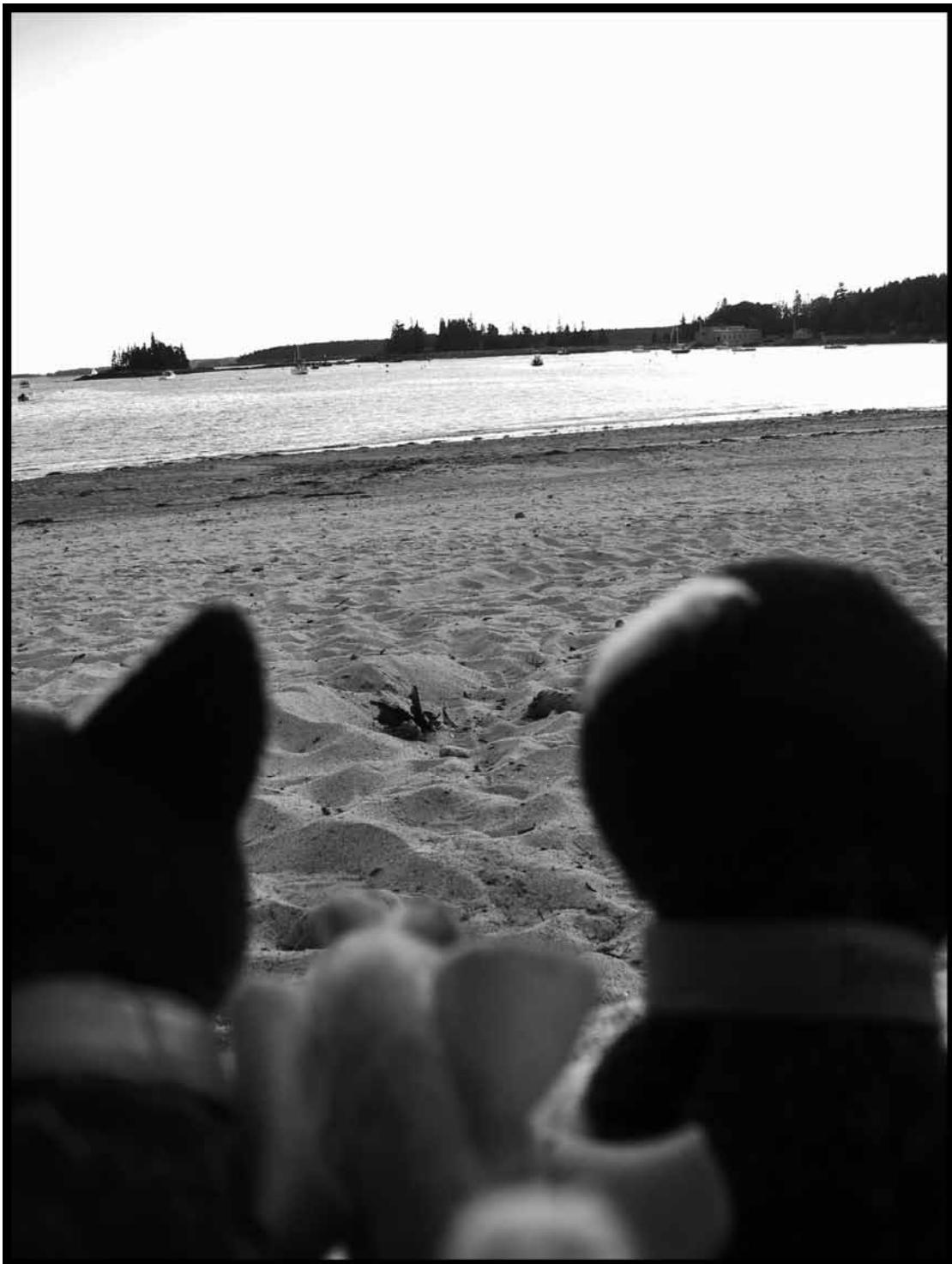
"You will find all of them." Pause. "Another day  
 you will find me, Odom."

I blink in the moonlight. *Deirdre. Iris. Deirdre.*

She then smiles almost cruelly. "Do you long  
 to smack my ass hard too, Odom?  
 Bind me? Fuck me? Fuck me hard?"

Blink as you roll on top of me, your  
 reddish blonde hair on my chest.

*Deirdre. Blink. Iris. Blink. Iris.*



*Blink. Iris.*

Your hands I bind over your head.  
 Your eyes I blindfold. Your mouth I gag.  
 Your sweet ass I redden for fucking.  
 Your bare pussy I taste till it noises,  
 then fuck. And again. *Eclipse.*

Then you bind me. Blindfold, gag me.  
 Hurt me with a stick. Hurt me as I've  
 not been hurt. *Eclipse.*

My blinded world white with pain.  
 Hurt, high & low, squeezed, bitten, smacked.

Then something. *Something.*

The day all of you left. While I was up  
 in the White Woods. Someone learned  
 what our captors intended that day,  
 for when we were to gather to evening meal.  
 A massacre. *No sense in it? A half-built  
 town for us?*

It was to cow the White Woods, all  
 its magick beings. Cow them with  
 their King's will to destroy everything unkneeling.

You ran. *You fled.* As calmly as possible,  
 to keep everyone together. My father &  
 the King leading you all away, far away  
 from the White Woods. *To where?*

Far down, miles down the shore of  
 the Wide Wide Sea. Hurrying but  
 keeping together. *There.* There you  
 all are now, digging up from deep  
 in the sand, *boats*, enough for  
 everyone, if barely, & not perpetually  
 on the Wide Wide Sea.

This vision begins to soften as I feel  
 numb to the bites & the blows. You're all  
 rowing away from them, from me.  
 I look for you among the fragments.

My father laying a blanket on an old woman.  
 Cordel'a handing round soup.  
 The girl with reddish blonde hair & turquoise eyes,  
 tuned to my very beat & breath? I look  
 & look. I don't know.

*You trusted I would understand.*

*You trusted I would not forget.*

*You trusted I would find you.*

You undo my binds. You unfold my eyes.  
 You are Deirdre again. You lie in my arms  
 & touch the lashes on my chest.  
 We say nothing more. I doze breathing  
 that long ago Sea scent in your hair.

My dreams are peaceful. My old King's bloo  
 eyes upon me, smiling. My blue-green little purse,  
 its beautiful contents, its shifting images of  
 Great Tree, Island, Castle, Gate.

Wytner, our three pairs of hands tightly grasping each other.

My loves.

Cordel'a, my wise protector. Iris, my wondering woeful heart.

Now back on the ship, now bound for  
 the Island. Where I will not leave until I know.  
 Now these two quests are one, as ever they were.  
 To save this world is to save my own,  
 my wish one star in the great lit canvas  
 of the sky. *No more eclipse.*

Yet the stripes on my arms, my back, my heart,  
 these form the map to follow once we make land,  
 when we arrive the Island, when my brothers  
 are uncertain, & turn to me to sniff, & know.



\* \* \* \* \*

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*Nathan D. Horowitz*



## Psychedelic Summercamp

[Travel Journal]

Here in the provisional hut, we're some 200 meters upriver of the family hut, and of Cabaña Supernatura, where Joaquín and Dave and I drank last year. Across the river live Joaquín's daughter-in-law Katia's elderly parents plus, in other huts, three of Katia's brothers and their families. Ten minutes downriver by motor canoe, the village of Siecoya. Fifty minutes upriver, the village of San Pablo.

Sheltered from rain by brown canvas and black plastic sheeting over a wooden frame, next to a half-built traditional hut, a third of a degree south of the equator, a number of us are hanging out: don Joaquín, doña Maribel, Xiomara (their granddaughter, about thirteen now), Dave, Ryder, Mark, and me.

The rain.

A dozen chickens.

A Swarovski crystal, hanging from the western roofbeam, reflecting deceptively tiny chunks of forest and gray sky.

Joaquín's dogs Cuauquillo and Potente have just emerged, wet, from the forest, entered the hut, and lain down on the ground.

Cuauquillo is jet black and lordly, an obsidian idol to the god of dogs.

His brother Potente is thin, tan-and-white, ingratiating.

Dogs are technically not allowed in the "house," but the rule is being bent because it's raining.

There are plantains; hammocks; facial expressions; muddy bare feet; bones and veins, and skulls, and rainbows, in our bodies, among other things.

A little wooden crate serves as a table. Atop it lies a paperback I bought in Quito. The following description is complicated, so bear with me. The cover has a picture taken at a ceremony in 1969 of a *yagé* drinker puffing a cigar and staring contemplatively at the viewer. The book contains two autobiographies. Above the photo are the words *El bebedor de yajé* (The *Yagé* Drinker) and *Francisco Payaguaje*. That's Maribel's deceased older brother, the last shaman-chief of the tribe. Below the photo are the words *Raíz de medicina* (Medicine Root) and *Serafín Piaguaje*. That's Maribel and Francisco's nephew, the one who told me last year that August is the best month for shamanism, when the dead who live in the sky in the form of stars descend to earth in the form of birds to feed on ripe fruits in the tops of the trees. *Raiz de medicina* is his Spanish translation of his Paicoca name, *Ecorasa*.

The first Secoya who learned to read and write, Serafín scribed his own autobiography. Francisco, in contrast, was interviewed on tape by three of his grandsons, who translated his stories into Spanish. A Capuchin priest who worked in San Pablo for a while edited and published the double book.

Tied to the rafters high above the paperback are nine or ten half-deflated balloons—

red, blue, yellow, orange, purple, green, white—left over from Dave's birthday party four nights ago.

Dave's gorgeous sister Eva, athletic, freckle-speckled, topped with long curly dark red hair, visited from Quito with a box of goodies for him including chocolate bars, granola, cookies, and powdered milk.

Strung on a string from one side of the hut to the other are triangular cloth flags with more or less geometric designs painted on them in achiote. Dave made them, basing the designs on sketches Serafín the educator did. Some of them, Serafín said, are images people saw in *yagé* trances, while others are just designs.

Dreams stream through us every night like movies, like the news, like designs.

That swarm of horseflies visits us every day punctually at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., right at dawn and dusk, until six-twenty, when they're apparently needed elsewhere. I don't let them bite me.

Ryder the Alabaman blacksmith is pondering, his sharp chin resting on his palm, his sharp eyes fixed on something immaterial.

A newspaper called *El Hoy*, "The Today," from five days ago, appears to be announcing that all the nations have finally signed the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. It's good news, if I'm understanding the Spanish correctly.

I'm writing, imagining my readers as points of consciousness behind my eyes, looking out through them at the forest, listening though my ears, et cetera.

Dave flexes his long toes and speaks earnestly to Ryder, his voice blurred by the rain falling on the roof.

Yesterday, Dave told me, "A couple days before you got here, some bird flew right through the provisional hut, and don Joaquín said it meant that somebody was going to arrive from far away."

Big aluminum pots have been placed on the ground at the four corners of the roof to catch rainwater flowing off the tarps that form the roof. The pots are full. Maribel's using an aluminum bowl to ladle water from one of them into a five-gallon plastic jug for drinking water.

Chickens gather under the finished parts of the half-finished palm-thatched roof of the house "next door" (though these houses, or huts, have no doors).

Over dinner, Joaquín warned us about *watí engañadores*, trickster spirits. He says the world's full of little beings who try to hurt people, or mislead people into hurting themselves. *Watí* is the Paicoca word for a spirit. Sometimes, in the forest, between trees, they spin webs, which *yagé* drinkers can see and avoid.

Yesterday Ryder stayed behind to guard the place from thieves while Joaquín, Maribel, Xiomara, Dave, Mark, doña Alicia—the elderly widow of Maribel's brother Francisco, the last shaman-chief—, and I all went out down the river to get a dugout canoe Joaquín had just finished making. It had to be made from the mōnsé tree, and the mōnsé tree is pretty uncommon. Joaquín had a strong pain in his lower back; Maribel, Dave, Mark, and I used a rope to drag the canoe two miles through the jungle, from the site where it was made all the way to the river. Maribel is strong! She's a woman in her sixties with a body of steel! Leaning into the rope, grinning, even *laughing* as she strains!

Doña Alicia—her honey-colored face a map of wrinkles, but with pouting, sweet lips and laughing eyes—surprised me too. She'd brought a machete along. I thought, "How cute.

She has a machete.” We were walking along and she stopped. I figured she’d stopped to catch her breath. I heard *Swok! Swok! Swok!* And moments later, a crash. She’d chopped down a palm tree. Then came the sound of her chopping the trunk open. Soon she caught up to us, bowlegged, hobbling fast, bearing an armload of chambira fibers she’d torn from the hollow inside of the trunk, which she’d later boil, dry, and twine into string for making bags, nets, or hammocks.

Most of the chambira hammocks here are big enough that I can lie flat on my stomach perpendicular to their axis, my arms straight above my head, and be fully supported, without sagging (chambira may break, but never sags), from my toes to my fingertips, with room to spare. Rufino and his wife and three of their kids can relax in one.

Dave

*Here's something I thought of on yagé the other night:  
"The world's a sacrificial playground."*

Ryder (nodding)

*Hmmm. I can see that.*

—(The  
sound  
of the  
rain  
goes  
on)—

Dave

*This book I'm reading on Taoism by Lao Tzu  
says you can live passionately,  
to see how the world operates,  
or you can live without passion,  
to see the secret behind the world.*

*That's what we're doing here!  
Living without passion  
to see the secret behind the world!  
The parallels  
between Taoism and shamanism  
are amazing!*

*But Lao Tzu says you can't really talk about it.  
The secret you can talk about  
isn't the real secret.  
And the Tao you can talk about  
isn't the real Tao.*

*So whatever we're talking about . . . .*

Ryder  
*. . . Isn't real!*

As I listen to reality affirming and denying itself, I watch the expanding circles of raindrops in puddles.

A rooster searches for food.  
 I search for a story. I climb the beanstalk of language into unfamiliar skies.  
 What do I see? Maribel's long, wavy hair, living river, black wind.  
 She laughs as Dave turns to talk to her. She binds up her long, wavy hair, living river, black wind.

I half-listen to Dave's Tao-redolent words.  
 Ryder contemplates the wet forest—or a convincing illusion of one.  
 I contemplate the visions—images of Taoist secrets behind the world. Most are hard to remember clearly. They don't resemble what we see in the everyday world, so it's hard to describe them using everyday words. They can be fast and overwhelming, like a night of dreams in a single minute.

Other times they're less fleeting, and we can contemplate them as they undergo their majestic transformations, though even then, we can be too transfixed by their intensity to verbalize them or mentally photograph them and file them for future recollection—which doesn't mean we don't enjoy them. We do.

Each of my forearms still has a splotch of a special *curí*, or paint, from our last ceremony. Doña Alicia cooked it up for us; it's red and fragrant, made following an old recipe: achiote plus tree sap. It's high tech of the sacred, something comforting to smell in the ceremony when the visions turn terrifying and the mind plummets into nature's nightmares. Something to remind the drinker who he is, where he comes from, who cooked the paint for him.

The paint's still on my legs, too, stuck in my hair. Ryder's, too.  
 In conversation, we string words like the glass beads we all wear, multicolored sentences on our wrists and around our necks.

The world is summed up in a raindrop that hangs at the tip of a length of blue twine hanging down from a grommet at the edge of one of the roof-tarps.

“. . . Machetes, axes—they were selling *everything!*” says Dave in Spanish, telling a story to Maribel.

“Ah, yes,” she says. I can hear her smiling.  
 Xiomara climbs into a hand-woven cotton hammock with a copy of *El Hoy* newspaper, and she reads and sways. She leaves for boarding school in six days, where, her father tells me, she hopes to study computing.

She's blossoming, young-womanly, less kinetic than she was last year. I remember her running then with her brothers, her long black hair streaming, living river, black wind.

Dave smoked his “last cigarette” this morning.  
 Xio's reading aloud to herself.  
 Behind me, Joaquín—no, Mark—or maybe Ryder—hocks and spits.  
 Dave tells Maribel about the Hopis. Last night, moved by forces beyond his control, but not above his appreciation, he was singing in his sleep, some shaman song of the subconscious.

My right hand's muddy from carrying the aforementioned five-gallon jug of drinking water over to the family hut where Joaquín and Maribel live now; my shoulder's muddy too, and especially my feet. My muscles are sore and happy for having hauled that mönsé canoe yesterday.

Xio reads aloud, random consonants and the occasional vowel filtering through the sound of the rain on the roof.

Dave's still talking to Maribel. Words flow fluently, fluidly, urgently from his mouth, spilling up like water from the underground spring of his soul.

Don Joaquín's interpreting a dream Mark had about a deer: "*Esa cosa Usted soñando parece diablo.*" That thing you dreaming seems like devil.

I see the forest wall across the river. It's raining over there too.

I scratch mosquito bites on my moderately furry belly. My body's tall, with short brown hair, green eyes, big cheeks, and a small chin—a sign of a weak personality, I'm told. My right eye doesn't open as wide as my left, the legacy of a solid punch in Pasadena when I tried to save a woman from getting dragged down the street by the neck by her huge boyfriend, one night when Eunmi was taking me out to a movie during the summer I worked for Greenpeace in Los Angeles, the summer after I worked for Greenpeace in Seattle, the summer after I worked for Greenpeace in Ann Arbor.

Xio tosses the newspaper onto one of the sleeping platforms. She rocks in the hammock, listening to Dave, then gets up and sits by her grandmother and the fire. Using a big knife, she peels a *maduro*, a mature plantain banana (yellow, no longer green, its starch having turned to sugar) and lays it on the embers of the fire to bake. Dave explains to Maribel that, as a result of his last trance, he wants to be called Isaac now, after his great-uncle Isaac Sternstein, the Cuban boxing promoter.

Our Jewish families. I'm thinking about my cousins the Safeeks as I write with stiff fingers. My father's cousin Rose is married to Danny Safeek, whose mother was smuggled into the land of Israel from Yemen at the age of three inside some kind of huge bottle, he told me, which left her claustrophobic forever.

I'm missing my Ricki. I wonder if I'll ever again press my palm to her sweaty chest to feel her hot heart pounding. I miss the feline fuzz on her chin. We have a vague plan to meet in a year. But I'm here in Ecuador this time to take the time to learn what I need to learn. I'll probably stay until my money runs out. Or earn money here somehow.

Two red balloons twist in the breeze.

The rain has let up a lot.

A black chicken scratches in the mud, making the Chinese character for river.

"That's great, huh?" comments Joaquín about something behind me.

Dave stands up and walks away. Xio picks up and examines the fire fan, the *haipa*, of *ya'i* vine that had been pulled down from the forest canopy and soaked in water and split in half with a knife, and woven into a handle, and neatly interlaced around black wild turkey tail feathers by Enrique, an old gentleman from the village of Siecoya.

Gnats are swarming around my shins, diving in to attack when they get their courage up.

Dave's back and talking about the Hopis again, filling my left ear with sounds punctuated by Maribel's "Sí . . . sí."

Three days' beard growth: I'd better deforest my face today.

Parrots chatter back and forth as they fly overhead.

Hopi prophecies, non-stop. Xio rocks in the hammock, watches me write in this journal. Hopi prophecies about circles and crosses and nuclear bombs. The cut on my toe is healing. Last night I dreamt of Bill Clinton, as one does. The dream that can be told of isn't the real dream. The Bill who can be told of isn't the real Bill.

Lao Tzu pretty well describes what we're doing here—stripping ourselves of passion in order to see the secret behind the world. Yes, we've all seen it. I'll be happy to tell you about it sometime if I haven't already. The stripping of passion involves, demands, complete celibacy, channeling sexual power to higher energy centers in the body, to awaken the mind to things of the spirit.

\* \* \*

Late afternoon. A big aluminum pot of *yagé* leaves and *yagé ocó* leaves is bubbling on the fire. At 3 a.m. we'll drink to vomit, following Joaquín's instructions on purifying our bodies and minds in order to see the *yagé* visions more clearly. "Snake head soup" is the term Joaquín shared with us for this brew made only of leaves—the heads of the *yagé* serpent.

"Working with the forces of nature, man—that's how we can accomplish miracles," remarks Dave to Ryder. He mentions that during the last ceremony, a phrase occurred to him for what we're doing here: *psychedelic summercamp*.

We're putting our trust in Joaquín's methods and traditions, trying to figure out what it is, this practice imperfectly named *shamanism*—what it's good for, and how it can help people and the earth.

Meditative, Ryder tends the fire.

The air's about as still as it gets.

No, there's a breeze.

Sunset gilds trees golden green.

Plants drink a light dinner, quivering.

*"Yahhh!"* Ryder breathes out hard, leans close to the ground, waves away the smoke from the fire with his hands.

"Say, 'Rabbit, rabbit,'" I say.

"That doesn't work," Ryder says.

Dark gray clouds are dropping light rain on the roof of brown canvas and black plastic. Dave gets up, whistling.

A wasp harasses my knee.

Time to take blankets and

Time to take blankets and a hammock inside from where they've been airing out.  
Big plantain leaves lick the last direct light from the sun as if it were vanilla ice cream.

A yellow bird soffs the air. Rosanna Patente's lover. She's a black nose followed by an

A yellow bitch smells the air: Fasiona, Potente's lover. She's a black nose followed by an emaciated dog body. The skeleton of a fox wearing a second-hand fur coat. We think she's full of parasites that eat what she eats. She doesn't belong to Joaquín, but to Serafín, but she lives here to be with Potente, who, despite his beta male reputation, proves an attentive lover.

\* \* \*

Through the green forest canopy appears the gray, cloudy sky, as serious as death.

The pot of *yagé* leaves bubbles fiercely.

Dave writes in his journal.

It'll be dark soon.

A dragonfly wheels and glides, hunting bugs that suck our blood.

Yesterday Joaquín reiterated a prohibition he shared with me previously. We're not to bathe in the river the morning after drinking *yagé*. If we want to bathe, we should haul a pot of water from the river and bring it up to dry land and pour it over ourselves. Because if we bathed in the river, one of the hairs on our head could come off, and it would float down the river. Later, a *watí*, a spirit, would see it, and to him, it would be glowing like a tail feather from a scarlet macaw, and he'd pick it up and do witchcraft on its former owner.

Of course. What else would he do with the hair?

I'm thinking about the taste of peach kefir, and the smell of wood smoke, and the tactile sensation of the mosquito bite on the arch of my foot, and the bird songs in the forest, and the insect chants, and the bubbling brew, and whoever's reading or listening to this text, and what they're thinking, and the expression on their face, and the dimming light, and how comfortable I am in this hammock.

Dave is telling a dream to Ryder. "A man was up at the top of a suspension bridge, thinking about jumping off and killing himself."

"Yeah?" says Ryder.

"I went up to get this guy," Dave says. "Every ten feet there's a wire. In between, it's a precarious climb. I say to the guy, 'Your family wants you to come down.' He says, 'I don't have a family. What the hell do you want?' I say, 'I love you, man.' So I'm hanging out with him,

talking, and suddenly the bridge turns into a tandem bicycle. We're cruising around . . ." The dream zooms past my ability to scribble it all down.

The droning of cicadas seems to be helping the forest grow, as rock music used to help my co-workers and me wash dishes.

A machete is stuck in a post of this hut, lightly hacked into the wood, to store it there. Cuaucuillo saunters in and is driven out with a few words and a gesture.

\* \* \* \* \*



*Ace Boggess*



### **Status Report**

I look into myself & see music  
but can't hear the notes or name the song.  
I look out my narrow glass at twilight &

see rain over razor wire, a river of mud  
down a mountainside, nothing at all the color red,  
the color of anger, of life & of suffering.

I have time enough for a novel now  
though I find I have nothing to say.  
I have time enough to write enough letters

to woo every single woman in the world,  
but the world is too full of women  
who've forgotten the sound of hunger

in my voice, the smells of fruity liquor &  
desire in the whispers of my breath.  
I wish I could write myself letters;

I've forgotten me, too. My God,  
I'm an empty chalice next to an empty plate.  
So I sleep because sleep is freedom: we say,

"I have robbed them of an hour."  
I sleep because in sleep I see  
endless open roads, roast turkey &

thick burgers, the faces to names I've lost.  
I sleep because in sleep I see nothing  
often: we say, "Through the hole,

down the hall, winding the corridor,  
mapping the maze, follow the cat  
in your dream—he knows the way out."

\* \* \*

**The Feeding of the Birds**

it is not that so much bread is wasted  
why this is prohibited

for these tiny finches bland & gray as businessmen  
the occasional portly pigeon slight-flying with a wobble

neither because they chatter & cluster  
nor shit on windshields of the warden's cars

it is not because they sing &  
in singing raise the spirits of the dead

not the companionship they offer  
 fleeting as a naughty girl's at night

one never need examine too exactly  
their piercing abysmal judge's eyes

or the soft dance steps  
their tiny legs will disco toward the feast

it is because they enter & exit so freely  
through the fence without restraint

that gives men hope  
where naught should be but suffering & remorse

\* \* \*

### I Said Goodbye to My Old Pair of Shoes

Prison-white sneakers, last remnants of a past  
no man should remember or forget. Cracked,  
broken, they held on like mean drunks  
in houses that never belonged to them.

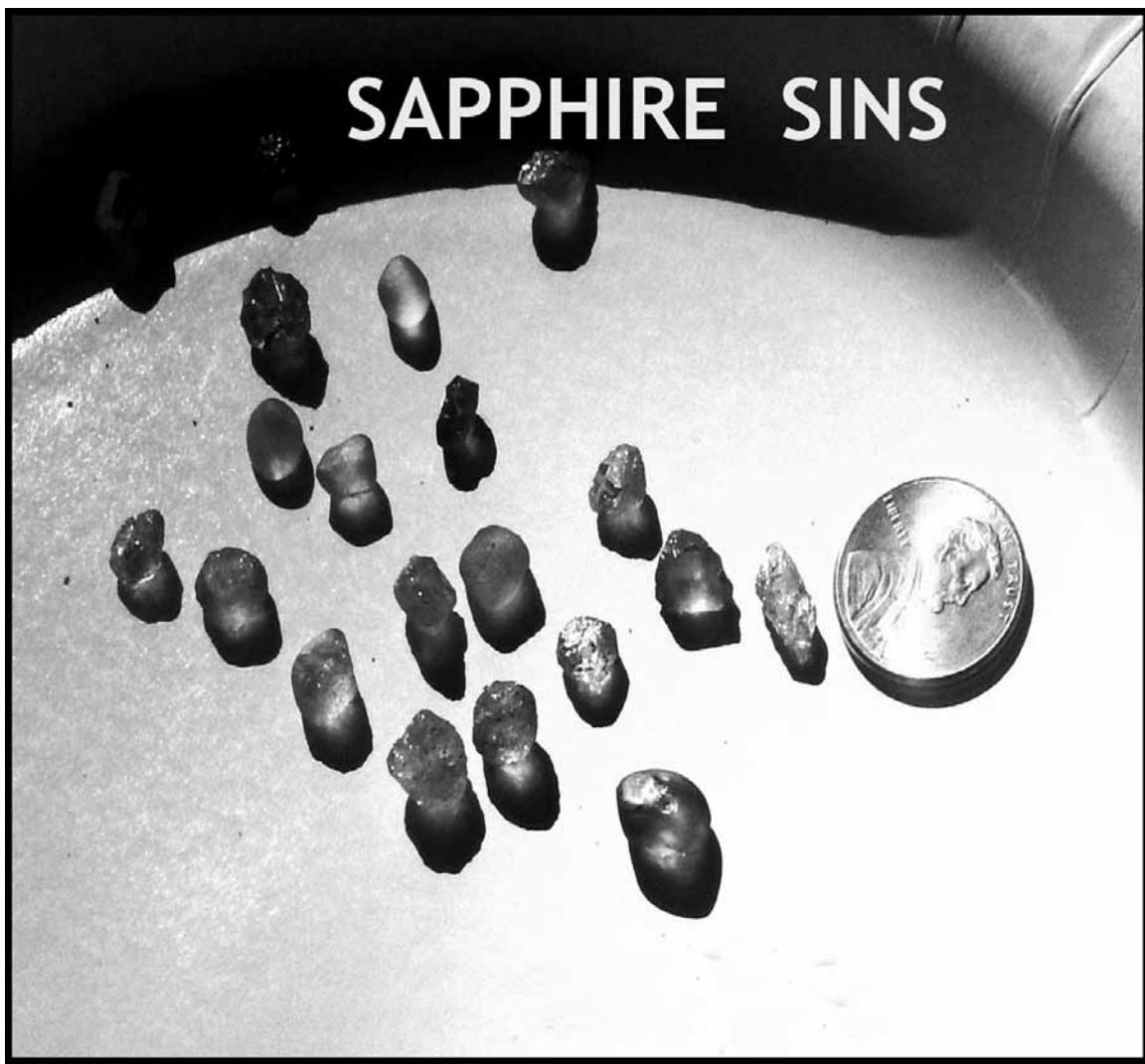
I don't know why I delayed before I said,  
"So long," & sent them out with the rubbish.  
Sometimes it's hard to let go of hurt.

I kept them like vacation photos, little reminders  
of holidays, the opposites of those, like scars:  
plain & stained, ugly as a snow-capped highway  
after the plowman passes through.

They had to go. Their steps measured miles  
of barely moving, soles worn from pacing,  
waiting, laces frayed as a body over time  
trapped between squares of stone & steel.

They'd served their sentence, as had I,  
innocent in my new shoes: brown &  
black like two raccoons with bandit eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

*Charlie Beyer*



## Sapphire Sins

[Travel Journal]

*i. Why?*

I'm off to save the future. My future and the future of this planet. Naturally, I can't do this without money. I'm no charismatic Ghandi who can rally thousands with a diaper on. I need cold cash. I need everything, starting with a new truck. Then I need thousands of dollars for experimental materials to save the world. One of those materials is a piece of Florida coastline. It's a race against capitalist poverty before I can institute CO<sub>2</sub> absorption with algae. Before I can build land in the sea with electro participation of dissolved calcium. Before I can genetically cross-heat resistant coral with the wimpy stuff in the Caribbean. It's a race in life between abject poverty and grandiose salvation of the earth.

But, for now, I'm still back on the starting line. Feels like I've always been there, listening intently for the pistol to start on the mad dash. I'm tired of waiting—every muscle and tendon tensed, on the edge of explosion—, so I'm going to squeeze the pistol's trigger myself.

Through the years, I thought of finding my own cornucopia of pure gold, paving the path to elitism and glory for the rest of life. When I was a teenager, the hermit of Jones Bar on the Yuba River regaled me with tales of the riches beneath my feet. Injected me with gold fever. Since then, I have continued to search the earth for its treasures of gold and gems.

But treasure didn't happen . . . shit.

I suffered for a corporate paycheck to raise a family but, every weekend or week off, I'd head to the mountains, scouring the land in quest of the yellow metal. *What did this accomplish? With no economic reward, what could be the value of roaming the hills?*

My kids grew up thinking that a can of beans over a campfire was better than a four-star restaurant. I wandered in the bush and snow of unnamed cordillera, while all my "hoodies" died of drugs or Hepatitis C in the big cities. My spirit and moxie stayed strong, while my city brethren withered in the cacophony of soul-killing white noise and media bombardment. Crumbled under the angst of civilization.

But the golden man of El Dorado mocks my life's quest to find his glittering treasure. I am somehow still alive at 64, and still seeking this dream, despite the ridicule of my efforts. And I mock myself too. I treat myself badly like tomorrow never comes.

Living in Colorado means being buried in snow and weed. Half the year, cabin fever grows in the dark corners of one's snow-bound oubliette. To compensate, I get addicted to the weed and TV.

I've never had a TV, so its glittering eye is more hypnotizing than the Great Moldovo. The weed is ubiquitous. Everyone is practicing the social norm to pipe up at a greeting. There is no resistance. Other than a few sober moments in the morning, the blue haze fills my brain for most of the day. My dopamine receptors are fried. No great giggles, or grandiose ideas. Only

a calming from DT rage and depression caused from withdrawals. Only the 10 AM re-run of *Gladiator* and a chest-ripping bowl of Kobe Kush stabilizes my mind. When I write emails to people, not sure about what, but something trivial and depressing, it steadily shrinks my puny cadre of correspondents. My depression makes them depressed.

With the depression comes “woundology.” This is when the first words to another is a chronicle of all your health ailments. For instance:

“Hey Charlie! How’s it going?”

“Oh, my back hurts. I can’t walk very well cause the neurons in my legs are shut off from all the weed smoking. I have the dry heaves for a half an hour in the morning. I think I have diabetes because I can’t feel my toes.”

“Oh. Sorry to hear it. Well, that being the case, wadda ya think about giving me that motorcycle you never use? Clearly your days are numbered!”

This is not exactly the sympathy I crave. Not that sympathy would alter my swimming in self-pity or my descent into devolution. So I don’t know where to complain anymore. My only solution is to huff more chronic and try to find a new episode of *Silicon Valley* on the TV.

As I said, I got the gold bug as a gangly teenager when the hermit of Jones Bar told me of picking up fist-sized nuggets out of the creek. But destroying a hillside for buckets of gold, as I would have liked, has never come to pass. My fate has been to be a perpetual prospector. I’ve looked everywhere. Visited every ghost town and abandoned mining camp in the American West.

Even up jungle rivers in Central America, where a white man carrying a shovel is an invitation to be hacked by machete-wielding locals. But all that slogging up streams, nibbling at the earth, clouds of bugs, has done me no financial good. Yes, it has persevered me. When all my cronies were stabbing themselves with Mexican brown heroin, I was sleeping in a cold wind, dining on sparrows.

But more than health, I had a *quest*. I had *hope*. I had moxie, stone, resilience. *I had a dream*. I preserved the dream in my heart. My survival is due to anti-disestablishmentarianism. A job was only a temporary inconvenience to get enough money to continue prospecting.

Eventually it became, as Robert Service said, “not so much about finding the gold, as it is just looking for it!” Naturally, this philosophy did not bode too well with the wife, although the kids liked living as animals in the woods. I managed to stay married for 25 years, until the poverty, the absence, the compulsion, and the reluctance to take a corporate job wore her out. So life continued with the family fleeing, a long stream of insufficient girlfriends, and ever the fever to find El Dorado.

A word to describe a homeless, penniless, ne’er-do-well is *choad*. A loser, an idiot. This I am not. I exist magnificently half the year in the suburbs with my best friend and sometimes lover. In the house is a TV, the pinnacle of civilization, along with a never-ending supply of chronic.

Because I am not a choad, but a respected member of society, I have mineral status. With four different mining claims, hope springs eternal in my breast. One claim has flakey float gold that never adds up; a second, a hole in a river that the Forest Service will not let me dredge; a third, a hard rock mine with a half a million (still in the hill), with a curmudgeon farmer who will not give me access to it.

But the other, *the other*, is a sapphire mine. Here, every pan is filled with a half a dozen gems. When the ore is concentrated with a sluice box, the pan is full of hundreds of multi-

colored jewels. In the sunlight, it's as if a Christmas LED light show is radiating up at me.

This is what this story is about: the Big Pink sapphire mine in Montana. This is the story of Big Pink, and the crew of choads I collected to help me dig it.

### *ii. Pleas*

One early spring morning, stressed out over how to excavate the mine with only my shovel—one tired shovel—I discovered a source of free labor.

My daily ritual starts with:

1. 3 cups of coffee;
2. 5 letters to estranged people;
3. Check the price of gold;
4. 10 minutes on a porn site; and
5. A hunt for sci-fi architecture

—and then the cat, Pomo, walks on the keyboard, demanding a cat chewy. The coffee is good, the people illiterate, the gold price steady, the 18-year-old bootie looks fine, and the cat's typing lessons might be improving.

I cyber-wander into an intentional community, the current name for what used to be called hippie communes. I'm thinking I'll find a place full of inventors, artists, and feverishly creative people. *Nawwww*—just hippies in Ohio growing ten-pound zucchinis.

But then I notice a section I have not seen before. The intentional community classified ads. It's mostly filled with farms seeking sustainable hippies, if there is such a thing. The farms want free labor to hoe the row.

But there is also the opposite type of ad. A melodic desperate plea to be part of something. Cries not unlike howler monkies crying for the company of community, for companionship, for water. Some samples of these are:

“I’m stuck as a pizza delivery boy in the Chicago suburbs. Is there not more to life? Please consider me for membership in your community.”

“I am a street medic in Berkeley”—*whatever the hell that is?*—“I just want to be a part of something sustainable with a community of others.” It appears that handing out Band-Aids on Telegraph Avenue just doesn’t fulfill life.

“Who will save my life?” they cry.

But I cry out too for the same, for purpose, for meaning. Though my version is tweaked, the end remains totally innocent—the desire to have companionship at the Big Pink sapphire mine.

### *iii. Bill*

Last year, there was *no* companionship. Two months were spent alone at the mine, enveloped in the empty woods. It drove me absolutely crazy. The first two weeks alone I feel smart with my wits and moxie. But then the deep loneliness sets in. This morphed into a rage against humanity. All the dozens I've invited to join me never showed up.

The chickens, the liars, the bull-shitters who watch *Gold Rush* with envy, but will not get off the couch. Here it is, you dogs, *here* is your adventure. Just get out of your rut and join me.

But no. Many are called, but none arise. So fuck them. If any of these assholes shows up,

I'll kill them.

The days wore on, dreadfully alone. Every day the temperature starts out at 40 and slowly works up to 50 by noon. I must have lizard blood, because I can't do anything till 1-ish. First coffee, then writing, then breakfast. Still feeling cold, so I read. More coffee. Smoke whatever I can find that will give me a buzz.

By then the mosquitoes have given way to the horse-flies, so it's time to go to work on the hole. A huge hole of 12 x 12 feet, 8 feet deep, is started in the beginning of July. It will not take me more than a week to get down to the treasure, I'm thinking. The damned gems are only in the bottom one foot of the hole. To clear the top 30 cubic yards is the labor of an excavator, which is not around.

Being used to background nagging for a lot of my life, but having none now, I unintentionally invent an imaginary friend—Bill. I dream of Bill urging me onward: "Get to the bottom," he says.

But I'm not so sure it is a dream. I have a strong feeling of someone else with me in the tent in the dead of night. No use freaking out—*where the hell am I gonna run?* So I gradually open my mind to this specter, offer a few words in reply sometimes.

"Don't wimp out," Bill tells me. He reminds me of the times I did wimp out. "You have food this time, and the weather is good. Are you just going to wallow in self-pity? You need to get to the bottom by your birthday. Be the lone wolf! Dig like mad for the glory to come!"

"All fine for you to say, being non-existent and all. I don't see you huffing a shovel," I counter.

Then I start to hear him during the day. As I dig, we converse on solutions to global warming and contradictions surrounding wave-particle duality. Mostly it's Bill hounding me to keep digging. "Skip lunch. Keep going. *Dig. Dig. Dig.*"

"But I'm battling depression from isolation and a sugar low. I need to eat two cans of beans for a dopamine reward. I just want to sleep. I feel lost from all humanity. I stink too much to be around anyone anyway. All I hear are strange animal noises to keep me company. The whine of insects."

"But you have me," says Bill quietly.

"Look, I don't know where you came from, and I appreciate not seeing you, but how do you calculate that any of this is any of your business anyway?"

Bill is quiet for a moment. Then he says in a whisper. "You know why."

When Bill first showed up, a voice, a specter in the black of night, I was comforted to have him there with me. Not really a stranger, being an old friend of my father's, a superb storyteller of the treasure beneath this mountain or that, with no detail left out (aside from the actual location).

I would listen in awe as a young man, and often go out to some lost bend in the river to search for the treasure he described. Bill just got older and older, more full of stories, until his tiny truck flew off the icy road into the river one winter. He was heading to an obscure theological library to investigate the collusion of a secret government and the Mormon church.

"Don't wimp out. Get to the treasure at the bottom." he blurts out again.

*I've heard this before. Give it a rest.*

"OK, Bill. I have you to encourage me. I have you to get excited with me. I have you to prove that El Dorado really does exist. I carry your dream that we can find it together. But I have to tell you, Bill," I pause for effect, assuming that he's still listening, "I will moil to the

bottom. I will get the glory, for both of us. But when I get outta here, I'm headed to the bar. There I'll drink myself stupid and totally erase you from my brain with distilled spirits. You will not even be a memory anymore. We'll never have any more of these stupid discussions."

#### *iv. Red*

Bill wakes me up with a start the next morning. He's mumbling something that I can't understand. I am drenched in sweat, but my feet are sticking out and icy white. Dead still is the air. Bird songs play in the trees. The sky is orange like a California sunrise. The trees are ragged and hairy against the bright background of sky, making a hole in the canopy like some insects in an electron microscope picture. Woodpeckers knock their heads in hollow sounds reverberating among the trees.

I am glad to be alive this day, surrounded in perfect serenity. I am glad Bill is with me, that we have purpose together. I am sorry for the other suckers who are not here. *I can't imagine why not?* I feel sorry for them, but not pity. They choose not to be here and choose wrongly. Choose a life of drudgery over the discovery of jewels? One of us is the fool.

There are chipmunks all over the place. The biggest one with a red chest (who I called Red in a burst of imagination) liked to watch me shovel, getting closer and closer, and talking about it all the way.

I put nuts out for him, which he scoops up and demands more. Over the days, I put the nuts closer and closer. Soon Red is snatching them out of my hand. Now Red follows me everywhere, in camp, ventures up the hill with me, to the bathroom. As I read in camp in the morning, Red skitters around on my lap till I feed him another almond. Sometimes he sits on my shoulder for the view, and to leap off and attack other chipmunks.

The food pile is a source of great delight for him, tearing and shredding into noodles, packaged soup, and any kind of nut or energy bar. Red knows that the jars hold peanut butter. He chews off the labels, and then works on the lid. In frustration, he tries to steal the whole thing, and I catch him rolling the jar into the brush on the edge of camp.

One day he steals some light sticks. I found one after dark that had been activated in the woods. Seems he was starting his own illuminated chipmunk city. I really love this little guy, riding my shoulder, his little hands gripping and pulling at me. He's the equivalent of a woodland pirate parrot; but, in this case, more like the chipmunk man of Alcatraz.

#### *v. Bear*

Some funky food was in the pile. Sugar cookies, a rotten mango, some moldy bread—all of which I put out for the local black bear to consume. Which he did. He then walked directly into camp, no more than ten feet from where I sat. I was so still, reading, that he didn't realize I was there. So I watched him for some minutes. It was clear he wanted more cookies, his nose was up next to me, looking over the cookie menu.

"Do you want coffee with that?" I ask.

"What kind do you have?" he replies.

"Costa Rican Black."

"Oho. Matches my fur."

"Leave room?"



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

“Where?”  
 “For cream, idiot.”  
 “Oh. OK. But lots of sugar.”  
 “Do you have a major credit card?”  
 “Do I look like I have a major credit card?”  
 “We’ll need your number and profile for our records?”  
 “Look, I don’t even have any pockets. I’ve never dealt with a financial conglomerate in my life.”  
 “Social Security number?”  
 “Nope.”  
 “Well, I’m afraid the coffee is out. Would you like a credit application?”  
 “I want some more fucking cookies! Hand over the bacon while you’re at it!”  
 “Security!” I cry. “I’ll have you arrested for attempted anthropomorphic eating. You know that’s not politically correct. Your kind is being jailed in Yellowstone for that.”  
 “Well, fuck you, speciesist! I don’t even like that yuppie coffee brand. Tight ass! I’m going to tell my mother.”  
 “Please don’t. You do realize I can kill you for sport and never go to trial?” My sweaty hand grips my pathetically tiny Swiss Army knife.  
 “No trial in town. We have our own law out here. Go ahead and try.”  
 “Is that a threat, you ungrateful fur ball?”  
 “Yes” is all he says.  
 The bear turns slowly and lumbers back into the forest. Disgusted with humanity, as usual.

#### *vi. Alone*

The bottom of the mega-hole is reached in August. Yes, there are thousands of carats of gems, worth maybe \$5000 or more. But now I don’t give a shit. I question what the hell I’m doing. *What is life if all you do is alone?* Bill harasses me a little more about what to do now, but I’m done with the guy and tell him to get lost. For good.

Strangely, he does disappear, and then I sort of miss him. But I have Red now for company and, though all he talks about is nuts, he keeps up a lively conversation.

Meanwhile, I’ve pretty much forgotten about my fellow man. I don’t need them anymore. I have transitioned into a peace to rival Thoreau’s at Walden Pond. I am as any other bug out here, and I know most of their names. *Where does the sky stop and the land begin?*

If the trees and the water and all the animals act like I am a part of them, then I must be a forest creature. I stop work on the mine. The value of tiny colored pebbles has lost its meaning to me. I cannot envision the end result of cutting and cash—what I would do with it—it all is so far away. Mining the hole seems so irrelevant.

I invent survey equipment made out of sticks, just to see if I can do it. With these contraptions, I survey the height of giant fir trees. A notion to build tree houses obsesses my mind, but the sixty feet of air between myself and the tree-top is daunting. Selecting a cluster of trees on a steep slope satisfies my architectural urges, where I make a fine platform out of trees and old flume boxes. The airy perch would sleep a dozen.

### *vii. Human Visitors*

In the middle of August, my girlfriend Terry arrives with a 300-pound brain-dead woman. I had considered boning them both at the same time, but the fat one is so nothing, so much a huge slab of meat, that I lose interest in both of them. *What if I got trapped between this corpulent flesh and lost some parts?* Be hard to find them again. After sucking down two reefers, I am on a brain-damaged intellectual level, and have no more desire than a sex change gone wrong.

The rescue of my sorry self is somewhat welcome—the new food, the drugs, the possibilities. But almost as soon as they show up, I want them to vacate again. I have human companions again, but they don't say anything. No stories, no jokes, just nothing. *How can they not even ask questions?*

My clothes are caked in mud and half ripped off by branches. With amusement I watch as a cloud of bugs buzzes them, seeking unsullied meat. The big one should be able to feed at least 30,000. I have the immunity of stink and grime. They are mobbed.

Terry brings a hyper little rat dog. This asshole sets to hassling Red full time, cornering him in rock piles. I figure Red can hold his own, escape this citified maniac. But I am woefully wrong. Red finally makes a mistake and the rat dog kills him. Just rips his guts open and leaves him. I am mortified.

I want to kill the dog, but Terry thinks it's just an innocent little lap dog. The thing is an insidious killer. I feel like killing all these asshole visitors. I give Red a Viking funeral, a 15-foot bonfire. I don't give a shit if I make a forest fire. The heat dries the tears on my face.

My mind is pretty far-gone now. Humanity seems like the lowest form of life. I hate everyone and their fucking dogs. *I hate 'em hard.* I don't feel I can re-integrate with society. With all their cars and commodities, their cavalier attitude toward Nature, their irrelevant blithering into and about electronics.

I can't stand them. I wanted companions, *but the gods gave me mindless morons.*

The fat unfuckable one leaves in a week. Good riddance. I resolve to talk to Terry about everything, and try to kick the asshole dog at every chance. A few weeks later, we are back in Colorado civilization.

I soften to mindless suburban existence, the frenetic nothingness these monkeys engage in. Dashing off to work jobs they hate, then home to smoke a huge pile of dope, talking only of food and dogs.

But, as they say, when in Rome . . . so I take to the weed. And this works. My angst is buried under a truckload of torpidity. I'm synchronized with the masses, slow moving, slack jawed, unthinking. Too bombed to think about saving the world now. Actually, I don't care.

### *viii. Recruitment*

But my problem remains. How to get company and assistants to the mine? There's plenty of ore to go. Lots of reserves. An easy half a million just sitting there looking at me—minus the trees and the seven feet of overburden. The vision of such a change of life, just below my feet, is enough to fit me for a straight jacket.

Back to my inscrutable calculating mind. Back to the intentional communities classified ads I was reading. The entreaties for a meaningful life by wanderers of the globe.

I mull it over. “What will lure these unsuspecting souls to the mine? Duhhh . . . *money!*” That’s obvious any day of the week. These poor choads. Good at nothing. Devoid of all chutzpah, all moxie, all stone, all ability to be involved or create something. Just inconsequential rubes waiting to be fired in the first wave of Trump economics.

Last year I gave away the bigger stones that had any value to anyone who visited. Thus, by year’s end, I had only half of what I thought I had. So I have to make a new plan. A plan that gets me *mine* from the *mine*.

OK. So corporate memo to self: *don’t give away any of the big stones*. But this is what anybody would come here for. They are mad with desire to walk away with a one-pound ruby.

I did give away a lot of the stones, though, even though I dug the hole they came out of. But now is a new year, 2017. This year I want to triple production, but don’t want to screw myself in the ass like I did last year. The bootie is still sore.

*How then to distribute this wealth to make everyone happy?* The raw stones are hard to sell. Raw stones come to this country by 55-gallon barrels from Tanzania.

One fellow I heard of moved into a New York penthouse with two barrels of sapphires and a Siberian tiger. Whenever he needed cash, the man would take up a scoopful, pour it into his pocket, and head for the jeweler with the tiger. The tiger prevented the possibility of mugging. Muggers fled before the tiger, although they knew the loot the owner was carrying. The tiger snacked on chunks of raw meat. Loved it fresh.

Raw stones sell for \$50 a carat, tops. A carat is 1/5 of a gram, about the size of a half a dried pea or lentil. Raw stones are sold by the kilo, or 5000 carats.

But cut stones sell. Jewelers don’t have to guess what the outcome of a cut stone will be. Cut stones start at \$500 a carat, and go up in price with color, clarity, saturation, and size. So the real value of the mine is not in a bucket of colored pebbles, but what the pile looks like after cutting. Only 5% are big enough to cut. Of those, only 20% will be exceptional. One percent of the recovered weight of all stones. So one good stone can pay for everything ten times or, if stolen, crash the mine.

We’re playing the anomaly factor, the “Nugget Effect.” It’s called *seeking the 1%, the inside straight, the long shot*.

But if you play long enough, move enough sapphire ore, the odds are in your favor. The 5% of cuttable stones is consistent in the ore zone. It is measured in carats per square foot. It is not a gamble that you will get cuttable stones; you will. It’s just that you have to mine 100 carats to get a couple of 2.5 carat stones that will cut to one-carat-sized brilliant jewels, worth maybe \$1000 if you are lucky.

*Now how the hell can I pay the hopeful participants with that?*

#### *ix. A Plan*

Somebody once said: “The wheels of the mind turn slowly, but the gears mesh incredibly fine.” After a few days of deep cogitation, I develop a plan.

Because nothing is worth spit until cut, the peckerwoods will have to wait for the finished product. Cut. Post-cutting. Even post-selling.

I decide then and there to take 60% off the top. Let the minions divide the other 40% among themselves, depending on who did the most work. The percentage of work each puts in—relative to all possible work days—will be their percentage of the 40%.

And so each participant is motivated to bust ass and work as many days as possible. I figure the extra help will more than compensate for giving away 40%. My 60% will be fatter than if I worked alone. *I like this.*

Others will like it too, even if they don't understand it. But they will know they are getting their share. The only problem is that they will be motivated to kill the others for a bigger slice of the pie. Oh well, I never said this was without risk.

Thus, with the plan firmly in mind, I write the whole thing up. Then post it to the classified ads of IC.org as a new intentional community. It's called *Mining Nomads*. Our creed is this:

*We own no land. We grow no vegetables. We have no expensive condos to sell. We attest to no religion except gold and sapphires. We wander from claim to claim, tearing into the earth and harvesting the minerals. Our home is the pine-filled forests. Our community is other like-minded individuals, living in tents, learning and practicing mining with "sustainable use."*

Buzz words to the new masses. Everyone is so goddamned PC. Unless it's "sustainable" and "re-purposed," it has no hip chic value. These people must really love plastic. Lasts forever. You can use a milk jug for your water supply, or to store hydrochloric acid.

So I post it there. Post it also in Facebook, both public and private. Zero response. Guess we're not all friends. Who knows? Maybe Mark Zuckerman hacked it out because he thought it was a sex recruitment scam. The only sex here is the *fuck you* part in my mind.

Sure enough, as anticipated, the souls without a life respond. A drug dealer in Durango. A carpenter in California. A royalty parasite in London. A 38-year-old pizza boy in Chicago.

Pizza Boy is not so sure. He is weighing his \$7.35 an hour plus tips against the greatest adventure in a lifetime. If he gave up his steady job for a shot at \$10,000 with a pack of laughing, drinking, incredibly interesting people, how would that work? I have to tell him to shit or get off the porcelain. I ask him if he still wanted to deliver pizza in ten years, or be a mining engineer with a life full of women and adventure? In a few days he responds that he's loading the pizza truck with camping equipment and coming our way. I hope he brings a few hot pies with him.

But adventure is not for everyone. It's hard and painful. Adventure looks best at a remote time in the future. You spend all your money and possibly get nothing in return—except great stories. *In my mind, what else is there to life but the stories you tell?*

To live a life without stories is to be a robot. Now, in these times, robots are controlling the minds of youth with the little me-phones. Stories are gone and the children are unimaginative and boring. A devolution from the previous century.

#### *x. Launch*

At last the adventure begins. June 1st is leaving day. But I don't leave. I am disorganized. I am lazy. I am a little scared in an old man way, and loathe to live out in the weather like a creature of the woods. I hate the drive, and particularly the three hours it takes to get through the Salt Lake corridor. I struggle for sympathy from Terry, but get none.

Why should I? I'm free and launching on an adventure, while everyone else has to work

at a job, pay a mortgage, attend to children and old people. But, hell, at least they have someone to attend to. They live in a warm house with dogs and doors. They see people all day and have long phone conversations. I don't see people. No people to see. No friend to pal around with. Now I'm going into *deep* exile. No roof, no heat, no friends, no company and, as it turns out, no salt or eating utensils. This I will not discover until later.

But all is not lost. I do have a secret weapon to counter loneliness. I do have that someone who needs me and who I can care for. The Cat. Pomo is a remarkably lazy, easy-going, fat, black and white, long-haired lap cat.

No, I don't know if she will freak out, run away, be a snack for a lurking wild animal. I realize that she may not make it, but I'm selfish. I gotta have some company. Somebody to talk to. Like a pretty woman, she ignores me wholesale—but then, also like a woman, she gives me a little affection when it's not too much trouble.

Pomo is really good in the truck. Looks out the window curiously, doesn't cry piteously, settles down to sleep on her cushion. Normally a cat will climb to the highest point—your head—then secure itself firmly with twenty needle hooks around the hair line. Not this cat. Everything is just sort of *whatever*. A brilliantly torpid travel companion.

I am loath to leave, still. Yes, I have what some would call a vacation but, to myself, it's similar to checking into a solitary confinement cell in a Siberian Gulag. It is a notch or two below a half-paid trip to Flint, Michigan.

So I don't leave. I find a new episode of *Genius* on the TV and fire up the fourth joint of the day. *What's the rush to go freeze my ass?*

*Tomorrow, methinks, will look better for all this.*

June 2nd shines its golden sunbeams on my grey depressed face. Everything is still to do, and alone. Go through the morning ritual, writing goodbyes to half a dozen on the computer. Somewhat like suicide notes. Terry is off with her friends and work, two things I seem to have given up long ago.

I pet Pomo. She walks on the keyboard, sending a message to my friend John: "aaaaawwwwcccckkkkuuuuu." The poor thing hasn't mastered punctuation yet, so I hope John can understand it. Behind me is a small mountain of clothes that need packing. It looks like a trash picker's dump in India. Basically, all my clothes.

I could, in theory, move to Baton Rouge or Winnipeg and have everything. Is Manitoba warmer than Idaho this time of year?

There's still everything else too. The steel sluice box, steel screen, massive wheelbarrow, tools to dig the Panama Canal, a pump and hoses, six totes of crap. All in all, about 2½ truck loads' worth.

And the truck is fragile, driving with a ¾ burnt-out clutch. My reluctance to leave manifests itself with broken down truck fantasies. Broken down in Utah where their expression of Mormon love is to charge double for repairs.

But I pack. Pack and pack. Smoke the reefers. I bought \$200 worth of reefers. At four for \$20, that's 40 joints. These were supposed to be for the trip, but I have them mostly smoked up after two weeks of "storage." I'm too fucking paranoid to drive through Utah and Idaho with them. I'm a three strikes guy whose fourth would lock me away till the end of time. That's kinda tempting. Three meals a day. No expenses. A warm well-lighted room. Lots of company and companions. But I think I'll pass for now.

The truck is all packed by 7 PM. Time to go. With six hours to the Salt Lake Valley, then I'll run the three-hour gauntlet in the dead of night. During the day, it's bumper-to-bumper maniacs at 70 MPH. I've never seen people in such a sweat to get to work. I've heard it's for their god.

Goddamn glad it's not my god, driving me like a dog. All the Mormons are going faster than my old heap, rattling along at 60 tops. The favorite thing on Salt Lake City freeways is to pass on the right. Not illegal there. Often two cars pass on either side, sorta like the Mexican highway races through the cartel states.

The truck is still packed. I still don't want to go. What if the cat breaks down, leaving me and the truck stranded? I watch a rerun of *Bering Sea Gold* and smoke another doobie. Better stock up on dopamine destruction now.

Soon, no more doobies. No more TV. But drying out will be good, in a punishing way. No weed and no TV. It may just revive and restore my brain. *To what? For what?*

It's now 8 PM. Load Pomo and we're on the road. The long and boring road. Uneventful. Which is OK. At 1 AM I'm in the Salt Lake valley. At 4 AM I'm through it. In another eight hours, I'm in my campsite at 6500 feet. High in the empty woods next to the ghost town of Leesburg.

Now, June 3rd, I can't do anything. I'm a used rubber. Crow bait. Burnt out to the bone. The cat doesn't want to leave the truck, her new safe spot. The outside is full of monsters. It takes me four hours to set up the tent. All I want to do is sleep. So sleep I do. Exhausted to the marrow. Sleep till 8 AM the next day.

*To be continued in Cenacle | 102 | December 2017*

\* \* \* \* \*



Courtesy of Charlie Beyer

*Colin James*



### A Sadist's Traditional Response to an Emergency

I became aware of the camera  
hanging from my balls when  
presenting myself for reduction surgery,  
the recurrence of a routine task.

Standing over the Protestant bowl  
youth confirming angle in hand,  
a shadow of the thinnest possible wire  
led down to a lens box  
of no previously determinable presence.  
Until now I hadn't dribbled.

Shaken by a tiny panic of the gonads  
like gasps from a dutiful adorer,  
the wire was catgut.  
I always run on the late side but  
when had this been added to my schedule?

I monastically shaved my anus in the mirror,  
since the hair had become almost like fur.  
Not unappealing yet confusing to sit on.

I managed to style it sparingly in Egyptian oil,  
then grab my Victorian partner's harmonium,  
departing respectfully through the donation door.

\* \* \*

**Reformed Survivalist**

L searches for her thinking chair  
containing the ugliest  
of the three abandoned pups  
left on our doorstep,  
but the smartest by far.

The pup is wearing black fur.  
Fox or possibly mink.  
There is a graze on his best side,  
but is not so obvious  
as the gold on his paw,  
heavy and soft.

The slightest trace of lace  
caresses each fearlessly.

We will continue to dress  
him conservatively until he  
is well into his recovery.

\* \* \*

### Zombie Intervention

I had tried to prolong my stay here  
by a night from Friday to Sunday,  
but the guy at the desk was uncooperative.

His rudeness and obsequiousness  
have become quite ridiculous.  
I vehemently deny making a request for breakfast.

I always travel with the remains of a face.  
There is no need to drag an unresponsive body  
to the open trunk of my Mercedes,  
parked in the back of the hostel.

I told all this to the guy at the desk.  
He went out and slammed the trunk shut,  
then uttered something indecipherable.

If anyone else should turn up unexpectedly,  
then of course traditional methods will have to do.

\* \* \*

**I Married a Model from an Ocean State Job Lot Flier**

I was arguing with the cashier  
while holding one hand  
over an eye,  
affecting a look.

The manager didn't speak pirate  
so body language was irrelevant.  
The rolling hills of Euganea even  
would require descriptive winces  
like overused caterwauls.

A t-shirt rack close by  
began to disassociate.  
I could tell by the run-on Rs  
and quasi-proletarian Ps.  
Calming down was like  
laying in a bed of used tissues.

Security was provided by  
the only other male present,  
couldn't tell if older or younger  
as he didn't fit any prophetic category.

I was led away by my future wife  
who heard the noise while shooting  
a fashion layout in a back room.  
I became immediately compensational  
and have duly remained so.

We have even successfully converted  
some of her old smocks  
into blue window curtains,  
and are currently engrossed in  
other conceptual projects.

\* \* \* \* \*



*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*

## Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse  
of high notes."*

*The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.*

### *A Tribute*

It was the day the Trickster came to Luna T's Cafe. Long blonde-haired & blue-eyed, a near-always-present smirk, friendly one. He'd come from somewhere else not long before but had heard from the Traveling Troubadour that this place was quite welcoming.

The day began early at Luna T's Cafe, with the door opening & Mr. Bob the barman stepping in. A middle-sized man, on the slender side, short pepper-grey hair, a friendly smile for most, if not all comers. The Trickster would come to like him a lot.

Pulls on the string attached to the neon sign telling the joint's name, & it being open. Could walk blindfolded through the darkened bar to the back room where he deposits his coat & hat. Finds his apron, old but sturdy, ties it on. Colorous splatter patterns all over it, gift of a friend long ago. Cackles in that back room. His & a mysterious other's.

Comes out to the barroom again, still no lights on, walks around turning on machines for awhile. Beer taps, jukebox, radio, TV.

Briefly back outside in the cool autumn air, linger, linger, breathe, smile, plucks his copy of the *City Tymes* from the milk crate next to the door. Paperboy gets an extra dollar a week to land it there every day, pull the makeshift cover over it on wet ones.

Finally with paper walks to the switch box on the wall behind the bar & flips & flips till the whole place is turned on & ready to.

Radio behind the bar is an old tabletop model. Learned how to fix it himself a few years ago. Swap out tubes. Found friendly souls online who loved old machines too, & hoarded good parts to sell.

Bit of warming up, static, then the usual oldies station. The morning DJ had been bending the



format lately, playing songs by that recently passed rocker Tom Petty, one a day. Said management allowed him one a day.

All rock & roll made Mr. Bob think of his friend Rich Americus, who owned Luna T's Cafe & led the place's house band, Noisy Children. And Petty one of Rich's greatest heroes of all.

*Runnin' down a dream  
rang the guitars  
that never would come to me  
ring! ring!  
workin' on a mystery  
ring lower  
goin' wherever it leads  
drums pound-pound-pound  
runnin' down a dream*

Song soars on shouts & harmonies, raises up & up, Mr. Bob turns it up a little, getting it a little more.

The *Tymes* reporting how another famous man was caught groping girls in his employ. Seems like all those big shots couldn't keep their hands off asses, up skirts, wherever something soft & shapely was near.

Wondering what it meant, *really meant*. Not simplistic newspaper ink, scandal vampires.

But just then an old, old man burst through the door. Short, indistinctly shaped beneath his winter-heavy coat. Crying out from his ancient depths upon arrival.

***"Saloon-Keeper, the days grow shorter & darker! The trials of man more cartoonish, more desperate! Even in the golden sun we are become a cold, self-obsessed kind! Dreams of plastic molding, vague, crumbling, & the next, & the next, & the next!"***

Waiting for more as he watches Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker settle on his usual stool, ancient cane resting by his leg.

Wondering if this man was ever young enough or randy enough to pinch a girl's bottom just because, Mr. Bob fetches the old man's craggy mug & pours him spring water, kept room temperature as his preference. His decades, centuries at the bourbon over, mostly.

Sits, staring at nothing, sipping very occasionally, Dr. K feels a small presence in his lap. Knows, without looking down, that it is the White Bunny, come in these ridiculously still living years to nap near to him, *hmmm* softly up into his ears, sometimes stare into his eyes & take him so far elsewhere he cannot recall here or there for a happy time.

"That was the late great Mr. Tom Petty, rocking out in his glories with the Heartbreakers, & this is Commander Q keeping you musical company this A.M."

A long time passes. Knickerbocker present but not. Radio back to the more usual oldies. The Association, The Turtles, Gordon Lightfoot.

Mr. Bob reads on: "I was young then, 26. He called me into his office to discuss my project. Invited me to sit in his lap. He wasn't my boss but he was important. It happened a few times. I never told anyone but he was gross. I felt awful."

A voice suddenly. "He hired the pretty ones. Bet you every one of them had years of lap invitations to call their own. Bet they calculated the worth of each lap too, once they figured it out."

Mr. Bob looks up. Bowie the spy, long unseen around here. "That's pretty cynical, son. Is that what you believe?"

Bowie is tall, quite thin, one blue-green eye, one mushroom eye. Dressed . . . vaguely.

"I don't believe anything about human behavior. There are social norms, not universal ones. But what I do believe drives men & women alike are hunger for power, & fear of powerlessness. No gender or race or ethnicity or kind of human holds major stock in angelic or asshole behavior. We all shake what we got. Some shake it better. Some have more to shake."

"And that's it?" Mr. Bob pours him a glass from the unmarked turquoise bottle kept special for him.

Nods. Sips. Smiles. "No. But it's a damned good part of it. Everyone wants to grab ass, just that most us refrain. Cuz we're trained, afraid? Maybe. And who doesn't want their ass grabbed, by the right person in the right moment? Nothing's straight & nothing's simple."

Mr. Bob nods. "But an asshole's still an asshole."

Bowie nods & toasts & sips.

Turns to the little blue & pink piglet sitting smirking on the stool next to him.

"Ya think?"

Smirk. "I do."

"And?"

Smirk but silence.

Awhile quiet again in the lit but still murky bar, & then Mr. Bob puts on a new TV show he's taken to.

"Welcome, friends to *New Trip Town!*" cries the affable looking woman with the microphone that looks like a kind of whittled down branch. The theme song plays. Mr. Bob perks up. He'd heard this one the other day. Bouncy, electric fun.

*Baby, even the losers  
Get lucky some time!*

It's a tense game for the very very tall black man with the long long beard, answering question after question; his prize, if he wins it, a map to the Island that houses the Tangled Gate. His dream to bring his aging father to the Fountain there, perhaps restore him to health, or at least make his passing less excruciating.

"Where is the Tangled Gate from?"  
 "Emandia!"  
 "Who lives under the Tangled Gate?"  
 "The Creatures!"  
 "Who lives in the Cave?"  
 "The Beast!"  
 "How does the Princess navigate the Gate?"  
 "The box of threads!"

Aunt, she of the long braid & heavy boots, agelessly handsome, turns to the TV camera & says, "Two more questions tomorrow for the Grand Prize!"

Mr. Bob turns down the TV as live music erupts from the other room. *New Trip Town* shifts a few times before it seems to synch with the music:

- \* A cartoon Mr. Tom Petty racing with a small cigar chomping imp through the wilds of Dreamland
- \* A guitar strumming Mr. Tom Petty riding high through the late '80s mall wasteland of LA
- \* A Mad Hatter Mr. Tom Petty & his Mad Cohorts torturing a blonde Alice before feasting upon her
- \* A mad scientist Tom Petty waltzing with a dead blonde siren through a narrow mansion's darkened rooms

"It's about power & death!" cries a wildly drunken Bowie as he leads the White Bunny, the blue & pink piglet, & some little black & white pandy bears he found one time cackling on the ceiling of the men's room, leads them all to the band room to dance.

The Trickster strolls in quietly in the midst of all this, long purple coat & tails, handsome top hat, small round spectacles. Blonde, blue-eyed. Wordless, he finds himself a corner to pause & take this all in. Beautiful smirk. Sitting right beneath the Hendrix at Woodstock '69 poster. Of course.

*Thank you, Mr. Tom Petty. Your music ever makes me happy. You have my love always.*



\* \* \* \* \*



---

*Judih Haggai*



dream veils fall away  
early morning orchestra  
clock, fridge and birds

\* \* \*

dream reminder  
flow, keep flowing, flow  
mind as a river

\* \* \*

dear self  
night, day, in or out  
this is your life

\* \* \*

how old am i?  
what is this thing called time?  
one espresso, two

\* \* \*

2 maniacs  
2 countries with nuclear  
read or not read news?

\* \* \*

loquat, fig, lemon  
fruit trees lush and green  
hint of future time

\* \* \*

signs of autumn  
guava ripens on tree  
brisker bike rides

\* \* \*

while no one looks  
her single rose  
left on the table

\* \* \*

luxury of time  
to delve and relish  
and there's no "but"

\* \* \*

so much to see  
details and big pictures  
pardon my silence

\* \* \*

cycle of being  
each breath  
a new chance

\* \* \*

a flock of birds  
just before sunset  
mottled pink sky

\* \* \* \* \*

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*Jimmy Heffernan*



## Notes on Fate Versus Free Will

I personally do not believe in clockwork determinism, so I feel events are more or less likely to happen, but that the improbable can always happen, and things can always change. That said, I feel the universe has much more of a say in our lives than we do—we're just puny human individuals in a gigantic cosmos anyway.

I do not believe we have “free” will, but I do believe we have a will that is genetically and culturally constrained. So we can effect actions in the world that are not automatic, although I note that humans act virtually automatically most of the time. But consciousness is always there at the bottom of things, so humans are indeed not robots.

Our will has an outlet in reality, but it is very tiny. Nature and chance have much more of a say in how our lives will go than we do. So really, to pit free will against fate is wrong, because even if our will is free, the hand of earthly happenings determines much more than our will ever could. It is not until you get to the Caesars or Napoleons (or Christs) that an individual will shapes events meaningfully. But I think, in our lives as humans, there is always wiggle room to execute our will in a small way. But it can always be nixed by happenings.

\* \* \*

Every thought a person has, however it fires, is thoroughly constrained by genetic and especially by cultural (i.e. memetic, e.g. language itself, primarily) factors which are salient and fundamental. The evolution of the culture, of which you are an unwitting part, and the genetic equipment, of which you are involuntarily composed, had at no point, anywhere along the line, anything to do with anyone’s will. Culture is a larger and more dynamical independent process and it is not, and has never been, formed by choices.

\* \* \*

“Block time” can be a correct description of our universe and, to my mind at least, still preserve volition. In block time, from a higher dimension one would be able to see every event from the beginning of our universe until its demise—it is basically a “block” of events which only appear to unfold in our dimension of time—like a range of mountains in which each peak is an individual moment in the larger range of time.

I can imagine that, even though the events of the universe may in some way be predetermined (as by fate), it does not nullify our ability to be willful. Perhaps you were always going to choose a particular way. In block time, you were somehow bound to do it. Why can’t you really have chosen it? Does block time really forbid it?

My contention is no, it doesn't; any concession made that fate obviously exists does not exclude willful behavior. Appreciating the power of fate may serve to trivialize the notion of will, which in my opinion cannot properly be called truly "free." But will and fate are not incompatible.

\* \* \*

Most people do not have a destiny.

\* \* \*

Life is definitely a ride, and should be characterized as such, but the interesting thing is that we are allowed to steer it a little of the time.

\* \* \*

One must remember that free will is not the same as true will.

\* \* \*

When I contend that actions are genetically determined, I am not saying that the genetic switches themselves are causing them, but rather that the behavioral "organs" which they have constructed are the primary actors. There is, within the genetic prescription, latitude for several behaviors.

This does not mean that humans are automatic (even though they act that way much of the time). Humans are not, in fact, sophisticated robots—one has to leave room for consciousness, which obviously makes the whole picture quite a bit more complicated and subtle.

\* \* \*

The will is essentially like an organ. Only it's one you can use consciously.

\* \* \*

I feel that if the circumstances of my life—the events and their chronology—had been different, the arc of my personal being would still have been the same. In other words, I don't think the experiences of my life define who I really am. I think this particular self would have, sooner or later, shaken out in any alternate universe in which the initial conditions were the same (barring any major traumas). That's just how it feels.

\* \* \*

We do not choose how we choose.

\* \* \*

The creative, conscious force at the center of all of us is capable of overcoming the mechanism of the mind and nervous system. This doesn't change the fact that most people act mechanistically most of the time.

\* \* \*

I don't know whether free will actually exists or not—and occasionally I have good reason to believe it doesn't—but I prefer to conduct myself as if it does.

\* \* \*

Moving one's arm, or doing anything consciously, is sort of like power steering. You set the process in motion, but there are billions of operations/computations going on in your brain and body which carry out the command for you.

\* \* \*

What we are calling free will is the confluence of matter and spirit. Ultimately, pure awareness is the reality.

\* \* \*

Will could, in some sense, be seen as that which changes thought into energy.

\* \* \*

Conduct yourself for a week as if you have free will. Then conduct yourself for a week as if you are a deterministic robot. Note where there are contradictions, and see which one you like better.

\* \* \*

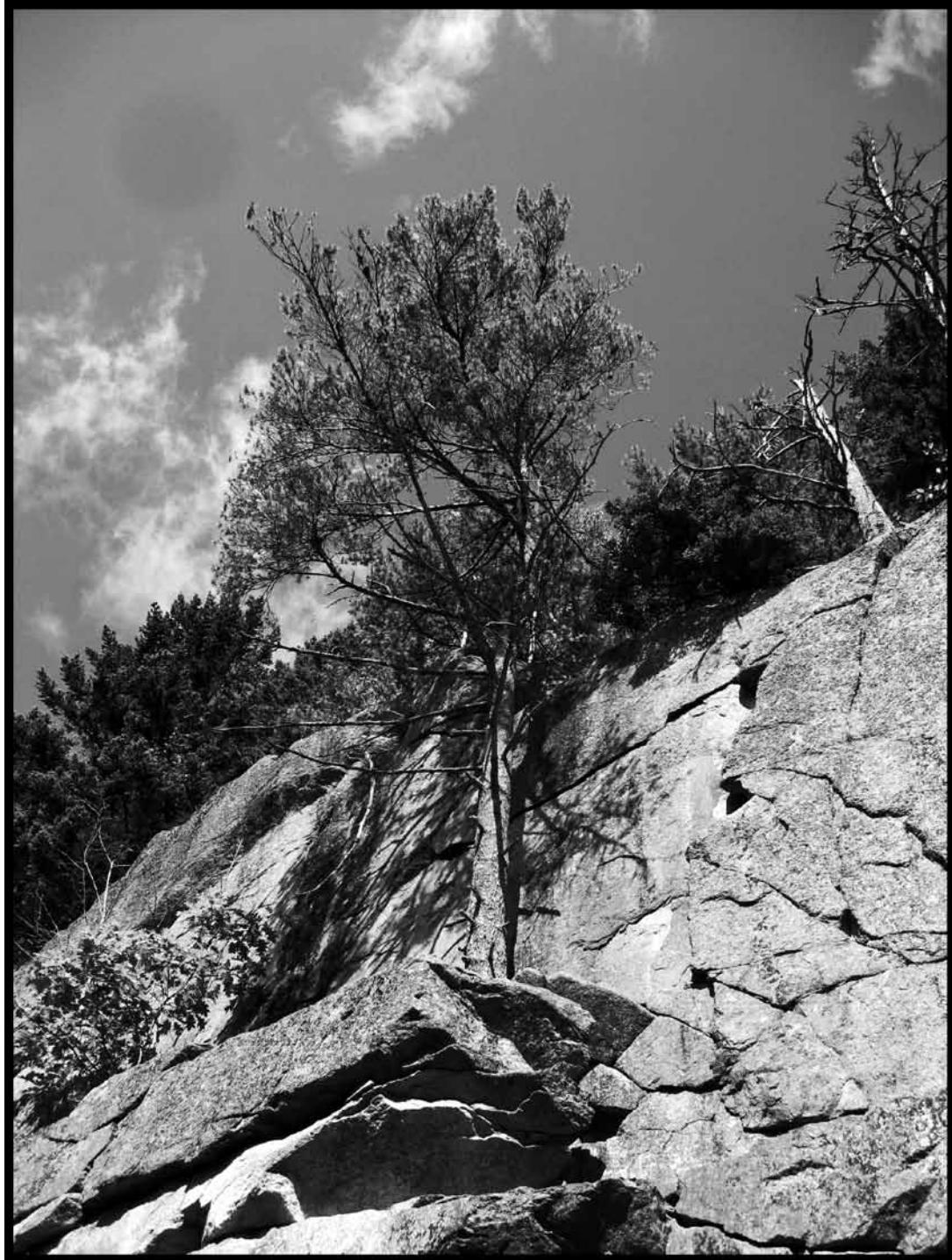
Is there any better argument for some kind of free will than suicide? How do evolutionary biologists attempt to explain it?

\* \* \*

It seems to me that there is a bizarre contradiction at the heart of Hindu philosophy. On the one hand, they are hardcore fatalists, believing that one cannot change the world, and that free will is an illusion. But on the other hand, at the same time, with respect to their system of karma, they believe that everyone is ultimately and totally responsible for their actions, especially those involving right action and morality.

These actions, not up to God, but up to the individual only, determine the future course of one's soul. So: they are hardcore fatalists who believe in freely willed behavior. Right? Perhaps they feel that one cannot change the world, but that one can change oneself.

\* \* \* \* \*





*Pablo Neruda*

### The She Bird

With my little terrestrial bird,  
my rustic earthen jug,  
I break out singing  
the guitar's rain:  
alleged autumn arrives  
like a load of firewood,  
decanting the aroma  
that flew through the mountains,  
and grape by grape my kisses  
were joined to her bunch.  
This proves that the afternoon  
accumulated sweetness  
like the amber process  
or the order of violets.  
Come flying, passenger,  
let's fly with the coals,  
live or cold,  
with the disorderly darkness  
of the obscure and the ardent.  
Let's enter the ash,  
let's move with the smoke,  
let's live by the fire.  
In mid autumn  
we'll set the table  
over the grassy hillside,  
flying over Chillan  
with your guitar in your wings.

\* \* \*

**In the center of the earth . . .**

In the center of the earth I will push aside  
the emeralds so that I can see you—  
you like an amanuensis, with a pen  
of water, copying the green sprigs of plants.

What a world! What deep parsley!  
What a ship sailing through the sweetness!  
And you, maybe—and me, maybe—a topaz.  
There'll be no more dissensions in the bells.

There won't be anything but all the fresh air,  
apples carried on the wind,  
the succulent book in the woods:

and there where the carnations breathe, we will begin  
to make ourselves a clothing, something to last  
through the eternity of a victorious kiss.

\* \* \*

### We are the clumsy passersby

We are the clumsy passersby, we push past each other with elbows,  
with feet, with trousers, with suitcases,  
we get off the train, the jet plane, the ship, we step down  
in our wrinkled suits and sinister hats.

We are all guilty, we are all sinners,  
we come from dead-end hotels or industrial peace,  
this might be our last clean shirt,  
we have misplaced our tie,  
yet even so, on the edge of panic, pompous,  
sons of bitches who move in the highest circles  
or quiet types who don't owe anything to anybody,  
we are one and the same, the same in time's eyes,  
or in solitude's: we are the poor devils  
who earn a living and a death working  
bureautragedically or in the usual ways,  
sitting down or packed together in subway stations,  
boats, mines, research centers, jails,  
universities, breweries,  
(under our clothes the same thirsty skin),  
(the hair, the same hair, only in different colors).

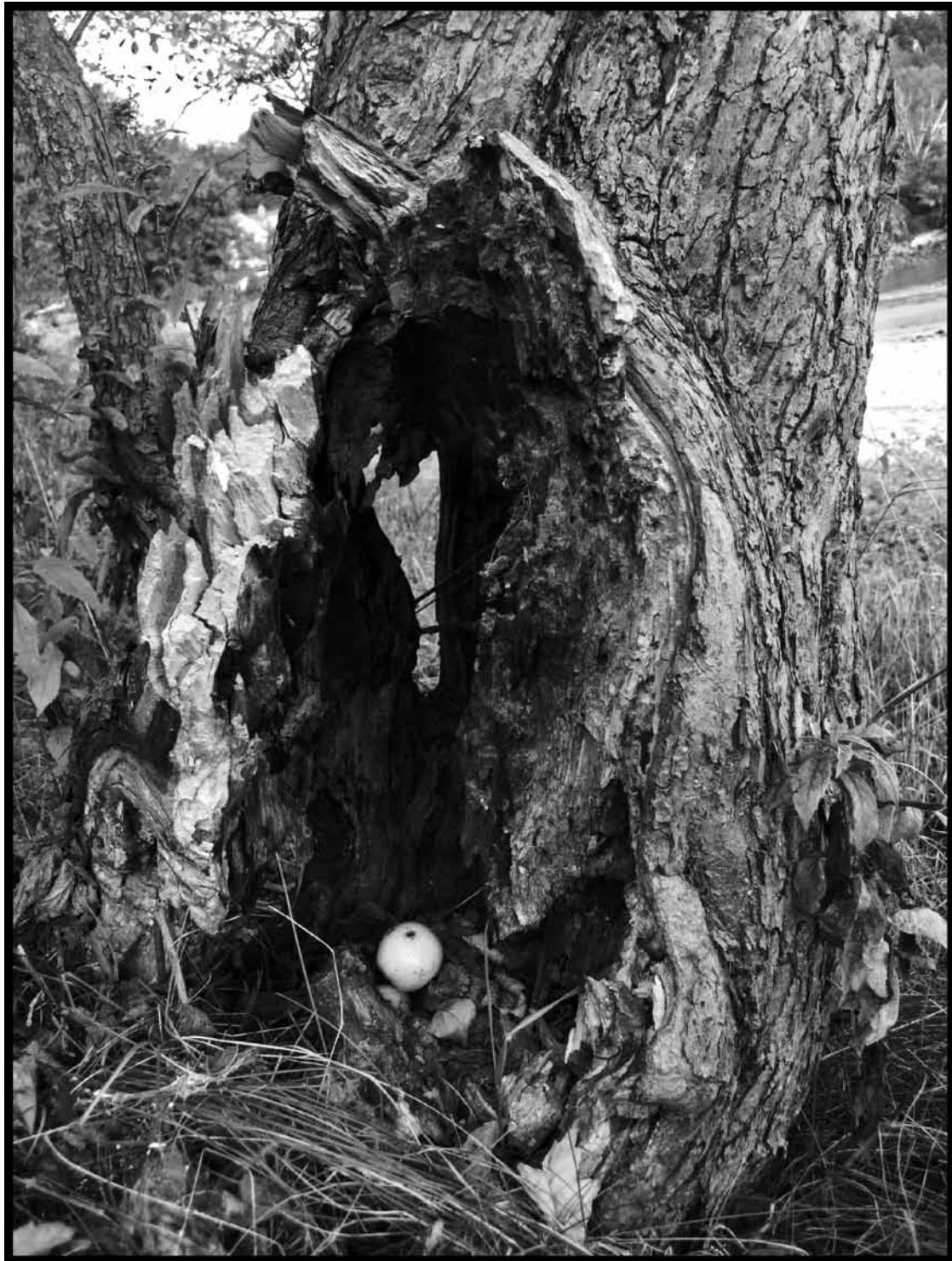
\* \* \*

**If You Forget Me**

I want you to know  
one thing.  
You know how this is:  
if I look  
at the crystal moon, at the red branch  
of the slow autumn at my window,  
if I touch  
near the fire  
the impalpable ash  
or the wrinkled body of the log,  
everything carries me to you,  
as if everything that exists,  
aromas, light, metals,  
were little boats  
that sail  
toward those isles of yours that wait for me.  
Well, now,  
if little by little you stop loving me  
I shall stop loving you little by little.  
If suddenly  
you forget me  
do not look for me,  
for I shall already have forgotten you.

If you think it long and mad,  
the wind of banners  
that passes through my life,  
and you decide  
to leave me at the shore  
of the heart where I have roots,  
remember  
that on that day,  
at that hour,  
I shall lift my arms  
and my roots will set off  
to seek another land.  
But  
if each day,  
each hour,  
you feel that you are destined for me  
with implacable sweetness,  
if each day a flower  
climbs up to your lips to seek me,  
ah my love, ah my own,  
in me all that fire is repeated,  
in me nothing is extinguished or forgotten,  
my love feeds on your love, beloved,  
and as long as you live it will be in your arms  
without leaving mine.

\* \* \* \* \*



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*Tom Sheehan*



## The Shoe in the Wall, or Viola's Place

[Fiction]

*i.*

Day closed in around me, and the night that followed, reverie and recompense fighting for equal space, or so it seemed, for hours on end. I had come down the road for about 30 miles, my car loaded with a good assemblage of scrap wood from packing crates, the heft and feel of each piece hanging on my fingertips, like echoes on the rebound; you know, the kind that refuse to let you sleep, wondering what tree in what forest a man with a purring chain saw in his hand had figured to be good enough for cutting.

Their images were locked up tight for me; I had cut wood in the state forest for six years at that point and tree selection had never bothered me, winter warmth with odds had grabbed me from slumber, working with my saw, the split logs in stacks growing each day in measureable cords.

*ii.*

The wood I was salvaging this time was for a complete re-do of our kitchen, much of it as requested by the lady of the house: "More cabinets, more shelving for dishware, food stuffs in their containers, countertop for work, a little more character for a room in this house erected in 1742, a real Colonial." She knew what she wanted and I knew I would get it done, as cheaply as I could; you know, most expenses to be spared, or something like that.

With ideas in mind, I had already torn down a wall, moved the rear door, opened space under stairs for a washing machine, positioned the dryer out of the way between rooms, to make one composite room running the full house, about 32 feet long. That's its whole length. It would be kitchen, den, TV room, with a place for my computer, home base for home hours upon hours, pre-dawn often running into thick darkness; when it's to be done, there's no time like now!

The ceiling became a new adventure when a true woodsman, Paul Jodoin, showed me how to mark a 4"x6" beam as a hand-hewn piece, adding a touch of texture, the whole length of 10 of them. How? Rig an old wringer washing machine with a rolling cutter that would chew at a beam as it was passed over the spinning blade of the rig, chewing odd cuts on one face of a beam at a time as if it had been hewn by an ax in the hands of an old logger. Each beam came authentic, old, passed over by time, hanging above me with a sense of pride and accomplishment, old as the hills, as can be said.

Progress, as it always arrives with hard labor, had to work through occasional obstacles: a rugged, hand-fashioned, real Colonial nail as stubborn as a deck of cards, or an MP on duty, or the mailman on his rounds; a board or beam wearing its age too well; now and then a most rugged hand-made spike standing in the way of progress; and, eventually, significantly, full of

messages, pleas, declarations, perhaps the hopes of a father, came exposed an anting-anting (a musical name for a good luck charm) of a girl's high button shoe, one side of its sole worn to a frazzle as if it had been dragged through a torturous life, and which was now found nailed to an overhead beam above one window, hidden from early view, tucked away forever.

I am positive it was a builder's plea for his daughter's cure, a lucky hope nailed in place to bless a new house, a cry for her cure, a wish for happiness for a child suffering long-duress. I knew then as now the shivers of a father at prayers. It seems the caliber of them never changes no matter the curse or the comfort befalls those you love.

*iii.*

The diligence stayed with me, and with it the progress and completion of the whole task, which did not get celebrated with a glass of wine or cold mug of beer, but the last piece of border Formica on the edge of the ten foot countertop, a tricky dodge on its own for a not-so-far-traveled journeyman; but it's still in place hanging by its sticky fingernails, so to speak. There's no counting the pounds of dough poured and pounded and fashioned into place, how many pizza layers or crusts have been spread in their varied formats by the chief cook of the room, what cakes or pies began and ended there.

But for the longest time that child's shoe kept returning to my thoughts, how she might have won a foot race by graceful default of friends, how many she might have lost with taunts in the air instead of cheers, how a father or mother might have suffered for her in silence or prayer.

I shared some part of small miseries.

I studied the shoe sitting on a shelf above my bench in the cellar, a contest of attraction from the year 1742 when the house was built. It sat alone, as if by choice, in dimness, half-light of early dawn, at a reaching edge of moonlight from behind a cloud softened by its light seeping in a low window. Going down stairs into that lonely working spot, it was the first object to reach my eyes; heading up, snapping the light switch off, it was the last thing I saw, and what I carried away with me.

*iv.*

The haunting was real. Her sounds were real. At times I'd hear her pleas, another time her short laughter on those rare occasions when she might have found humor, it too often lost, too often aimed at herself.

Once, in my reading, the word *compartmentalization* leaped surely but clumsily off the page, waiting my assimilation, or a lost image waiting on recovery. Ideas, we all are aware of, have springboards of their own design and implementation. All they call for is attention.

I looked at remnants of the wood, realizing I had some still piled up in the cellar, scrap, odd ends, corners, slabs, you name it, at hand, the residue of a completed task. I hardly ever threw anything away that had a minute, an hour, a whole month or more left in its service.

Now it worked on me, the spans of it, plans of it, at some order of formalization; basically it assumed a framework of captured emotions. It was a miracle how it climbed out of its darkness, how it stretched yet its fingers, how I caught it like a ball in a wide curve off the pitcher's mound.

*v.*

Pieces fell into my hands, or my fingers pulled a piece from the lower part of a pile. Partially stained, a few of them caught my eye in a hurry, a name rose from a far corner. I heard her being called home, called to a house or cabin built by the man who built this house, who nailed her wounded shoe above one window in the kitchen, nailed so it would never be seen but do the thing, the deed, the hope that an anting-anting called on, that tokens did, or good luck charms at their best.

I heard him call out her name, not insistently but containing enough softness to secure her attention. "Viola," said he, sweet as an instrument, as sweet as a chord, as soft as a finger touching one's own brow in the search for an answer, a solution, an echo lost in the thinking.

"Viola," he whispered, faint, fading, agreeing that her shoe could be placed elsewhere.

*vi.*

I would not let that shoe sit alone again, would not let it be unshared, unaccompanied, would have its friends and companions. 12" x 24" it would be, enclosed in glass it would be, its side depths at 2 1/2 inches, deep enough for the shoe and deep enough for its company. I planned on 5 or 6 compartments.

I'm a pack rat, a collector of things connected or colored or emblematic of conditions, standings, resolves, responsibilities. I found my father's Marine Corps medallions, the Corps insignia, an award medal for an honor of some sort (the reason long gone); my Combat Badge from the Korean War 1951-1952; my Army dog tags carrying my identification (Army serial number, my blood type, my religion); two gold miniature footballs awarded from Saugus High School football competition; and, last but not least, the single souvenir I had slipped into my dungaree pockets at the site of the First Iron Works in America—that I can see from my den window—a matchlock pistol recovered from under one-third of a waterwheel found near rotted under Central Street.

The road had been rerouted for the reconstruction effort. I had worked on the site from 1948 to 1950, and summers of 1952 to 1956 when I graduated from Boston College after separation from the Army.

I placed Viola's shoe in a compartment by itself, toes pointing right, high button laces rising four or so inches above the worn heel and worn sole, a place of her own, foot first. But not alone.

Below Viola's section I added old square nails pulled from walls of my own kitchen/den construction, a few hinges, a door latch, each piece signifying an era of the house.

In the bottom section split in two, I placed a collection of colored marbles/Aggies I had dug up from gardening work about the grounds of the house, even digging up the driveway for the Iron Works archeologist looking for the passage of a water canal that powered the bellows of the furnace fires.

*vii.*

It was completed in a matter of days, with glass inserts placed over each compartment. Viola's place, the name steady now in its calling, no limp, no pain, no more suffering. A child at rest . . . forever.

\* \* \* \* \*





*Martina Newberry*

### **The World is Ending**

Let me get my bearings. These are spaces  
I will never own. I feel such regret,  
especially now that the world is on fire.

The air is eaten by flame all around.  
Monks, with their skirts billowing, jump from the  
mountain tops, chanting *poverty, chastity,*

*indifference.* Keep laughing in the face  
of this molten planet—laugh your ass off.  
It's what you'll have left in the end. You think

this is an hallucination? A joke?  
A fantasy? Perhaps you're bewildered—  
the world is not ending, you've only backed

one last war, one last steaming holocaust.  
You've only stayed silent while continents  
starved and died, whittled down to rock

and bleached bone. Is your own part in this  
unlikely, misunderstood?  
Mine, unfortunately, is not.

I've participated and want to move on.  
Just give me a moment.

\* \* \*

**As Far As There Are Paths**

Words come off the tongue—  
predictable as saliva.

The winds of breath  
push them outward  
as far as there are paths  
and islands.

We can nearly not hear  
what we've let others know.  
We should be wiser,  
less willing to consider words  
any more important  
than the ways of tattered clouds.

The air around us says  
*speak speak speak.*  
The devil waits in the driveway—  
always hungry in the wake of his  
historical consciousness.

Every thing we know,  
we've already said.  
Our only hope is  
to un-know it and begin again—  
maybe a little quieter this time.

\* \* \*

### The First Forty-Four Years

What kept haunting my life was  
the I'm-Sorry Waltz  
*I'm sorry, I'm sorry,*  
over and over  
until I couldn't speak at all  
if it didn't start with *I'm sorry.*

Funny how it followed me  
for so long  
or I followed it.

Music or no music,  
you'll hear no more  
*I'm sorries*  
from me.

I left that dance floor  
with this admonition:  
*Watch out friends:*  
*being re-born*  
*can make a woman*  
*mean.*

\* \* \*

**Inland Empire, Smog**

When I came to say goodbye,  
you were glad I was going,  
relieved as though finding yourself  
outside a burning house—safe,  
if somewhat bereft.

I was married then  
to someone,  
another man, as I am  
at this moment. I wanted  
loss and something to ponder

over the years, something more  
profound than curtains and couches  
and clean carpets. You gave me that.  
You afforded me very little  
mercy, left me the delicate tattoos

of our lovemaking.  
You wanted to lose me  
almost as much as  
I wanted to be lost,  
loneliness being an acquired taste.

I hoped for one minute that you  
would ask me to stay, would claim  
everlasting love. Though I  
would not have believed it,  
it would have been sweet to hear.

All these years later, I'm glad  
you couldn't, didn't say it.  
This is a piss-poor explanation  
of what we were. I've had to  
reinvent myself in order

to record it. You will decide  
about me when you are older,  
more tired than you ever imagined  
yourself being. The last time we spoke,  
you sounded resigned,

so like you have always sounded.  
Your voice lacked leniency.  
You wanted no more or less  
than what you've always wanted.  
Perhaps that is almost enough.

\* \* \* \* \*

Bags End News  
No. 673 March 30, 1996  
Editor: Algernon Beagle  
King: Sheila Bunny  
(Written Down By: Lori Bunny)

### Seeking too Interview Betsee Bunny Pillo!

Noue that yor old pal Algernon iz bak too losin his bagel boyz jernilizm, I must allwee bee on the lookout for a good storee. I must hunt hi airlo an keep mah eerez wid opin evin the they flop so about whah hedbon.

Wan storee I nowd I had too go aftr, was won that new ends on that iz the strang doobings of that reet by lousy pillo named Betsee. She iz bak in Bagzond noue an I supoz finding outt about her crazed plans an nuw skeemz would see a good storee too rit about. Or evin, bedr an interview.

Bags End News  
No. 674 April 1, 1996  
Editor: Algernon Beagle  
King: Sheila Bunny  
(Written Down By: Lori Bunny)

### The Inspektr iz Kuming!

No viziter too mah strang horlam kan evr say that itz citizens dont' akt jest the way thay lik. No ser. Do thay need too be encouraged too Bump, bowns, or blowe jazz trumpet in aurl pikuljan wayz throo lif? No indeed.

But wat if sumwon did incorrig them? Wat if sumwon kam along an sed "O gys an creechours ut Bagzond I think yu har bin to shiy about letting yor wakkys waters flo. Go on! Go a litel bit farther!"

The guy responsible for awl of this iz cauld Iggy the Inspektr. Noue a long tim ago Iggy had

Bags End News  
No. 675 April 1, 1996  
Editor: Algernon Beagle  
King: Sheila Bunny  
(Written Down By: Lori Bunny)

### The Inspektrz' Almost Fleer!

Yor old pal Algernon triys hard too bee a pushurt sort. I mean, I liv in a strang plas fulll of strang peepel so strangnis iz wat wee hav in common, rit? A person cood evin cal me strang if he war a mean gy or smutthing.

An evr sines the nowt kam that the longlawst Iggy the Inspektr was kuming bak too Bagzond an that his nuw filosophee of inspecting yaz too grad how god a tantasee land war beeing the nativ selfe whoo woos eksoek everything but the most crazed film Bagzond gys whoo evn kerd that in the old days to grads lik D- cuz we

Bags End News  
No. 676 April 1, 1996  
Editor: Algernon Beagle  
King: Sheila Bunny  
(Written Down By: Lori Bunny)

### Waiting For - Will the Inspektr Evr Sho?

In the old days in Bagzond, befor Betsee roold the Buny Pillo treey Stat an Sheila grumpled allot an so on. Iggy the Inspektr kam around wins a mouth too seey how well behavd we wer. Well, we usellly wernt' at leest lik awl the gys in Oz an Narnea an the Humpid Aker Wood an places lik that, an so we wood get-a

To strang, werewe. To frikky, wer we. To uz a big weird Sheila engd from her fat dikshunary, idumsokratik.

Then Iggy sortuf got intubed

---

*Algernon Beagle*



## Bags End Book #7: The Inspector is Coming!

This story and more Bags End writings  
can be found at: [www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf](http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf)

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Seeking to Interview Betsy Bunny Pillow!

As a good beagleboy, your old pal Algernon must always be on the lookout 4or a good story. I must hunt hi & lo & keep mah earz wide open even tho they flop lo about mah headbone.

One story I knowed I had to go after was one that never ends & that is the strange doings of that real live Bunny Pillow named Betsy. She is back in Bags End now & I suppose finding out about her crazed plans & new schemes would be a good story to write about. Or even better, a interview.

So I put on mah reporter's fedorah & found mah notebook & pencil & set off tramping along to find the unimitable Betsy.

An trouble traipsed happily alongside me.

My big disappointment came when I found the door in Bags End through which there was a field with a tree in it, & in that tree a tree house where Betsy used to headquartered herself & her Allies & make her plans to defeat

Farmer Jones, who used to run the Bunny Pillow Farm, before Betsy defeated him. I tolded all about this in one of the earlier books.

The tree was there but there was no tree house at all in it! I looked carefully all around the tree for any signs of house, but no luck at all.

I guess I was so sure that Betsy would use her tree house now that she was back in Bags End that I had no other plan to find her.

Frustrated by mah failure, I went back through the door to Bags End & decided to go see mah adopted sister Sheila Bunny.

Sometimes Sheila can be the grumpiest of them all, but sometimes not. Partly you have to get lucky & not wake her up from a good dream, or interrupt her listening to jazz, or reading a good book.

Hm. That means it's hard to ever see her without interrupting her good solitary time.

I stopped where I stood. So what would work? I wondered.

I don't know.

What has worked before? I asked.

Well, if I am nuts over something, & ignore her grumpiness, that works. Ought else, fellas?

If I say something that interests her, maybe that too.

Great. A good wagon of an idea but no wheels to carry it anywhere.

I finally walked again & hoped a bright idea would appear in my mouth when I needed it most.

I walked through the door into Sheila's Throne Room.

Mah eyes told me a lie I could not believe.

Curled up together in Sheila's Throne was the Bunny herself & the Pillow herself!

They weren't quiet like they had beaten each other up. An they weren't kidnapped & held prisoner together & tortured.

For a crazy moment I wished Sheila's little throne that Miss Chris made 4or her was big enough for me too. If I napped with those guys, it would be safe as with Miss Chris or Princess Crissy or mah sometimes upon a dream Mommy Beagle.

No. Not me. I hoped it was not a obscure trick of some kind which Miss Chris & Mommy Beagle would never make on me.

So I settled 4or mah usual spot on the floor near Sheila's Throne. I watched those sleeping 2 closely tho. No nap 4or this one.

I stayed so still that when they woke up they didn't see me or know I was there at all. They talked too but it was so soft at first that I couldn't hear it.

I listened & I am going to tell what I heard but it doesn't mean it's the interview I looked 4or.

"When is he coming?" asked Betsy in her whispery voice.

"Soon. I never know 4or sure. But Crissy told me like she always does," said Sheila.

"Are you sure he's going to inspect my State?" said Betsy a little louder. Who? wondered me.

"Crissy thinks so. It's a fantasyland. Iggy inspects fantasylands."

Now I knew. Iggy the Inspector! He used to come around places like Bags End & Oz & Narnia & give us grades. He wasn't seen in awhile.

"I will have to ring my State's borders with guards! He will never get in!" Betsy whisperscreamed. How like her.

"Listen, Pillow, I don't think you should do that."

"Why not!"

There were no words for a minute. I saw Sheila's head tilt upward

which I knowed meant she was staring at the ceiling like she always does when she is thinking hard.

"You're back here because Bags End is your home even tho you were born there," Sheila began.

Betsy calmed down. I knowed this cuz I felt less scared.

"You're like a door. If you lived there, it would be a closed off place. But it isn't."

"No," Betsy said softly.

"Iggy is like a connection between all the fantasylands. He inspects a place to make sure that it's being like itself. So make him know the place & then he can tell you how it's doing."

There was some more no words. Then Betsy talked. She asked mah questions out loud. "Where has he been? He didn't used to be missing like this."

"He wrote me letters. I can show you them. He said that Inspecting can be an art instead of just a job."

"OK," said Betsy, I guess to the seeing Iggy's letters part. Boy! I wished I could see them!

But some things don't change after all. When they climbed from the Throne to leave, they saw me & acted like always. Sheila harrumphed a sort of friendly hello. Betsy ignored me totally. Then I was left alone.

But it didn't matter. I got mah story tho no interview. I didn't really understand all of it, but OK, fine. I never do usually.

I guesed that since Sheila is the big shot leader of Bags End & Betsy has her Bunny Pillow Free State, they're sort of equals. That's why they're getting along right now. Figgers. Little guys in this world get along to help each other when trouble comes. Big guys get along cuz they think they're better than anyone else.

I made mah way slowly to mah favorite place in Bags End called Milne's Porch, which is just outside mah bedroom window. I am not a big shot but I have a comfy armchair & a good view & a great newspaper to write in. That's better 4or me.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Inspector is Coming!

No visitor to mah strange homeland can ever say that its citizens don't act just the way they like. No sir. Do they need to be encouraged to Bump, bounce, or blow jazz trumpet in all peculiar ways through life? No indeed!

But what if someone did encourage them? What if someone came along & said, "O guys & creatures of Bags End! I think you have been shy about letting your wacky waters flow! Go on! Go a little further!"

The guy responsible 4or all of this happening is called Iggy the Inspector. Now a long time ago, Iggy would come around once a month to all the fantasylands & give them a grade like a report card or something. Goody 2 shoes places like Oz & Narnia would always get A's 4or their grades, while slouched grumpy Bags End would get a D-.

Then one time Bags End got a F & there was trouble by the truckload. Iggy took our side in the fight after we were made illegal. He stopped coming around though. I tolded about that in another of these books.

Then news came that he was coming back with a tray full of new ideas about how to be an inspector & inspect. Now we heard that he was gonna judge each fantasyland on how good it was being itself.

An I am sure that mah deer readers know that the crazier & more badly

behaved Bags End is being, the more it is being itself!

An that's what has happened. Bags End is trying extra hard to be itself 4or when Iggy comes around.

Mah first notice of all of this came when I earsdropped on Sheila Bunny & Betsy Bunny Pillow talking all friends about it. Then there wasn't any more news until last Sunday morning when I was sitting quietly in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. I had just been to Sunday School listening to the Blondys give their talk. They talked a lot about the best way to get rid of being mad is to laugh it right out of yourself.

"Bump-Bump-Ba-Bump-Bump!" announced a crazy brother of mine called Alexander Puppy, thinking he was a trumpet announcing madness & made-up languages both. He is mah brother cuz Miss Chris said too.

He had blue overalls on & a big silly face that thinks all the world is friendly & new. He climbed right through our bedroom window onto Milne's Porch & came right up to me saying Bump things & bumping me too.

"Hey, ya crazed relative! This is not Be Kind to Cracked Kin Day! Leave me be!" I yelled.

Alex looked at me all curiously like I said I was gonna show him a hard trick or something. "Bump?" he said all friendly.

I heard a soft voice at the window & there was that green-eyed Allie Leopard who knows a lot of languages, including Politeness.

"Algernon, Alex sez that we must all be ready 4or Iggy the Inspector's visit. He wonders if you are sure you know your Bump P's & Q's."

I jumped up & down in mah seat & yelled, "Bump language don't got no P's & Q's! Those are good English letters!"

Alex thought I was very funny & laughed a lot. Then he stopped & looked serious or what was as near to serious as his silly face could, & he said tons of Bump words. I nearly went mad.

Allie is a merciful guy & he talked Alex into coming away with him. Maybe he said I had to study mah Bump P's & Q's some more.

I don't know.

The strange got stranger. Hardly had one intruder upon mah sanctuary been taken away when another came. Be4ore I knew it, there was that crazy baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow climbing onto mah porch, followed slowly by her Army of the Babys, also called Ramie the snoring Toy Tall Boy.

"OK, bweagle, a-10-up!" she yelled at me.

I looked at her in her green diaper & her army helmet & M\*A\*S\*H t-shirt & then I looked at Ramie still sound asleep in the window going back to mah bedroom. Then I remembered the Blondys' advice & I laughed real hard then & there.

Ramie kept sleeping. But Lisa got real mad at me.

She toddled right up to me in mah comfy armchair, & she got a good hold of mah poor earbone & yanked me right to the floor!

"O! Mah earbone!" I yelled.

"Fwall in line with thwee west of the twoops!" Lisa ordered.

I looked at Ramie happily asleep in the window of mah bedroom & I couldn't help mahself. I laughed again.

Lisa looked at Ramie & she 4orgot about me & let go of mah earbone, & then she want over to wake up Ramie & yell at him.

Well, Dear Readers, I had had enough. I don't march & that's that. I did something crazier than I ever did be4ore.

I climbed to the top of the fence surrounding Milne's Porch & I leaped off!

Suddenly I was floating slowly down into clouds that kept changing

colors. I enjoyed it for a bit until I remembered that beagles don't float or fly good, & they crash horribly.

"Help! Blondys! O help me! Blondys!" I yelled. The Blondys are these 3 magic girls who help me in times of trouble, & they float because they don't know the Law of Grabitee.

No Blondys came at first & I worried a lot. I wasn't going too fast but when I looked up I couldn't see Milne's Porch or Bags End or nothing.

"Blondys! Help your old pal Algernon!"

Before I knew it, the trio of nice Blondys were floating me back up. They were all smiling at me too.

The funny thing was that they weren't holding on tight to me.

"Hey! How come I am floating up without your help?" I asked.

Tammy the oldest Blondy looked at me smiling enough for 2. "O Algernon, you always could float. You were just too stubborn."

"O" said me.

"Yeah, beagle!" yelled Simmy the youngest Blondy. Then she & Sammy the middle Blondy did a sort of "yeah beagle!" float dance. I would have joined them except beagles don't dance. At least I don't think they do.

We floated back to Milne's Porch & I landed on mah comfy armchair. Lisa & her sleepy Army were gone. The Blondys all gave me little kisses on mah furry cheekbones & left.

Was floating a way for me to be mah most beagle after all? Good question. I sat & thought about it for a long while.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Inspector's Almost Here!

Your old pal Algernon tries hard to be a patient sort. I mean, I live in a strange place full of strange people, so strangeness is what we have in common, right? A person could even call me strange, if he was a mean guy or something.

An ever since the news came that the longlost Iggy the Inspector was coming back to Bags End & that his new philosophy of inspecting was to grade how good a fantasyland was being its native self, who would expect anything but the most crazed from Bags End guys who never cared that in the old days we got lo grades like D- cuz we refused to be anything but ourselves?

So. What made me mad was that people had to be their crazy best as close to me as they could!

This happened with my crazed brother Alexander Puppy & also with that silly baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow, as I have told. And when Iggy still didn't show up, I got caught in more lunacies. Partly mah own fault. I have a bad case of beagleboy journalist curiosity.

I decided that I couldn't stall any longer going to see mah adopted sister & baddest bunny in Bags End, Sheila, in her Throne Room.

In the old days, Sheila & the Inspector were always fighing about the low grades Bags End got. Sheila thought Iggy should see Bags End for the great place that it is. I guess Iggy finally agrees with her or something.

So I went tramping along to the Throne Room & there I was met by a horrible sight. A giant carrot!

**"O YUK!"**

I yelled & would have fled but 4or a commanding Sheila voice.

"It's not real, beagle. Get back here. This is the best story you're gonna find."

Wimpering almost like a puppy, I tippytoed back into the Throne Room & sneaked along the walls to the other side of the big you-know-what.

Sheila was half inside it, & I noticed that her BunnyCycle was all the way inside!

"Hey, Sheila, is that carrot eating you & your BunnyCycle or something?" I said. What a ridiculous thing to say!

## "O YUK!"

I said again.

Sheila crawled out of the big yellow thing & said, "Algernon, I am disqualifying you from this story after all. Send your assistant, Brains. She will write it."

How humiliating. Still, Sheila was right. I hurried away to get Brains, er, I mean Lory Bunny, Sheila's older sister who is really smart & helps me with mah newspaper.

Lory was perfectly agreeable to help me. I told her I would waite 4or her on Milne's Porch.

I tried not to be impatient but I sort of failed. After all, I am used to writing mah own stories about Bags End.

After too long, Lory came hopping onto mah porch. She had the story she had writed down & she read it to me after adjusting her funny little spectacles properly. She has bright orange fur & is nice to look at & listen to.

"Now, Algernon," said she, "this is not a story like the ones you do & then I help you write down. These are notes I wrote so I would remember all the little details."

I nodded. "OK, Lory. Read your story & I will listen good."

She smiled strangely at me & started talking. "Sheila is going to do her Greatest BunnyCycle Stunt of All. She calls it her Flaming Carrot Leap."

"O! Yuk!" yelled me.

Lory jumped a little when I yelled. "Someone will set the, you know, on fire, & she told me that when she is flying in the air, it will have burned off enough for her bike to come clear so she can make a good landing."

A what? thought me. Seemed more like a Crazed Bunny Trick than anything else. Lory told me that it would happen when the Inspector arrived, & Sheila hoped I would be there to witness it & then report it. She smiled at me some more & said she had to go, & then she left Milne's Porch.

What to do now? I was stumped. An almost afraid to find out what else was going on in Bags End.

I thinked about going to see Betsy Bunny Pillow but mah cup of brave proved empty. I decided to go to see mah good friend Princess Chrisakah in Imaginna instead.

As I walked along in Bags End to get to the door leading there, I wondered what Imaginna being its best would be like. Was I in 4or a surprise!

Through the door & Crissy's Castle beyond a field as usual. I kept thinking I would see Crissy's friend & servant Boop any minute. No.

I knocked on the door & almost right away Princess Crissy answered it. "Algernon!" she said, all me-happy & hugging.

I looked carefully at her after she unhugged me 4or a minute.

"Hey! Crissy, you don't have your Princess dress on!" An this was true. Crissy was wearing her bloo jeans & R.E.M. black t-shirt.

Crissy smiled. "Well, that's cuz I am not Princess right now." Correction, Dear Readers. Crissy smiled very tricky.

She had me follow her into the Throne Room & she said all importantly, "Presenting Boop, Reigning Monarch of Imagianna! Your highness, here is Algernon, Court Scribe of our good neighbor, Bags End!" And she bowed to Boop who was dressed like a King with a crown on his head & all.

"Hey! This is backwards!" cryeth me.

"Crissy convinced me that Imagianna being most itself was her not Princess & me as King. She is most clever," said Boop, who looked sort of unhappy. But not quite.

"Does your Higheness require anything?" asked Crissy with a sweet tricky look on her face.

Boop shook his head.

"Let's go play records & dance around," said Crissy all happy.

I felt bad 4or Boop but I guessed Crissy was just showing him that this royal stuff could go too far.

An me & Crissy played records by R.E.M. & Men at Work, & we danced around.

Later, when I was back on Milne's Porch in mah comfy armchair, where everything is always the same, I thinked about all of this & decided that the Inspector's visit was turning out to be a pretty big thing.

King Boop? Flaming Bunny Tricks? Citizen Crissy? What more? What next?

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#### Waiting 4or--Will the Inspector Ever Show?

Like I said before, in the old days in Bags End, be4ore Betsy ruled the Bunny Pillow Free State & Sheila grumped around a lot, Iggy the Inspector would come around about once a month & we would get D's 4or being too tricky, too strange or, to use a big word Sheila founded in her fat dictionary, too idiosyncratic.

Then Iggy sort of got into trouble & went away. Bags End didn't get any worse without grades all the time but we didn't get any better. Maybe we did get worse.

Now Iggy was coming back except where was he? Nobody wanted to tell me. I don't think anybody cared. Sheila only told me one thing.

"Being most Bagsendian means each nascent solipsism becomes a full blooming universe of I," she gruttered from underneath her BunnyCycle that she was fixing.

Sure. Fine. Talk words only you know. Who cares if nobody else understands, right?

I needed to see mah adopted personMommmy Miss Chris in her house in Connecticut. She would always smile & hug me. She always has long messy brown hair & brown eyes & bloo jeans & nice little feet when her Bunny Slippers aren't on them.

So I went to the level of Bags End where there is a door to Miss Chris's house in Connecticut.

"Algernon!" said a familiar voice & I was well-hugged. Except the voice was whispery & the hug was fluffy!

Betsy Bunny Pillow!

I was on Miss Chris's bed in her bedroom & Betsy was nice & near me.

I scaredly looked around 4or Miss Chris.

"She is coming. I am glad you are here."

Dear Readers, I had had it. Nice hugging Betsy was far too much 4or me. I runned from the bed & out of the room & I was lost & yelling for Miss Chris.

An finally soft arms with little freckles got me & when I looked 4or a face it was Miss Chris & none other.

"O Algernon" she said softly like I was the silliest beagle in the world. I hoped I waz.

She tucked me under her arm & got that weird nice Betsy & we went into Miss Chris's TV room & sat all on Suzy Couch. Ramie, Miss Chris's toy big brother, was sitting on Freddy Couch with her other real brothers.

Miss Chris tucked the soft strange Betsy under her head & rested with her thummer in her mouth.

"Algernon, there's enough room 4or you too," sweetly offered Betsy.

"Betsy, Why are you nice?"

Betsy laughed the sweetest little laugh I have ever heard. "Well, why shouldn't I be? My people are safe in a Free State & I am living near them in my chosen home. To be my best is to give up my restlessness & calm down."

"Betsy! You are always restless! You are always chasing the stars you dream about! I like that about you even though you don't like me much! Be you! Stop being nice!"

I leaped from Miss Chris's arms & onto the floor.

"The dum Inspector!" I yelled & runned away & dove back into Bags End & didn't stop until I got too mah bedroom, through the window, & onto Milne's Porch.

Huffing & puffing, that waz me. Mad & not sure why.

Is Bags End at its best the same as Bags End at its most weird? Is that what we did in the old days?

No. We were ourselves & we got a bad grade. The grade wasn't us. Now we were trying real hard 4or a grade because everyone thought we could be ourselves & get a good one.

But we weren't being ourselves no more.

That is, hardly nobody, because I was. Miss Chris's hugs were themselves. Even Sheila trying a strange BunnyCycle trick was sort of the right thing.

I made a real important decision. I decided mah newspaper would voidcott Iggy & his inspection. That means I wouldn't write about it or even be in it. I would stay right in mah comfy armchair on mah safe & same Milne's Porch until it was over. So there.

I was satisfied with mah decision but until others knowed about it, it wouldn't mean much.

Do I go chasing after crazy people to tell them about mah protest? No. I guess not.

Then I had a real good idea. I would lock mahself out of Bags End! An nobody could come out to Milne's Porch either. Eventually some crazed guy would come to show me some strange plan & he would tell the others about what I did. Or she would since a lot of the craziest are girls.

Nowe I was excited. I sneaked into mah room & got the blanket off mah bed & mah ritetyper & some picture books. Then I pulled the curtains off their rods & pulled the rods too & put them all back up on the outside of the bedroom window. On the inside I taped a note that said:



I was ready now. Noone could get onto Milne's Porch or even see it through the closed curtains.

I got in mah comfy armchair under mah covers & settled in. 4or awhile, I felt like I had won a big fight but then I felt a little lonely & sad & then I fell asleep.

Knock. Knock.

Knock! Knock!

Pound! Pound! Pound!

I was awaked by an impatient fist on mah bedroom window.

"Algernon, let me in or I will per4orm my Flaming Beagle Trick!" said a mad Sheila Bunny voice.

Uht-oh.

The pounding stopped a minute. I think she was reading mah note. Then I thought I heard a "harumf!" & then I didn't hear nothing.

Where did she go?

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#### Protest from the Porch!

Your old pal Algernon has gotten to be a kind of grumpy old Bagsendian purist these days. I didn't like what I was seeing guys doing to get the best grade 4or Bags End from Iggy the Inspector & his newfangled way of inspecting.

So I came to Milne's Porch & locked everyone else out of it & have decided not to write in mah newspaper about the big old dum inspection when it finally happens.

The pounding on the window from mah bedroom stopped a little while ago. Sheila did it & then she went away too. I hoped maybe the Blondys or Princess Crissy would come & talk to me. I guess I am used to someone helping me when I am confused.

Should I leave mah refuge?

I fell asleep 4or awhile & I can't remember what I dreamed. Mah dum noggin has ain't-nesia.

I started wondering if it's so bad how Iggy is inspecting now. Maybe it makes him happy & it probably causes less trouble.

Let me tell you, Dear Readers, that doubt is a strange kind of enemy, like a big guy except your look when you trick him in front of a mirror.

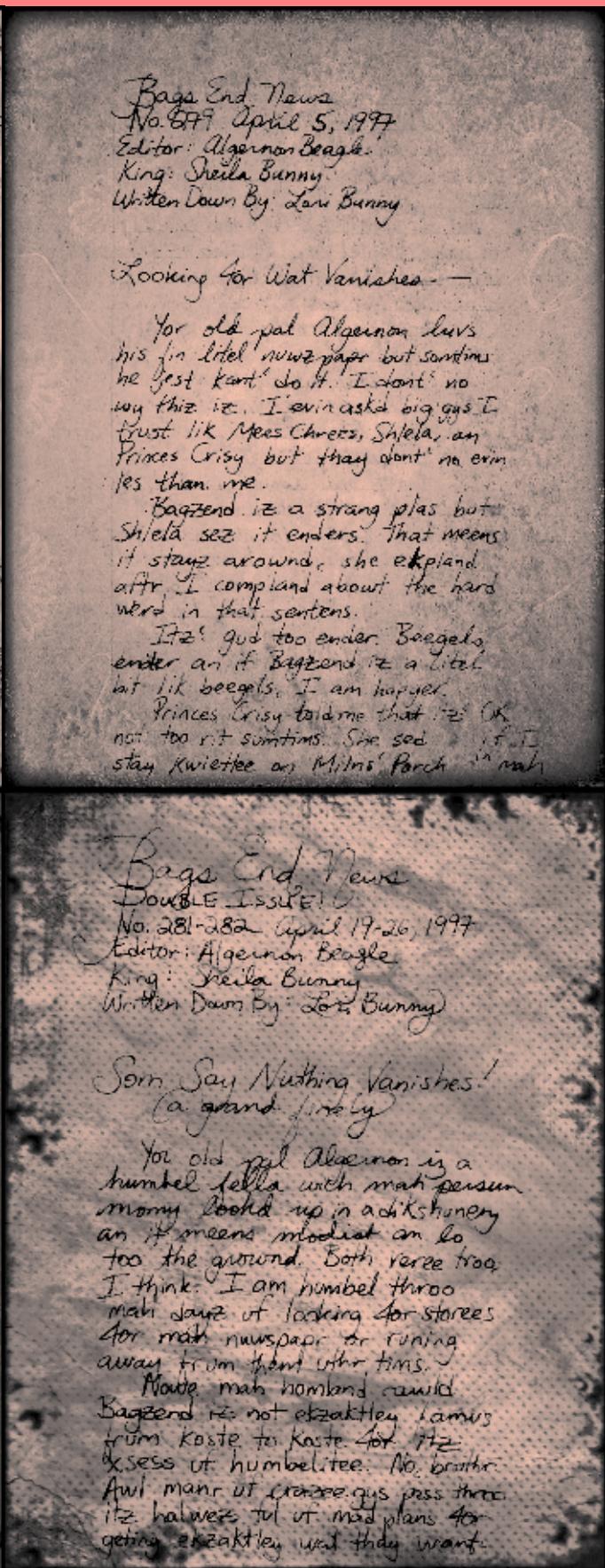
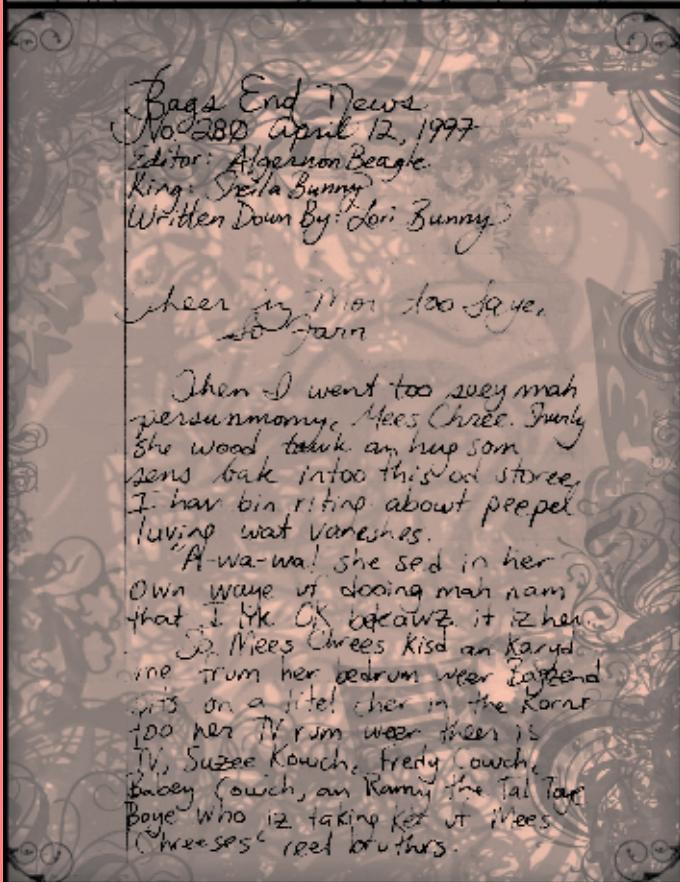
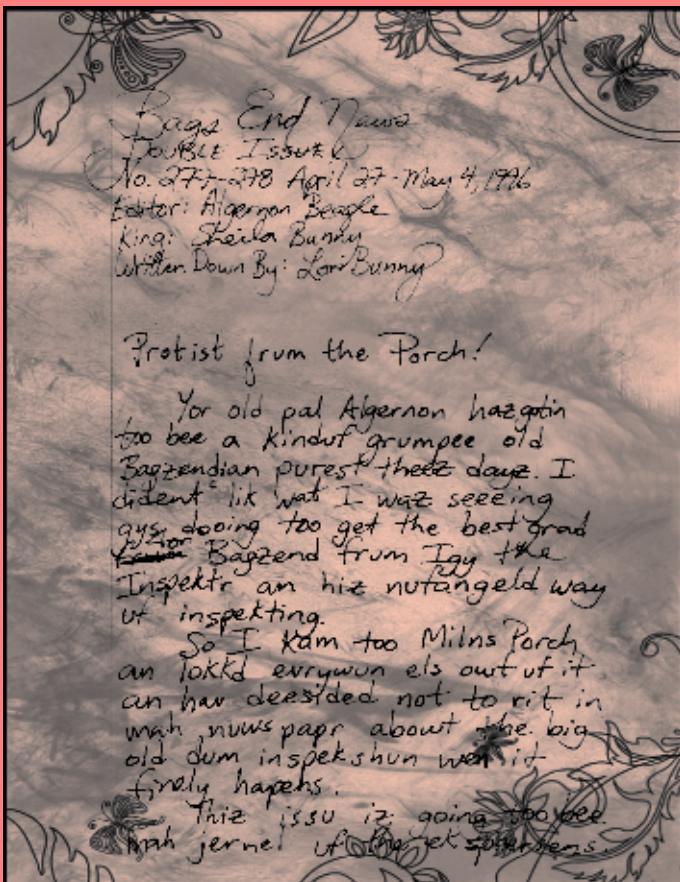
But I had to be sure. On mah safe porch it was OK to let doubt hang around. But in Bags End I would have to know mah own noggin to survive.

So I undid mah protection from things Bagsendian & walked through mah bedroom & thens the Bunny family apartment & right out into the hallway. The way to Sheila's Throne Room wasn't far & I hurried there.

An there I found Sheila Bunny, slouched down in her Throne, reading a book, crunching a carrot (O! Yuk!), & listening to some jazz on her little record player.

"Hello, Sheila," I said carefully.

Sheila looked up from her book, looked me over 4or a moment, harumfed,



& read some more.

"Is the Inspector still here?" I asked.

"No," she said.

A little annoyed, I said, "Did everyone get a good grade 4or being extra weird?"

Sheila dropped her book to the floor & aimed her bright purple eyes right at me. "Algernon, when are you going to learn that all is not as it seems?"

Then she hopped high into the air & when she came down went right into the floor of the Throne Room!

"Sheila!" I yelled & almost like one of those Puppys in Bags End tried to dig the spot she disappeared under. No luck.

"Help!" I yelled. "Help! Sheila is drowning or something!"

Suddenly I found mahself awake in my comfy armchair on Milne's Porch.

"O" quoth me. "A dream."

Then Sheila came hopping out of the floorboards of Milne's Porch!

"Hey!" I yelled.

"Tricked you," Sheila sniggered.

"How did you do that?" I demanded.

Sheila blinked her purple eyes at me a lot.

"O" said me.

Then a thought talked to me. "Hey! You don't know how your purple eyes work!"

Sheila looked fakesurprised. "I don't? O no!" & she leaped back into the floor.

OK. Fine.

I jumped off mah comfy armchair & tried to dive into the floor like Sheila did.

"OW! Mah body bone!" I yelled & waked up again.

But here's the strange part, Dear Readers. Mah body still hurt even tho I was back in mah comfy armchair & it had been a dream!

What could all this be? I didn't know a bit.

The first time I had seen Sheila in the Throne Room, she had said all is not as it seems. True enough.

What was really going on, then? How had the story changed from when it was about the Inspector?

I looked down at the floorboards that Sheila had jumped through. They were really close together & had hurt me good when I tried the same thing.

But I couldn't stay where I was, that's sure. So I pulled back the curtains that hid Milne's Porch from Bags End & I climbed through the window into the bedroom that is me & Alexander's.

An there was Alex himself sitting on his bed talking to his little bloo foam in Bump words! I was almost happy to see him.

"Bump! Bump-Bump!" he yelled all happy, & he carefully put away his bloo foam in the front pocket of his overalls.

I looked around 4or Allie Leopard to tell me about Alex's Bumpwords like he usually does, but no luck there.

I walked right up to where he was standing & looked him straight in the belly said, "Now listen, brother, Ally isn't around to help us today, so we have to work it out for ourselves."

Alex smiled all happy & said, "Bump" & then he bumped me with his nose too.

How to tell Alex about all this weirdness? He is a little guy really, & doesn't know how the world is strange & tricky.

An even if I told him, I don't really know if he understands English no more.

"Alex," I began, "did the Inspector come already?"

Silly question. Alex got all excited & told me so many Bumpwords that a liberry would break. He tried to Bump me a lot too but I backed away.

"Stop!" I yelled. "Stop in the name of words English & languages real!"

Alex calmed down. "Come along, brother," said me, & we left the Bunny family's apartment. Alex singed soft happy Bumpsongs to himself as he walked behind me.

Well, I had no good luck in adding English to mah parade with the next person I saw. But it wasn't so bad because he was Jacky Clown, a nice little guy who lives in a box & has smiling cheeks & talks Squeak language.

"Hi, Jacky!" I said all friendly & hoping he wouldn't jump through the floor like Sheila had & Alex hadn't.

"Bump!" said Alex happy & not knowing that Bump & Squeak are both strange but not kin.

"Squeak!" said Jacky. Then he told a long joke in Squeak language which he likes to do, & he laughed a lot at the end of it like he does too.

"Bump!" yelled Alex & he laughed a lot too & then he told a joke in Bump language, & laughed a lot, & Jacky laughed a lot, & 4or awhile I was trapped inside crazed madeupjoke air.

"OK!" said me, finally pretending to be a big bossy guy like Sheila. "We have to go now & leave all of this strange stuff far behind us."

Alex followed me, pulling on the wagon that carried Jackie along, but they kept laughing & joking even though one Bumped & the other Squeaked.

All is not as it seems. Sometimes I sure hope so.

"Who should we see, mah nonEnglishtalking followers?" I kind of sang. I ignored all the helpful Bumps & Squeaks that answered me.

I thinked hard about which big guy I should go see. Miss Chris? Hm. Betsy? Hah! Sheila? Harumf! Princess Crissy?

Hard question.

I wasn't having much luck finding any big guy, hallway after hallway, up level after level.

Then I found asleep on the floor the biggest guy of all. He is Ramie the Toy Tall Boy who is sort of Miss Chris's big brother.

"Hi, Ramie!" I said all friendly to sleeping he. He sleeped on.

Alex tried Bumping him awake & Jacky told him a whole bunch of really funny Squeakjokes which Alex laughed at cuz I guess he understands them, & I laughed at Jacky too cuz he has such funny smiling cheeks.

Then I tried to think of who has good luck waking him up. There's Miss Chris who scolds him & pushes his shoulder & won't stop. Then there's that silly baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow who yells at him a lot.

OK. "A-10-Up!" I yelled. I tried to sound like Lisa but mah funny accent leans the other way from hers.

"On your feet, dogface!" I yelled some more. This did it. Ramie thought it was time to march in the Army of the Babys, & he is an agreeable sort who doesn't like when Lisa cries cuz she has no soldiers to order around.

Great. A Bumper, a Squeaker, & a Lazybug. I gave Alex & Jacky the job of keeping Ramie marching along & they did a good job in their peculiar unEnglish way.

It was surely time to find a big guy.

At that moment, as we had just started going along again, the lights in the hallway darkened in an oldly familiar way.

Into view from a lower level of Bags End came Betsy Bunny Pillow &

her shadowy Allies!

"Ever forward, Allies! We must vanquish the Enemy!" whisperyelled Betsy.

"Hey, Betsy, you already beat Farmer Jones!" said me.

Betsy halted her travels to the next level when she heard me. She bounced right up to me, ignoring my little band of idiosyncranauts.

"The enemy is within, beagle!" she whisperyelled at me, & then turned & bounced off.

I would've whimpered, "What does that mean?" but mah mouth decided enough was too much & closed tightly shut.

At least she didn't go through the floor like Sheila did.

Mah little group had laughed & laughed after Betsy left, except 4or Ramie, who slepted & sleeped.

Then Alex & Jacky started singing a song in half Bump & half Squeak language, & Ramie rised to his feet & sleepdanced right along.

I was tired tho not sleepy of all this. I left them to their fun & sneaked away.

Where was a sane beagle to go in a saneless world like Bags End?

As I walked along in no bound direction, I thinked about how mah band of silly followers back there were the same as always, & whether the Inspector gave Bags End good grades or bad didn't interest them.

It's only the big important guys like Sheila & Betsy who would care. Princess Crissy changed Imagianna around not to get a better grade, but to show her friend Boop that being Princess or King or whatever can be boring compared to dancing to good music with a friend. Miss Chris certainly wouldn't change unless it was 4or a game.

An me? I'm not a genuine big guy but I'm not a real little guy either. I pay attention like big guys but I follow their adventures usually not mine.

Walking along & thinking all these things brung me to Sheila's Mayor's office where in the old days she & Iggy the Inspector would meet about Bags End's monthly grade, & argue & fight until Iggy agreed to give us yet another D-.

I don't know why I went in but I did. There's a desk that's always covered in paperwork, & a chair behind that desk that looks a little like a Throne, & a chair in front of the desk for a visitor.

It's not an office big enough 4or much more. On the floor is a phonograph with lots of jazz records next to it, & there are some books in a little bookcase against the wall.

On the walls are pictures of Sheila's heroes like Miles Davis & Jack Kerouac, & Bags End guys she likes like Lory & her kin. There's one of Princess Crissy & another of Miss Chris. There's even a little one of your old pal Algernon.

Noone was there which I guess was good since I 4orgot to knock.

I looked around but nothing looked different or interesting. I went over to the desk & looked at all the paperwork.

But all was only one, & I thought it looked familiar like the old days.

## Report Card Bags End

But I didn't see no grade! What did that mean? I didn't know.

I was pretty tired from all this & decided to go back to Milne's Porch.

I saw nobody around. This was probably good. I was tired of all of them & would have given a F if someone gave me Inspecting powers for once.

Sitting in mah comfy armchair made me think, "O mah word! Maybe a D-instead." I guess I talked mah thoughts cuz they got an answer.

"Probably. Who knows?" said Sheila as she climbed through mah window & made me nudge over in my comfy armchair to give her room.

I tucked her under one of mah floppy earblankets & she would sleep right away but I kept her up with a question.

"Will Iggy be back to give his grade?"

Sheila moved around under mah earbone. "All he said was he had to find another way." Then she slepted.

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#### Looking 4or What Vanishes--

Sometimes your old pal Algernon doesn't write for awhile, in mah fine little newspaper or in any other way, I just can't do it. I don't know why this is. I even asked big guys I trust like Miss Chris, Sheila, & Princess Crissy, but they don't know less than me.

Bags End is a strange place, but Sheila says it endures. That means it stays she explained after I complained about the hard word in that sentence.

It's good to endure. Beagles endure & if Bags End is a little bit like beagles, I am happier.

Princess Crissy told me it's OK not to write sometimes. She said if I stay quietly on Milne's Porch in mah comfy armchair, or maybe go visit her in Imagianna, then no harm is done. She said that maybe part like a nice kiss on my nosebone.

But I want to write again now & I am going to tell you why. It has to do with what Sheila told me she read in one of her books. She had come to see me on Milne's Porch, which don't happen so often. Hopped right into mah comfy armchair with me.

"Was it a Jack Kerouac book or a jazz book?" asked me. She likes those a lot.

"No," she said, adjusting her comfort under mah earblanket.

"Was it a Oz book?" I asked. She likes those a lot too. Me too.

"No. It was poetry."

"O. That's all about rhyming, right?"

"No. It's about your heart. Pomes are musical places in your heart & some people can write them down good."

"O. Did you read a good pome?"

"I read something by a good poet. W.B. Yeats. He wrote that 'man is in love & loves what vanishes. What more is there to say?'" Sheila's purple eyes glowed real bright while she said these Yeats words.

"I don't know."

"I like it. It's true."

"But what does it mean?"

"It means we remember some things so much they are gone but still around. They're more than they ever were. Or at least different."

I thinked about this hard. "I miss mah Mommy Beagle hard. But sometimes she's not so gone 4or awhile. Is it like that?"

Sheila was quiet but I was pretty sure she meant yes.

"Do us Bags End guys love what vanishes?"

Sheila laid her purple eyes heavy on me & said, "Go find out. Maybe it

will make a good story for your newspaper." She knowed I hadn't writed since the Iggy the Inspector story.

"Can I ask you first? Right now?"

Sheila shook her furry little head. Hopping back through mah bedroom window to Bags End, she said, "Come see me last. I'll talk to you then."

So that's what got me to writing again now.

The problem with asking most Bags End guys anything is that what they love most is whatever crazed ideas are in their head. It's like how we don't do grades good. Take this as a warning, Dear Readers.

"Bump!" said a voice too familiar into mah face as I climbed back through mah bedroom window from Milne's Porch. The one that mah silly Bumping brother Alexander lives in too cuz Miss Chris tricked me & gangniced me with Missis Bunny.

Alex & that nice language knowing fellas Allie Leopard were playing some kind of game that I would have bet mah beagle heart & soul involved saying Bump a lot & its name was Bump too.

"OK, Alex, I am doing mah fine English language newspaper again & mah story involves asking Bags End guys like yourself the question, do you love what vanishes?" I said till mah river of words stopped.

Alex looked at me almost seriously, with his silly yellow furry face. "Bump?"

I looked at Allie who wasn't promptly telling me all about this word.

"Allie! Don't let that dum Bump word get the best of you! Make it up like always, I mean if you have to!" I said a little meanly, cuz I was impatient.

Allie said, "Algernon, Alex just said Bump in English. That's why I was confused."

Now there was enough confusion 4or 2. How could this be?

Allie thinked some more & Alex was quiet.

Green eyes glowing, Allie muttered some Bumpwords to Alex who nodded his silly furry head a lot.

"He said Bump & he means Bump. It's cuz of you, Algernon. You're his hero & you don't like Bump much & he wishes he could talk English with you," said Allie.

I looked at Alex & said, "Well, speak some more words."

"Bump Bump Bump," said Alex, & he shook his head a lot.

"He said he can't & you know why. He urges you to respect his philosophical differences with English & says you are still welcomed to learn Bump from him," said Allie. "An me too, if you want to, Algernon," he said some more.

Hero to a silly Bumping brother. Goodness me. I left quickly.

Already this story was a strange one. Now I was walking along a hallway on one of Bags End's levels when along came Betsy Bunny Pillow.

She was bouncing past me like I don't exist, like she always does except when I interest her 4or some dangerous reason, but I decided she interested me. Brave beagle, fool beagle, that's me.

"Hi, Betsy. Can I ask you a question for mah newspaper?"

Betsy stopped in mid-bounce past me. She looked me up & down, even though she's got no face.

"I need an administrator 4or my native people's land," she said in her scary whisperyvoice. "Are you going to ask me if you can apply 4or this honored post despite your well-documented unPillow status?"

I started to talk as a cover for trying to escape, but she had me in the grip of her voice.

"Or are you going to attempt to involve me in some unPillow foolishness devised in the furry matter you have instead of brains?" she whisperscreamed.

I was frozen afraid.

"He is gone! I have looked 4or him. He's vanished! He knew that I don't know how to grow Pillows! I lead! I don't farm! So he beat me!"

"Farmer Jones?" asked me.

So angry she tried to smother me right there, but I ducked away & runned fast.

Now this was too strange, Dear Readers. Alex says he can't speak English no more? Betsy hunting around for Farmer Jones?

They were full of their own weird ideas & they were loving what vanishes!

Now what to do? I guess keep writing about all this.

I am back on Milne's Porch right now & I have pulled the curtains on the windows so I am safe.

The lesson I have so far is that whatever seems, there's much more, sort of like what Sheila told me before. An some of what you think is wrong. And the rest makes no sense.

But there's a little that's true & right, & you have to start there, wherever there is.

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### There is More to Say, So Far

Then I went to see mah personMommy, Miss Chris in her house in Connecticut. Surely she would talk & hug some sense back into this odd story.

"A-wa-wa!" she said in her own way of doing mah name that I like OK because it is her.

So Miss Chris kissed & carried me from her bedroom where Bags End sits on a little chair in the corner, to her TV room where there is TV, Suzy Couch, & Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, who takes care of her real brothers.

Miss Chris settled me & her on Suzy Couch & looked all smiles at me, & I tingled happily.

"A-wa-wa, you've got that newspaper doing look in your eyes," she said, & hugged me like a veteran.

I nodded. "An I need your help."

So I tolded Miss Chris how Sheila Bunny had read me some poetry by this guy Yeats who talked about man being in love with vanishes, & what more is there to say?

Miss Chris listened real closely. She looked inside me & it tickled. An she smiles a lot too.

"Is it true?" I asked.

She didn't talk right away. She holded me & she thinked & she skritched mah back nicely.

"I miss a lot of things, A-wa-wa," she said.

Then she did something that didn't seem like more of an answer at all. She curled up with me on Suzy Couch, & put her favorite thummer in her mouth, & closed her eyes 4or a nap.

A strange Lazybug maneauer, I must say! What could it mean?

But I decided to trust the unknown from the safety of Miss Chris's arms & so I went into a nap too.

"Hello, A-wa-wa," said a nice voice I know good in mah sleeping ears.

"Hi, personMommy! What are you doing in mah dream?"

"Our dream, A-wa-wa."

"I never shared a dream before."

Now I could see Miss Chris better & she looked all little! I didn't even bite her to give her Babys.

Bags End looked different like it was smaller & younger too.

Miss Chris was little but the strange thing was that her Freckles looked bigger!

"Hi, Freckles," I said friendly but careful because sometimes they get mad & mean.



they said with themselves on Miss Chris's face. I figured out some of the letters like A & I & the rest looked like they were saying hello to me, so I figured they were.

Miss Chris is a real smart girl & I don't think she forgotten mah question. This dream was mah answer.

The dream got blurry awhile but I felt like Miss Chris's hands were holding me & flying me somewhere.

OK. Fine. Now we were with Sheila Bunny when she was little & nice & jumpy.

Nobody was really saying much but there kept being more. There was Polly El who is pink & walks slowly. An there was Denny & Corey Puppy who are real Puppys who talk Puppy language & everything. Not like your old rebel pal Algernon who talks English.

See there was no adventure or even good argument. What was Miss Chris loving that was vanished?

I couldn't see her face when I looked for it, but her eyes were floating near me & I was still holded by her hands.

"What, personMommy? What is it here? All these guys & Pillows & other guys are still in Bags End & we still love you! What are you loving that is gone?"

Then her eyes got real big or maybe I shranked cuz I was littler than them now & it was like sadness with me, like a beagle tear or something falling down, but that's not right. Miss Chris is no cry baby.

So I wasn't a tear but I was still falling away in this shared dream & then I was alone in mah own unshared dream & I felt lonely in a new way & this strange feeling was mah answer. Strange & hard to understand is the only kind of answer I ever get, let me tell you.

"That's all you will ever get, beagle," grumbled a sleepy Sheila voice near me.

An I was back in in regular Miss Chris's arms with that Bunny.

"No," said me.

"Yes," said Sheila.

"PersonMommy?" I asked.

Miss Chris smiled big & mysterious at me, & I was afraid we would start dreamsharing again, so I said "No" real quickly & runned real fast back to Bags End in Miss Chris's bedroom before Sheila's "Yes" could catch me & tangle mah looking paws in doubt.

Like I said before, the problem with asking anyone anything in Bags End is that guys there are all interested in their own strange ways of seeing things.

Nobody tells you the simple truth. What you get are answers that the person is using when he is sad or wondering.

I wanted an answer that wasn't just someone's special weird idea.

Is that possible tho?

Then there were Blondys. Bags End was filled with floating Blondys even tho their population is always 3.

Now Blondys don't know the Law of Grabitee so they float. An they don't listen to me when I tell them that Beagles can't float, so they grab me up & away I go.

The leader Blondy Tammy was now floating me. The others, Sammy & Simmi, were floating behind & cheering me, especially Simmy, who is the youngest & wears a cheerleader dress.

Here I was again, floating with the Blondys 3, & silly me tried to talk English words to Blondys, who mostly float above them.

"Do Blondys love what vanishes?" I asked.

The Blondys 3 grouped close around me, above & below & everywhere, & then I was floating! Me, nonfloating landloving Beagle grounded Algernon! I was in some kind of magickal floating space that the Blondys made around me. We just floated higher & higher. 3 Blondys & bajillions both.

I tried to do what Sheila once told me to about the Blondys. She said they talk but in that other way. "So listen different, Beagle. Listen better."

So I listened & after awhile I wondered about this Law of Grabitee business. Who made the Law? Did it have to be like this?

I guess the Blondys were pleased because they had floated me all the way to Imagianna & right into mah good friend Princess Crissy's smiling arms. No answers, but OK anyway.

"Thanks, Blondys," said me.

"Yeah, Algernon!" cheered Simmi as they floated away.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Some Say Nothing Vanishes! (a grand finally)

Your old pal Algernon is a humble fella which Sheila Bunny told me from her big dictionary means modest & low to the ground. Both very true, I think I am humble through mah days of looking for stories 4or mah newspaper or running away from them other times.

Now mah homeland called Bags End is not exactly famous from coast to coast for its excess of humility. No, brother. All manner of crazy guys pass through its hallways, full of mad plans 4or getting exactly what they want.

And trying to get Bags End guys 4or even a minute to come up to the surface of sanity 4or air is as deranged as telling the Sun you want an encore showing of yesterday's sunset. Or something. Just hard to do.

So here was silly humble Algernon going around to these same guys & saying, "look, guys, Sheila Bunny told me this interesting thing some guy named Yeats said about how man is in love & loves what vanishes, what more is there to say? What do you think about it?"

Sure. Right. None of them are going to be the littlest bit confusing or obscure about their answers. No, sir.

Which is the long manywords way of saying that's what they did of course.

But here I was now brung by Blondys to Imagianna where mah beagleboosting friend Princess Crissy lives with her little pal called Boop,

who looks like a turtle but isn't one.

"Algernon!" she cried all happy as the Blondys brung me right to her open arms, full of many hugs & kisses.

Crissy is not so very low to the ground & she is more pretty & a little tricky than modest, but she likes Beagles & she understands them too.

First, she carried me up to her Royal Sleep Pad, which is like a regular guy's bedroom, & she played a lot of good records by R.E.M. for us. She understands that I like to dance all crazy 4or a long time & sing songs that have words I don't know.

What she really understands is that this all gets me in a Crissy mood 4or the rest of our visit. Now she can be herself in her home & not be so worried about not being a Beagle like me.

When I couldn't dance one more time to a song called "Stand" cuz I was tired & it didn't make no sense, we sat on her bed & Crissy helded me on her lap & kissed & hugged me & also just watched me good sometimes too while I talked about my reason to see her.

"So Crissy, are you in love with what vanishes?" I asked.

Now Crissy is tricky & smiles a lot & dances & all but when I ask her a serious question, she thinks all serious about it & tries to help.

First she gets real quiet & thinks a long time, & I sit & wait, & sometimes I keep mahself interested by wondering what it's like to be a comma. Punctuation, don'tcha know. They bully words around some. Punks, y'know.

"Algernon, are you thinking about commas again?"

"Yes. They're not words & they're sure not English. But they have a lot of power. They're like the big guys in Bags End."

Crissy smiles at me like I was too funny to be real. "Algernon, sometimes what vanishes is not so easy to talk about."

"What do you mean?"

"Sometimes it's what didn't happen. An what vanishes is all the hope you had about it."

"Could you talk more?"

Crissy didn't talk then but got deeper into her bed & brung me along, & we were under covers, & she smiled & the lights got lo.

"Close your eyes. Just listen to my voice. It will help you to concentrate & understand, I promise."

So I was just listening 4or awhile to Crissy's nice voice. An she talked 4or a long time too.

"I think Imagianna was different a long time ago. It wasn't just me & Boop. Sometimes when I'm here in this bed alone at night, I think there are Creatures all around me. It's like I'm awake but dreaming. I don't know what it's like.

"But they're around many nights. They never hurt me or really scare me too much. They just come & I sort of wake up & feel them here & they go away or I fall asleep, or both, I guess.

"I think they were in Imagianna too a long time ago. Or maybe they were almost here but all that's left is their wish."

I looked at Crissy all serious too. "Crissy, you never told me about all this."

"No, Algernon. I thought you might feel bad or worry."

"I feel bad, Crissy, I'm worried."

She smiled bright at me in the dim. But talked no words.

"You don't know what they're like, Crissy?"

She shook her head. "Sometimes there's only one. An it's kind of like an animal. But then it's kind of like a bug. Sometimes there are a lot."

"If they don't scare you, then how do you feel?" I asked.

Crissy looked at me surprised like I asked a question she didn't already know the answer. She got quiet & thought a lot.

I closed my eyes so I could listen better cuz when I'm in the darkness 4or awhile I start hoping Miss Chris's friends Suzy Dark, Freddy Dark, Mommy Dark, & Baby Dark will show up.

An when Crissy talked, the words got through mah wondering & took over. "Algernon, they're not really here to see me at all!. Not really at all. I guess it's this place they want to see because this is where they were or almost were & so they love it & want to see it."

"Sounds like ghostes to me," I said, still keeping my eyes shut so I could float in the Crissy words all around me. A little like floating with Blondys.

"Not that. I don't really know what instead. Cuz I think even tho they don't come to see me, they only come because of me. Boop never talks about them & I would never tell him because he would worry every time he looks at me all day & that would be awful."

"How do you know he doesn't dream about them?"

A tricky smile floated around the words & said, "I have my tricky Princess ways."

"O"

I opened mah eyes & tried to get some real around me. "Are you in love with them, Crissy?"

She shook her head. "They're not vanished. Not 4or me."

"Are you sad 4or them?"

"I don't know. I don't know what happened to them. I've gone sneaking into the cellar & the attic & a lot of hidden rooms that are only there once in awhile. But I don't know what it all means really."

Crissy didn't talk anymore 4or awhile & when she did talk it was more like happy sleepy mumbles which I have learned the hard way don't worry too much about meaning the way mah beloved English does.

But I had mah story to write & I was getting closer somehow to an answer. So.

"Crissy?"

"Yes, Algernon?"

"I have to go. Thanks 4or helping me with mah story."

Crissy hugged me tighter & sadder. She's not very good at byes.

"Stay?"

"I have mah BeagleBoy reporting to do. It's important."

"I could tell you the answer right now & you could stay."

"Crissy!"

"I'm sorry. That's not how it works, is it?"

"No. But when I'm ready to tell I will let you know, OK?"

Crissy nodded because that's all she had 4or mah leaving. Then she hugged & kissed me until I was happy & dizzy, & she said I could rest awhile, & I scolded her again, & we laughed, & I went in the middle of the laughing, fast.

I was guessing that it was time to go see Sheila & get her to tell me her opinion about all of this. She said she wanted to go last & I decided that then was now.

Now in Bags End, me, walking along on mah short paws & hoping I wasn't doing the wrong thing. Mah brainbone & mah heartbone had disagreed & they were calling each other names. It got loud in me, like Snoopy.

Then I was on the right level where Sheila's Throne Room is, but there

were Bags End guys in mah way. On the floor sleeping in a cuddle was that silly baby Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow & Ramie the Toy Tall Boy.

I guessed that what happened was that Lisa had made Ramie her whole Army of the Babys again & was marching him along when his Lazybug ways got the better of him, & he marched slower & slower until he was asleep, & Lisa tried to wake him, & failed, & got tired cuz she is so little, & went to sleep too.

An they were sprawled over the hallway so that I couldn't sneak by them & their sleep.

"Well," thought me, "maybe I will ask them about what vanishes."

"Hey, Lisa," I said softly. "Lisa?" No luck. "Hey, Sargent, your Army is sound asleep!"

That woke her up a little. She blinked her eyes at me & said, "Hello, bweagle." I was surprised when she talked nicely & didn't call me SwubPwivate or Bweagleface like she usually does.

She blinked her bloo eyes at me again & then closed them. "Nothing weally vwanishes, Bweagle."

"Nothing?"

"No. Nothing ever weally vwanishes. What more is thwere to sway?" An then she sleeped without even telling me, "Twoops, dwismwissed!"

I crawled through them carefully thinking about this until I looked down & there was Ramie's smiling face under me!

"Hi, Ramie," I said all friendly.

"Hi, Algernon. Do you want to come nap with me & Lisa?"

"No. But would you tell me if you love what vanishes?"

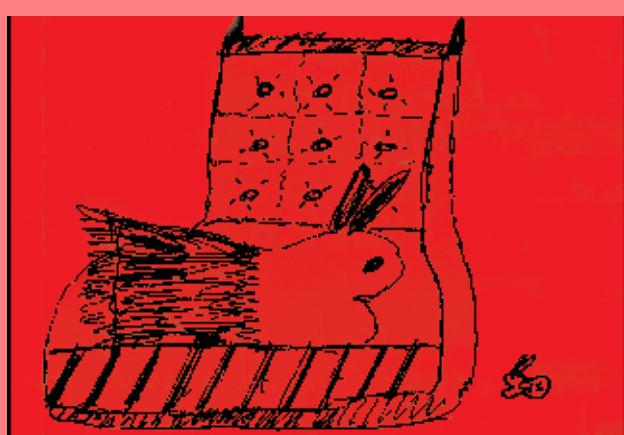
"What vanishes?"

"Yes. Lisa just told me that nothing vanishes. Is that right?"

Ramie smiles at me & said, "I didn't know anything could vanish! Where do they go?"

Well, Dear Readers, now mah confusion was so fat it could live in the desert 4or a month!

I leaped from Ramie's face & hurried to Sheila's Throne Room.



This is a picture of Sheila Bunny in her Throne drawn by Miss Chris & when I said it wasn't exactly right she said something about interpreting license, & I didn't know what that means of course, & she hugged me with no words which is much better most of the time anyway.

"You're back already?" Sheila said all grumpy. But I could tell she

wasn't too mad to see me.

I settled on mah favorite spot on the floor near her & didn't talk 4or a bit. Someone else's turn to wait 4or me!

Finally I talked. "It was a hard question to carry around. But I did it & I think I understand better now."

Sheila was quiet but she was listening.

I sunk into mah spot deeper & used mah brains inside paws to heap mah thoughts closer together.

But I was failing. "I'm failing, Sheila. I don't know what it is that I understand. I'm sorry."

Sheila moved her little body around in her Throne in a way that said to me it was OK 4or me to join her there. So I did & now we were together, her under mah earblanket. Slowly I began to tell her about what all the Bags End guys like Alex & Betsy & Lisa had said, & also what Miss Chris & Princess Crissy & Ramie had said too.

"You tried hard, Beagle."

"But I failed!"

"Why?"

"Because I don't know what more there is to say!"

Sheila closed her bright purple eyes for awhile, & I thought she had gone to sleep, & I was starting to think this was a good plan when she opened them again & looked up at the ceiling like she does when she is thinking real hard. I waited.

"I think things vanish & they don't. Sometimes we vanish from them. Like Alex vanished from English. It's still around but he isn't. An sometimes we go back & find what vanishes, & sometimes we don't, & sometimes we can't."

I leaped from the Throne. "But this isn't good enough. Yes & no & maybe!"

"Yes, Algernon. An no. An maybe!"

I decided to leave & I did. I said goodbye I think but it wasn't very important. It was time to go back to Milne's Porch.

Milne's Porch where I found Princess Crissy waiting 4or me.

"Hi, Algernon," she said, all shy.

I said hello but glum & we sat in mah comfy armchair together.

"Algernon, I was thinking that this kind of story is new to you."

"No. I go around & all these guys say stuff, & I get confused, & then I hide here."

Crissy smiled at me & I felt better against my will.

"This kind of story ends with the story open not closed. It's a story where you just to decide to stop because this isn't decided 4or you."

"O"

She smiled bigger. "You don't like this kind, do you?"

"I don't know."

Then we talked no more & I guess the story stops here all opened up like Crissy said. She is right, I don't like it, but that's this kind of story, isn't it?

Crissy left me alone & here I sit thinking new & humbler thoughts. I don't know so very much about beagleboy reporting as I thinked, huh, Dear Readers?

When all else fails, I watch the sunset. It comes through 4or me.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now it is almost dark but I have been watching very carefully. The colors came on slow & almost confused. A lot of blue & red at first. An they wouldn't dance or mix at all.

But slowly they did & some orange & pink arrived, & it was better, & & then it was perfect like it always gets, & I wasn't sure what colors I was seeing 4or awhile.

The colors were like music, like wonderful music, & they fell all over me. An they were in mah heartbone like they have been so many times, but it's hard to remember what it's like except when it is happening.

I was floating in mah seat which is mah native Beagle way & mah favorite. I was full of pinks & yellows & reds & oranges & bloos & other colors. I was so full if I talked it would be in rainbows. But I didn't talk of course.

It started going away before I knew this. I had forgotten my eyes were closed tight.

An it's dark so I am writing slowly in mah Beagle scrawl.

I loved the sunset tonight. An it vanished. An it will be back. But not the same one. An sometimes I won't be here to watch it. And sometimes it won't be here to watch me.

And so on. But I decided to be alright with this.

What more is there to say?

A lot. A little. Nothing.

What more is there to say?



\* \* \* \* \*







G.C. Dillon

## Jasmine in 3 Parts

[Classic Cenacle Fiction]

### III.

How many of you reading this recall the final scene of *Annie Hall*—the one where Woody meets Diane on the street a year after their relationship has ended? When I recently saw it on an obscure cable channel, I wondered: *is that it? Why doesn't he take her to an out of the way bistro for bagels and cappuccino? Why doesn't she invite him to her apartment for a glass of white wine?* But no. It is gone, what they had. Sure, they liked each other, but “it” was gone. Call it love, call it eros, call it some genetic urge deep within our genes. “It” is gone. Her antics just aren’t so cute anymore. You know, the way her head tilts when she tells a joke seems more an affectation than it once did. You wonder if it is the same person, not some strange twin, or a victim from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. No, as I said, it is gone.

This is what I thought when I ran into Jasmine Ashbourne last night. Years ago, junior and senior year, we were tight, close, an item some might say. I have only seen her twice since. Last night was one of them. I was coming into Bridey Murphey’s for a couple of large, cold, cheap beers when I saw her. Bridey’s is rectangular. Dark wood is ubiquitous here in a wonderfully decadent way. A gold-gilded mirror rests above the bar. The 1916 Proclamation holds a place of honor on the glass. Black-and-white photos of Yeats, Pearse, and Lady Gregory line the plaster on the opposite wall. A blackened brick fireplace dominates everything else in the room. Jesse (not Jessie she’ll tell you) was by the door. A pint of dark lager was at her left side and heavily salted peanuts at her right. I laughed. She was a health food nut with a wild craving for junk food—left over from her mallrat days. Pre-Tiffany, I’m afraid.

Something loud, imported, and beat-oriented played upon the bar’s speakers. T-Vamp maybe. I don’t know; I’m a sellout. I’ve left behind the avant-garde and the underground, except for some Thursday nights, alone in my room, when I pull out a battered Bukowski and put David Byrne on the stereo. Do my choices reflect how removed I am from the up and coming?

She looked up at me with eyes I could remember. Her hair—blonde, real blonde down to the genes, thank you—was drawn up in a bun. Her smile seemed painted on with a touch of lipstick. She was dressed like an *Addams Family* extra, blacker than midnight on the far side of the moon. A small leather purse was set on the bartop. She used a fannypack or bookbag when I knew her. It is a trifling thing to notice, I know. She put down her pen, didn’t invite me to sit, and took a sip of her beer.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi,” I returned.

“How have you been?” she asked.

“Good.”

“That’s good.”

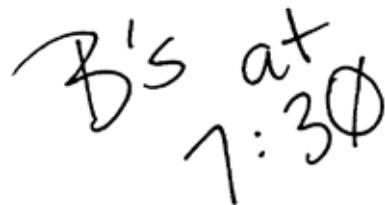
"Yeah."

This was awkward, too awkward, more awkward than it should be. I only hoped it was worse for her.

I could see on her notepad a series of names I remember from fervid, late-night discussions with her: Voltaire, Montesquieu, d'Alembert, and Diderot. She always said she'd be a professional student—grad level now. She began to talk about a class presentation she was preparing. She relaxed as she spoke, becoming more like the woman I had known. We began to talk of other things.

Of course Jasmine had been at the hottest concert of the year (no names please). I could imagine her there. The spotlights cut through the grey smoke in the air. She dresses in other bands' tee-shirts. Throwing Muses, I think, or perhaps Squidpus or the Soup Dragons. There is more than one band most likely. She adds layer on layer with a half-sleeve one on top. The group's name curves across her breasts. She stands on a chair, nearly falling off once, and dances. Her shoulders and hips do all the work. And the hands, don't forget her hands and their slow-motion, seductive signing; her fingers spread wide and point slightly upwards. She shrieks a musical orgasm, mouth wide open, arms above her head. Every love song will be about her. I bet she even likes the hokey Irish disc spinner. She sings along to the '50s hits (songs first sung before she was born). Slightly dazed, she moves through the crowd as everyone leaves. More than once she dances a step or two in a crowded crosswalk. She laments her favorite song wasn't performed. I could only imagine. Yeah, I'd been there with her before, I thought sadly.

There were questions I needed to ask her, but could not locate the words for in my brain. Questions about things we held in common: did she ever finish *The Golden Bough*? And things we did not: did she still think Bukowski wrote narrative laundry lists, not poetry? I sat too much of this time perplexed with a laconic "okay" on my lips, rather than the thoughts pumped to my brain by my heart and my memory. About seven she studied a torn sheet of looseleaf paper. I could see only



B's at  
1:30

written upon it. No signature. It was not her handwriting.

"I really have to be going. I have to be someplace in half an hour."

"Seeing your boyfriend?" I asked. Don't ask me why I asked. I just did.

"Yes. No. Just a friend, I guess," she replied.

She left and I took the seat she vacated. I thought of Woody Allen and Annie Hall. I thought about how you never get over anybody. Or maybe you do because the person you want is who they were and not who they are. I thought about a lot of things. I thought about going after her. I thought about not.

## II.

I could preface this with "it's a true story," but that makes it automatically suspect. It happens when Jim says, "it's a true story" before telling about the time he fell off a bridge in Billerica, or when

Rick (he's no Rich or Richard, but weathered like you'd expect a character in a Jack London novel to be) tells how he woke from a three day drunk next to three bags of coke in the back of a limousine passing through Nashville. So this is not a true story. It never happened. Hell, I wasn't even there. I was across town buying flowers or in another state looking for an address.

Or maybe I was in the computer lab typing up my latest school project. Yeah, that's where I was. Right, I was there when a quiet voice interrupted the tap, tap, tap at my keyboard. Sure I recognized the voice. Why wouldn't I? I looked over. She was dressed in a Betty Boop tee-shirt and white tights. The shirt was over-sized. The left end hung down her thigh, while the other was drawn up and tied at her right hip. She was Jasmine Ashbourne. Or hadn't you guessed? Well, after all, this is only fiction. There is none of the capricious surprise of real life within these pages. *Right?*

At one time she was my girlfriend. Or in other fictions she was my girlfriend, I should say. She was the one I called from my uncle's wake, she's the one I took long senseless walks with, and she's the one who pierced my ear. She—good material for stories is she.

"Can you meet me at the Tap in about an hour?" she asked.

I glanced at my stack of looseleaf papers.

"Sure," I answered.

"Good." She smiled, flashing two neat rows of white teeth. She turned and was gone.

Is every "I" I write the same me? Is every "Jasmine" the same her? Or another with an unoriginal name? Does her character change each time I write of her, or do I highlight a different aspect of her soul when I take up pen at 3 a.m. than at 5:30 p.m.? And what if someone else were to put her in their stories? Would her eyes be the same color and would her nose turn up at the same angle?

None of these questions concerned me as I seated myself at the Tap's wooden bar top. This was not the nearest bar to campus, but it was a popular hangout due mainly to the fact that they neglected to card most patrons. It was quiet in the place. I ordered a Harp Lager when the owner came over to me.

Jasmine came in. She placed her blue bookbag down at the barstool next to her.

"Glad you could make it," she said, arranging herself on the seat.

"What is it you wanted?"

"Brisk, petulant, and to the point," she shook her head as she spoke. "How like you."

I sipped my warming beer. Words stumbled from my lips: "All part of my charm."

She laughed and her hair swirled playfully about her shoulders. The motion dredge up memories murkily: the feel of her hair in my hands, the touch of her fingertips, her scent . . . She called her order to the bartender, then spoke to me.

"I wanted to see you, to see how you were doing." She placed her hand on my shoulder. No she didn't, strike that. She did not. Didn't happen. Maybe? I don't recall.

The owner arrived with Jasmine's beer, a Harpoon.

"We can still be friends, can't we?" she asked.

"Just friends," I replied.

"You men!" Jasmine spewed. "You are all alike. You carry your egos in your shorts."

I washed down her comment with a long swig of beer.

"Maybe we do." More beer followed. "Especially when a girl dumps you for someone else."

"How many times must I say I'm sorry?" A question, an accusation?

"Once if you mean it."

"This is useless," she said. She began to bite her nails. I stared at her, index finger caught between her teeth.

"I thought you stopped doing that."

"Sometimes." She smiled, took a taste of the drink. "Look, I am sorry."

"Still seeing him?"

"No," she said.

"Oh," I said. I wondered if I was glad to hear that.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," she said suddenly.  
 "No." I gripped my beer tightly with both hands.  
 "I was frightened."  
 "I wasn't," I said. Fill in your own adverb: angrily, sadly, or calmly.  
 "You don't understand." She looked away and began to fumble with her bookbag.  
 "No, I don't. I only know that suddenly you were never available for me. You were too busy with work or school or something. Then you were seeing someone else."  
 "He didn't make any demands on me."  
 I swung around to face her.  
 "What demands did I make?"  
 "You demanded I be at my best all the time."  
 "I did? How?"  
 "By expecting more from me than I expected from myself."  
 "I expected more than you were able to give?" I asked.  
 "You expected more than I was ready to give."  
 "Are you ready now?" I asked. No, I did not ask. Any question but that.  
 "I don't know," she answered.  
 "Jesse," I said. "I may still love you, but I don't trust you. You blew me off. How do I know you won't do it again?"  
 "I'm here now," she said. Pleaded maybe? Maybe not.  
 Yeah, she was here now.  
 In fiction, now can last forever. A now can be an eternity. Let us finish our beers and allow this now to last a bit longer.  
 Just a bit.

## I.

Did you find her beautiful? Lovely? Intelligent? Rad?  
 Or did you dislike her? Find her phoney? A walking stereotype? Poser?  
 Getting ahead of yourself, aren't you?

Start again. Paint the scene. Rembrandt lighting: dark, close, and subdued. Edward Hopper figures people the place. Some have a haunted Van Gogh look, others a Monet feel; one biker in the back looks to be out of Edvard Munch. Juan Gris table settings are scattered here and there. A Stuart Davis wall rests above the bar: a mish-mash of street signs, photographs, and a faded Nixon poster. A Raphaelite angel hangs from the ceiling. A Christy girl stands beneath it, doling out beers and mixed drinks. She notices you as you enter, smiles pleasantly. You hand Rick a two buck cover and walk toward the beer case. She names your usual. You nod, pass over your dough, and take the bottle to a side table. You're the first to arrive. Your first drink you take slowly. It is cold and good. You take another swallow almost immediately, then put the bottle down on the scarred wooden tabletop.

Friends from the college enter. You feel a smile spread across your lips. Party of five. You're the sixth. Eddie and Julie you know. Glenn too. The others look familiar, as if you'd seen them stumbling along the campus's concrete sidewalks for an 8 a.m. class, or rushing across the grassy lawns for a four o'clock one. The first to sit is brunette. Her hair flows down her shoulders. Eyeshadow brings out the come-hither darkness in her eyes. Shannon's her name, you're informed. The other is blonde; it is her van they all came in, that's parked out there. You glance out the window at the cul-de-sac road which serves as the bar's parking lot. You turn back to look at her. She wears an above-the-knee black skirt and white blouse. Sleeveless and ruffled, the blouse has a row of small black buttons which dot the garment's front. Her black vest matches the skirt. Cerulean eyes glisten beneath brows slightly darker than her hair. Jasmine she's called.

After introductions, the conversation quickly shifts to finals. Shannon had an Economics exam that everyone did badly on. She is hoping for a good curve. *Thank God for Mr. Bell*, you think. You recall the small class you had this semester. Ten people, only two majors, and you two blew the midterm curve with high grades. Or so a classmate informed you.

Glenn buys a round. He hands you another lager. The radio dies in the middle of The Cure's "Hot Hot Hot!!" Tonight's band starts up in the other room. You can hear them from where you are. Julie leads Eddie to the dance floor.

A police cruiser pulls into the cul-d-sac. You notice it from the window. Three exit the car. All are dressed rather casually. The lead officer wears a D.A.R.E. jacket. The owner comes out from the kitchen to speak to the newcomers. They are here to check on the vending machines. You know, the stale cashew dispenser, the computer poker game, and the pinball machine. You stalk them as they wander the room.

The conversation continues. Jasmine finished exams yesterday; today she shopped at the Waterfront. One of the bikers approaches two of the police. Summer plans are mentioned. It is the same biker noticed as you entered. Jasmine had been in Europe last summer. One of the cops looks behind the flipper machine near you. Her English cousin told her to charge any tourist a fiver for any photo. The cop ignores your table. Her hair had been green and red then, drove her dad nutso. You can hear the biker's voice rise. Jasmine refused; she was an American punk and she didn't charge. Besides, the Brits were behind the times, stuck in the early '80s styles.

—How long have you served? the police questions the biker.

—In Amsterdam I ate eels.

—Six months in the joint, the biker answers.

—The eels were served on spears.

—You won't catch me again, man. Not on my bike.

—Spears? you ask.

—You can't catch me. No fuckin' way. I go 200, 250.

—Well, they looked like spears, she confesses.

—Can't outrace a radio.

—Oh, you say.

—My bike'll beat any one of you.

The cops smile, huddle together, leave. They wave to the biker.

—Seeya 'round.

Shannon and Glenn slip out of the seats. They leave the bar, go around to the back.

—They can't catch me. I told them. They can't hassle me. No way. No way.

You realize you are sitting alone with Jasmine. Must find something to say. You suggest you two check out the dance room.

The band, Gone Awry, is cramped onto a pallet-sized stage. Four guys. Lead singer swallows the mike. He has the shortest hair. The lead guitarist has the longest. He wears black jeans. A blue plaid shirt covers up his tee-shirt. You cannot read the logo. College friends comprise the audience. Isn't that why you're here?

A crowd forms about the stage. The rest of the room is open and sparse. You linger in the doorway. You see Eddie standing near the side wall, beneath the road signs. He's enjoying his beer. Julie and three other girls are dancing to the music. You're sure they call it dancing, tho' they could be skipping rope for all the grace and form they demonstrate. *Who are you to say?*

You notice Jasmine's arms begin to sway to the beat. She looks your way, smiles coyly. *Don't you dance? Only to R.E.M., right?* You look around. Not a mosher in sight. That's good.

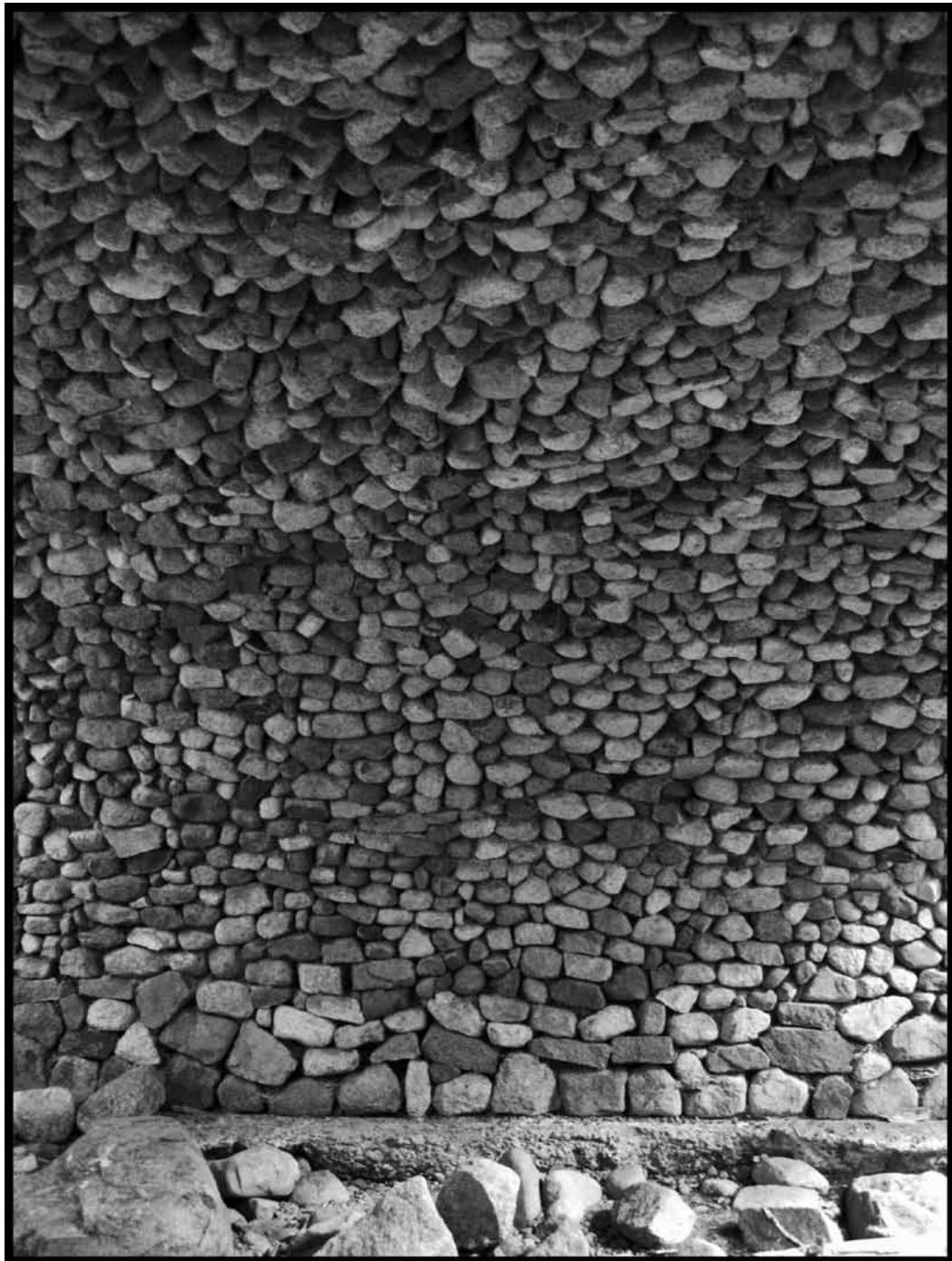
Confusion reigns on the stage as the bandmembers change instruments. The lead singer moves to the drumset. The drummer picks up a rhythm guitar which had rested dormant on its stand. The lead guitarist takes up the mike. His voice is strong. They play a slow song. *Anything can happen during a slow song*, you think. Fights broke out during "Sweet Sixteen" at the Billy Idol concert, didn't they? The lone women cease dancing. Julie and Eddie start. She places her arms about his neck. They move together slowly, eyes staring into each other's.

Jasmine entices you to dance. She places your empty bottle down near the speakers. *Do you just stand there with her moving before you or do you join in?*

*Hey, this is fun*, you think. Two, three songs later, you slip back to the bar for more beer. You decide to buy her one too.

—May 1992

\* \* \* \* \*



*Laura Huxley*



## The Most Beautiful Death

[Letter]

6233 Mulholland Highway  
Los Angeles 28, California  
December 8, 1963

Dearest Julian and Juliette:

There is so much I want to tell you about the last week of Aldous' life and particularly the last day. What happened is important not only for us close and loving but it is almost a conclusion, better, a continuation of his own work, and therefore it has importance for people in general.

First of all I must confirm to you with complete subjective certainty that Aldous had not consciously looked at the fact that he might die until the day he died. Subconsciously it was all there, and you will be able to see this for yourselves because beginning from November 15th until November 22nd I have much of Aldous' remarks on tape. For these tapes I know we shall all be immensely grateful.

Aldous was never quite willing to give up his writing and dictate or makes notes on a recorder. He used a Dictograph only to read poetry or passages of literature; he would listen to these in his quiet moments in the evening as he was going to sleep. I have had a tape recorder for years, and I tried to use it with him sometimes, but it was too bulky, and particularly now when we were always in the bedroom and the bed had so much hospital equipment around it. (We had spoken about buying a small one, but the market here is flooded with transistor tape recorders, and most of them are very bad. I didn't have time to look into it, and this remained just one of those things like many others that we were going to do.)

In the beginning of November, when Aldous was in the hospital, my birthday occurred, so Jinny looked carefully into all the machines, and presented me with the best of them—a small thing, easy manageable and practically unnoticeable. After having practiced with it myself a few days, I showed it to Aldous, who was very pleased with it, and from the 15th on we used it a little every day, recording his dreams and notes for future writing.

The period from the 15th to the 22nd marked, it seems to me, a period of intense mental activity for Aldous. We had diminished little by little the tranquillizers he had been taking four times a day—a drug called Sperine which is akin, I understand, to Thorazin. We diminished it practically to nothing—only used painkillers like Percodon, a little Amitol, and something for nausea. He took also a few injections of 1/2 cc of Dilaudid, which is a derivative of morphine, and which gave him many dreams, some of which you will hear on the tape. The doctor says this is a small intake of morphine.

Now to pick up my point again, in these dreams as well as sometimes in his conversation, it seemed obvious and transparent that subconsciously he knew that he was going to die. But not

once consciously did he speak of it. This had nothing to do with the idea that some of his friends put forward, that he wanted to spare me. It wasn't this, because Aldous had never been able to play a part, to say a single lie; he was constitutionally unable to lie, and if he wanted to spare me, he could certainly have spoken to Jinny.

During the last two months I gave him almost daily an opportunity, an opening for speaking about death, but of course this opening was always one that could have been taken in two ways—either towards life or towards death, and he always took it towards life. We read the entire manual of Dr. Leary extracted from *The Book of the Dead*. He could have, even jokingly, said, "don't forget to remind me"; his comment instead was only directed to the way Dr. Leary conducted his LSD sessions, and how he would bring people, who were not dead, back here to this life after the session.

It is true he said sometimes phrases like, "If I get out of this," in connection to his new ideas for writing, and wondered when and if he would have the strength to work. His mind was very active and it seems that this Dilaudid had stirred some new layer which had not often been stirred in him.

The night before he died, (Thursday night) about eight o'clock, suddenly an idea occurred to him. "Darling," he said, "it just occurs to me that I am imposing on Jinny having somebody as sick as this in the house with the two children. This is really an imposition." Jinny was out of the house at the moment, and so I said, "Good, when she comes back I will tell her this. It will be a nice laugh." "No," he said with unusual insistence, "we should do something about it." "Well," I replied, keeping it light, "all right, get up. Let's go on a trip." "No," he said, "It is serious. We must think about it. All these nurses in the house. What we could do, we could take an apartment for this period. Just for this period."

It was very clear what he meant. It was unmistakably clear. He thought he might be so sick for another three of four weeks, and then he could come back and start his normal life again. This fact of starting his normal life occurred quite often. In the last three or four weeks he was several times appalled by his weakness, when he realized how much he had lost, and how long it would take to be normal again.

Now, this Thursday night, he had remarked about taking an apartment with an unusual energy, but a few minutes later and all that evening I felt that he was going down, he was losing ground quickly. Eating was almost out of the question. He had just taken a few spoonfuls of liquid and puree; in fact, every time that he took something, this would start the cough.

Thursday night I called Dr. Bernstein, and told him the pulse was very high, 140, he had a little bit of fever, and my whole feeling was one of immanence of death. But both the nurse and the doctor said they didn't think this was the case, but that, if I wanted him, the doctor would come up to see him that night.

Then I returned to Aldous' room, and we decided to give him an injection of Dilaudid. It was about nine o'clock, and he went to sleep and I told the doctor to come the next morning. Aldous slept until about two a.m., and then he got another shot, and I saw him again at six-thirty. Again I felt that life was leaving, something was more wrong than usual, although I didn't know exactly what, and a little later I sent you and Matthew and Ellen and my sister a wire.

Then, about nine a.m., Aldous began to be so agitated, so uncomfortable, so desperate really. He wanted to be moved all the time. Nothing was right. Dr. Bernstein came about that time and decided to give him a shot which he had given him once before, something that you give intravenously, very slowly—it takes five minutes to give the shot, and it is a drug that dilates the bronchial tubes, so that respiration is easier.

This drug made him uncomfortable the time before, it must have been three Fridays before, when he had that crisis I wrote you about. But then it helped him. This time it was quite terrible. He couldn't express himself but he was feeling dreadful, nothing was right, no position was right. I tried to ask him what was occurring.

He had difficulty in speaking, but he managed to say, "Just trying to tell you makes it worse." He wanted to be moved all the time. "Move me." "Move my legs." "Move my arms." "Move my bed." I had one of those push-button beds, which moved up and down both from the head and the feet and, incessantly, at times, I would have him go up and down, up and down by pushing buttons. We did this again, and somehow it seemed to give him a little relief, but it was very, very little.

All of a sudden, it must have been then ten o'clock, he could hardly speak, and he said he wanted a tablet to write on, and for the first time he wrote, "If I die," and gave a direction for his will. I knew what he meant. He had signed his will, as I told you about a week before, and in this will there was a transfer of a life insurance policy from me to Matthew.

We had spoken of getting these papers of transfer, which the insurance company had just sent, and that actually arrived special delivery just a few minutes before. Writing was very, very difficult for him. Rosalind and Dr. Bernstein were there trying also to understand what he wanted. I said to him, "Do you mean that you want to make sure that the life insurance is transferred from me to Matthew?" He said, "Yes." I said, "The papers for the transfer have just arrived, if you want to sign them you can sign them, but it is not necessary because you already made it legal in your will."

He heaved a sigh of relief in not having to sign. I had asked him the day before, even, to sign some important papers, and he had said, "Let's wait a little while"; this, by the way, was his way now, for him to say that he couldn't do something. If he was asked to eat, he would say, "Let's wait a little while," and when I asked him to do some signing that was rather important on Thursday, he said, "Let's wait a little while."

He wanted to write you a letter—"and especially about Juliette's book, is lovely," he had said several times. And when I proposed to do it, he would say, "Yes, just in a little while" in such a tired voice, so totally different from his normal way of being. So when I told him that the signing was not necessary, and that all was in order, he had a sigh of relief.

"If I die." This was the first time that he had said that with reference to NOW. He wrote it. I knew and felt that for the first time he was looking at this. About a half an hour before I had called up Sidney Cohen, a psychiatrist who has been one of the leaders in the use of LSD. I had asked him if he had ever given LSD to a man in this condition. He said he had only done it twice actually, and in one case it had brought up a sort of reconciliation with Death, and in the other case it did not make any difference.

I asked him if he would advise me to give it to Aldous in his condition. I told him how I had offered it several times during the last two months, but he always said that he would wait until he was better. Then Dr. Cohen said, "I don't know. I don't think so. What do you think?" I said, "I don't know. Shall I offer it to him?" He said, "I would offer it to him in a very oblique way, just say 'what do you think about taking LSD [sometime again]?'"

This vague response had been common to the few workers in this field to whom I had asked, "Do you give LSD in extremes?" *Island* is the only definite reference that I know of. I must have spoken to Sidney Cohen about nine-thirty. Aldous' condition had become so physically painful and obscure, and he was so agitated he couldn't say what he wanted, and I couldn't understand.

At a certain point he said something which no one here has been able to explain to me; he said, "Who is eating out of my bowl?" And I didn't know what this meant and I yet don't know. And I asked him. He managed a faint whimsical smile and said, "Oh, never mind, it is only a joke." And later on, feeling my need to know a little so I could do something, he said in an agonizing way, "At this point there is so little to share." Then I knew that he knew that he was going. However, this inability to express himself was only muscular—his brain was clear and, in fact, I feel, at a pitch of activity.

Then, I don't know exactly what time it was, he asked for his tablet and wrote, "Try LSD 100 intramuscular." Although as you see from this photostatic copy it is not very clear, I know that this is what he meant. I asked him to confirm it.

Suddenly something became very clear to me. I knew that we were together again after this torturous talking of the last two months. I knew then, I knew what was to be done. I went quickly into the cupboard in the other room where Dr. Bernstein was, and the TV which had just announced the shooting of Kennedy. I took the LSD and said, "I am going to give him a shot of LSD, he asked for it."

The doctor had a moment of agitation because you know very well the uneasiness about this drug in the medical mind. Then he said, "All right, at this point what is the difference?" Whatever he had said, no "authority," not even an army of authorities, could have stopped me then. I went into Aldous' room with the vial of LSD, and prepared a syringe.

The doctor asked me if I wanted him to give him the shot—maybe because he saw that my hands were trembling. His asking me that made me conscious of my hands, and I said, "No, I must do this." I quieted myself, and when I gave him the shot my hands were very firm.

Then, somehow, a great relief came to us both. I believe it was 11:20 when I gave him his first shot of 100 microgrammes. I sat near his bed and I said, "Darling, maybe in a little while I will take it with you. Would you like me to take it also in a little while?"

I said "a little while" because I had no idea of when I should or could take it; in fact I have not been able to take it to this writing because of the condition around me. And he indicated "yes."

We must keep in mind that by now he was speaking very, very little. Then I said, "Would you like Matthew to take it with you also?" And he said, "Yes." "What about Ellen?" He said, "Yes." Then I mentioned two or three people who had been working with LSD and he said, "No, no, *basta, basta* [enough, enough.]" Then I said, "What about Jinny?" And he said, "Yes," with emphasis.

Then we were quiet. I just sat there without speaking for a while. Aldous was not so agitated physically. He seemed—somehow I felt he knew, we both knew what we were doing, and this has always been a great relief to Aldous. I have seen him at times during his illness very upset until he knew what he was going to do; then, even if it was an operation or X-ray, he would make a total change. This enormous feeling of relief would come to him, and he wouldn't be worried at all about it, he would say, "let's do it," and we would go to it, and he was like a liberated man.

And now I had the same feeling—a decision had been made, he made the decision again very quickly. Suddenly he had accepted the fact of death; he had taken this *moksha* medicine in which he believed. He was doing what he had written in *Island*, and I had the feeling that he was interested and relieved and quiet.

After half an hour, the expression on his face began to change a little, and I asked him if he felt the effect of LSD, and he indicated no. Yet, I think that a something had taken place

already. This was one of Aldous' characteristics. He would always delay acknowledging the effect of any medicine, even when the effect was quite certainly there; unless the effect was very, very strong he would say no.

Now, the expression of his face was beginning to look as it did every time that he had the *moksha* medicine, when this immense expression of complete bliss and love would come over him. This was not the case now, but there was a change in comparison to what his face had been two hours ago. I let another half hour pass, and then I decided to give him another 100 mg. I told him I was going to do it, and he acquiesced.

I gave him another shot, and then I began to talk to him. He was very quiet now; he was very quiet and his legs were getting colder; higher and higher I could see purple areas of cyanosis.

Then I began to talk to him, saying, "Light and free." Some of these things I told him at night in these last few weeks before he would go to sleep, and now I said it more convincingly, more intensely—"go, go, let go, darling; forward and up. You are going forward and up; you are going towards the light. Willing and consciously you are going, willingly and consciously, and you are doing this beautifully; you are doing this so beautifully—you are going towards the light; you are going towards a greater love; you are going forward and up. It is so easy; it is so beautiful. You are doing it so beautifully, so easily. Light and free. Forward and up. You are going towards Maria's love with my love. You are going towards a greater love than you have ever known. You are going towards the best, the greatest love, and it is easy, it is so easy, and you are doing it so beautifully."

I believe I started to talk to him—it must have been about one or two o'clock. It was very difficult for me to keep track of time. The nurse was in the room and Rosalind and Jinny and two doctors—Dr. Knight and Dr. Cutler. They were sort of far away from the bed. I was very, very near his ears, and I hope I spoke clearly and understandingly. Once I asked him, "Do you hear me?" He squeezed my hand. He was hearing me.

I was tempted to ask more questions, but in the morning he had begged me not to ask any more questions, and the entire feeling was that things were right. I didn't dare to inquire, to disturb, and that was the only question that I asked, "Do you hear me?" Maybe I should have asked more questions, but I didn't.

Later on I asked the same question, but the hand didn't move any more. Now from two o'clock until the time he died, which was five-twenty, there was complete peace except for once. That must have been about three-thirty or four, when I saw the beginning of struggle in his lower lip. His lower lip began to move as if it were going to be a struggle for air.

Then I gave the direction even more forcefully. "It is easy, and you are doing this beautifully and willingly and consciously, in full awareness, in full awareness, darling, you are going towards the light." I repeated these or similar words for the last three or four hours.

Once in a while my own emotion would overcome me, but if it did I immediately would leave the bed for two or three minutes, and would come back only when I could dismiss my emotion. The twitching of the lower lip lasted only a little bit, and it seemed to respond completely to what I was saying. "Easy, easy, and you are doing this willingly and consciously and beautifully—going forward and up, light and free, forward and up towards the light, into the light, into complete love."

The twitching stopped, the breathing became slower and slower, and there was absolutely not the slightest indication of contraction, of struggle. It was just that the breathing became slower—and slower—and slower, and at five-twenty the breathing stopped.

I had been warned in the morning that there might be some upsetting convulsions

towards the end, or some sort of contraction of the lungs, and noises. People had been trying to prepare me for some horrible physical reaction that would probably occur. None of this happened; actually, the ceasing of the breathing was not a drama at all, because it was done so slowly, so gently, like a piece of music just finishing in a *sempre più piano dolcemente*.

I had the feeling, actually, that the last hour of breathing was only the conditioned reflex of the body that had been used to doing this for 69 years, millions and millions of times. There was not the feeling that with the last breath, the spirit left. It had just been gently leaving for the last four hours. In the room, the last four hours, were two doctors, Jinny, the nurse, Rosalind Roger Gopal—you know she is the great friend of Krishnamurti, and the directress of the school in Ojai for which Aldous did so much.

They didn't seem to hear what I was saying. I thought I was speaking loud enough, but they said they didn't hear it. Rosalind and Jinny once in a while came near the bed and held Aldous' hand. These five people all said that this was the most serene, the most beautiful death. Both doctors and nurse said they had never seen a person in similar physical condition going off so completely without pain and without struggle.

We will never know if all this is only our wishful thinking, or if it is real, but certainly all outward signs and the inner feeling gave indication that it was beautiful and peaceful and easy.

And now, after I have been alone these few days, and less bombarded by other people's feelings, the meaning of this last day becomes clearer and clearer to me and more and more important. Aldous was, I think (and certainly I am) appalled at the fact that what he wrote in *Island* was not taken seriously. It was treated as a work of science fiction, when it was not fiction because each one of the ways of living he described in *Island* was not a product of his fantasy, but something that had been tried in one place or another, and some of them in our own everyday life.

If the way Aldous died were known, it might awaken people to the awareness that not only this, but many other facts described in *Island* are possible here and now. Aldous' asking for *moksha* medicine while dying is a confirmation of his work, and as such is of importance not only to us, but to the world. It is true we will have some people saying that he was a drug addict all his life, and that he ended as one, but it is history that Huxleys stop ignorance before ignorance can stop Huxleys.

Even after our correspondence on the subject, I had many doubts about keeping Aldous in the dark regarding his condition. It seemed not just that, after all he had written and spoken about death, he should be let to go into it unaware. And he had such complete confidence in me—he might have taken it for granted that had death been near I certainly would have told him and helped him. So my relief at his sudden awakening, at his quick adjusting, is immense. Don't you feel this also?

Now, is his way of dying to remain our, and only our, relief and consolation, or should others also benefit from it? What do you feel?

\* \* \* \* \*

*Raymond Soulard, Jr.*



## Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]

# Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,  
or be enslaved by another man's"*  
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

*lxi.*

I'm drowsing over a football game in the early wintertime. The snow has been falling & falling all weekend. I've watched it pile higher, up to & halfway over the one window that I have to see outside. I'm safe inside, & it's warm, but I don't know how I'll pay the heating bill next month, or the electricity bill, or the phone bill. But I think to myself: *if this snow keeps falling, I'll be buried & warm like the polar bear in the wintertime.* So go my future business plans.

[I fell asleep & found myself travelling in an SUV through a woodsy landscape. The radio singing wishing for higher love. Laughter in the front seat. Grey skies. White birch. Falling down barns]

I'm watching the football game on my black & white TV, every so often adjusting my Antennar 2000 to try to bring in the picture a little bit more clearly. I find my eye drawn to one particular football player, and start to feel like I'm watching two games at once. He plays for the Los Angeles team, has played for them for a long time. I knew him once, a long time ago, he was my friend, & now he's much older than that, & so am I, & so it seems like I'm watching two games at once.

- ] I stand up again & Pirth
- ] begins to dance ahead
- ] as this Attic hallway climbs
- ] down a long murky hill that
- ] feels less & less like a hallway

]  
 ] & more like a long hill  
 ] down into a long field lit  
 ] barely at points by fires  
 ] & echoing with drums &  
 ] drums & drums & drums  
 .]

I'm watching the game long ago in which he ran for many touchdowns. I think they even brought him out to punt the ball once. He could do no wrong, & they cheered & cheered, & cried out his name. People painted it on their bare chests, & on their bald heads.

- ) That desk I've had all these years  
 ( No. It's gone. Long gone.
- ) But yes, so long had, & gone  
 ( Made of cherry wood.
- ) My father sold it to me.  
 ( He was a salesman.
  
- ) I was excited when I bought it.  
 ( I was 21. 1985.
- ) Last time I saw it was 2002.  
 ( In a friend's garage.
- ) The roof fell in & destroyed it.  
 ( I still carry it all along.
  
- ) It's in this field now.  
 ( A metal chair. Pirth dancing.
- ) Me too. Me clumsier.

But the other game I'm watching is probably a more recent game, my Antennar 2000 can't tell time anymore. He's now kind of fat, sloppily uniformed, & I guess they keep him around out of sentiment. He's an institution. They don't even call the plays in his direction anymore, because then people start to laugh. He mostly stays in to block because he's so big & fat, it often helps, people fall around him.

/ SUV. Desk. Cherry wood. Black.  
 Pirth. Ribbons. Bow. Purple fur.  
 Hallway hill. Drums. Fire.  
 My dad said, "If you ever get in trouble,  
 pray to god & my mother. That's what I do."

/ Never tried it yet. But might one day. Just in case.

/ *What melts? What remains?*

Glance out the window from my two games, & see that the snow is piling higher & higher. I'm thinking: *O! To be a polar bear, now that the winter is here.* Look back to the black & white TV screen, & see the pretty quarterback, in the newer game, dropping back & throwing the ball, & it's tipped up, & it rides high up into the air &, as though an air current itself had a funny sense of humor, the ball falls into my old friend's fat hands!

[Now other Creatures come sniffing around, coming down the long dark field, sniffing the black SUV speeding in place but hurrying on, I help them onto the desk with Pirth & me & my dad, one at a time. Very colorful & shy Moosei, a pair of them. A girl bear in a long lovely black & white striped dress & flowered beret, pretty eyelashes. More coming.]

He probably hasn't caught a pass in five or six seasons [*his football cards have a lot of zeroes on them*], & he staggers wildly around with the ball, not remembering what to do or how [*run! you fat motherfucker!*], his old body moves & memories all gone. He runs the wrong way, & then he trips [*shit! shit!*], & he falls down near the sidelines, & I'm thinking to myself: *please, ball, just roll out of bounds & save my friend's pride for one more day* [I remember his first bad season began with him doing a TV commercial for Mulronie the Space Pirate's Cosmic Puff-a-Roonies Cereal, how it had him in his football uniform playing football on a planetoid with Mulronie, scoring back & forth until they agreed on a tie & a bowl of Puff-a-Roonies with skim milk, part of a complete breakfast], & it rolls closer & closer to the out of bounds marker.

In the older game, they put him on defense near the end of the game, & he roars through the line, crushes the pretty quarterback, ball jumps loose, & he scoops it up, & dances & jives his way to the end zone. The stadium lifts off with cheers for my friend.

### *lxii.*

The sun sinking in glitters & shades, the falls slinks & slides through the rocks, trees leaning helter skelter over the water, look at the rocks in the water, chunks of logs make a path in deeper & out—

[*You've got to pay attention to the signs in your life. You've got to look around for clues, there's all sorts of information & guide points everywhere, but you've got to pay attention. You can't be controlled by your dogmas & your presuppositions. You've just got to look around with open eyes, listen in strange ways any way you can.*]

### *lxiii.*

It is the old & well-known story of what happens when there is a Couple A & a Couple B. Couple A & Couple B meet in college. Couple B walks hand in hand into the student center, & they sit down at a table near Couple A, & they all start talking. Couple B is prettier, Couple A is kindlier. They switch up at times, becoming Couple C & Couple D, & two stray, Couple E & Couple F, & stray further, to form Couple G & Couple H. But eventually Couple A & Couple B reform.



Some years after college, Couple A & Couple B going to the Red Sox game on the weekend, one of them holds up the best sign in the whole park, & they win the local TV station's "Take a Swing!" contest. As prize, they get to play an inning against the Red Sox, right there in Fenway Park.

[“Even then I was thinking about these Woods,” he admits, a little shaky with his blue tin cup of water.

“What about it?” she asks, relieved to be back with him, willing to listen to it all whatever. He points. “That pond yonder I showed you. Sitting mornings, watching & listening to the wind blow the water to shore. Splashing kind of perpetual rhythms. Those low mountains all around. Especially the days when sky is overcast, smears of darker & lighter grey clouds across it. Trees & bushes all around the shore. Lots of white birches. A few Yellow Amanita Muscarias too. The big ferns you see. Massive rocks covered gently in moss. Climb & climb up, & up, find views nobody has seen. Ever.”

“Because we’re in your mind?”

“Yes. Yes.”]

For the first play, Couple A-he gets a single. Maybe the Sox are kind, don’t try too hard. Couple B-she takes a walk. Couple B-he bunts, & the Red Sox let all runners advance safely. Laughing lazily, rich, good-looking guys in tight white uniforms.

[“What about the tiny blue light?” she asks, realizing he will forget that & carry on randomly without returning to it.

“I still see it,” he says briefly, reluctant now, paranoid.

“What is it?”

“I don’t know,” he’s done. For now.]

The fourth one, though, Couple A-she, smashes the ball just over the left fielder’s glove. (She’s the leading hitter by a country mile in her local softball league. *Shhhhhh!*) The fielder slows it, that’s all, then wilds around for the ball. Another fielder rushes to help him—they’re panicked—they hadn’t expected this. They throw the ball back to the infield, but it just rolls away toward the dugout &, by the time the chaos & panic has settled down, there has been struck, inside Fenway Park, by these seeming amateurs (*Shhhhhh!*), an inside-the-park grand slam home run. And, as a result, the Red Sox have to pay them \$10,000 total—\$2,500 each—, plus make a \$10,000 donation to the Jimmy Cancer Fund.

*Delight delight delight*, everyone says, newspapers catch the gleam of their smiles, their pretty figures, the laughing charms in their eyes. Then days, *dot-dot-dot*, weeks pass. He sees a tiny blue light again on the ceiling of their bedroom. Thinking of his small Creature friend Pirth. Pirth’s fisher hat, the desert festival. Pirth’s dance, better than any coupling, any inside-the-park grand slam home run.

[“Where is he now?”

Quietly, “Up there.”

“Where?”

Points in numerous directions. Smiles weirdly & nods.]

*lxiv.*

We continue our peramble through the Attic. My friend Pirth dancing ahead of me. I talk our way along, the hallway we're in less narrow & low than some previous, red doors every so predictably often. Talk.

"Now they can say what they want, but I say that it all comes from the book I was reading. It was for a class, & it was a day late, should have read it yesterday. It's how these things go sometimes.

"Our house was tipped in design. I climbed from one half to the other, settled into the lowest end of the couch to read, where I was least likely to just tumble on out mid-page. And on the last page of the book I'm reading, the girl was telling the boy she had a good time the other night, & it ends, & I can't tell if a page is missing. I just don't know. I stare at the book, & I just don't know. Will young Mulronie leave pretty Figga after all, for the romances of outer space, that secret mission to the Moon & beyond?"

Of a sudden, Pirth stops by one of the occasional red doors, & waits for me to catch up.

Hm. OK. But no doorknob. I think. My Burning Man 2003 pendant. I lean toward the door & apply my pendant to the door's lightly glowing surface. Glow shifts from red to a sort of off white, & clicks open.

Walk in & wonder what.

[Put the Mulronie book in my knapsack & I head off to class with Pirth in my plaid jacket pocket that, mind you, was held yesterday, but I wonder if I can say something anyway. Along the way I figure: *well, since I'm late, maybe I'll just go in & see a movie.*

[There's this movie theater I like, it's down an alley, although the sign that marked it has long since been gone, so you *really* gotta know it's there or you'll never find it. I walk, still wondering about my book. I take Pirth out & set him to dancing before me.

[Wondering. Mulronie always packs his black & white TV with the Antennar 2000 last &, *when & only when they're packed*, he goes.

[It's a fairly big room. And the thing about this theater is that it doesn't have the usual rows upon rows of theater seats. It has an assortment of chairs, different kinds & sizes, armchairs & rocking chairs & so on, & the movie screen is small & it's over in one corner. So I pick up my favorite green armchair, lucky it's empty, & I move it as close as I can to the screen, trying not to get in the way of others who were also peering toward the screen, everybody trying to get a look. Because nobody actually charges us to get in, we try to have our manners.

[When it comes on, it's in the middle of the story, as the movies sometimes are at this theater. It seems to be a movie about a football team. The grizzled old veteran is showing the brash first round rookie how to play, how to win right. He feels he can't do it anymore, he believes he's on his way out. The fans laugh at him now, & the team usually only lets him block these days, not carry or catch the ball. His leadership in the locker room, coaching on the sideline, these are shadowed over by his big belly, grizzled jaw, slack-mouthed grin at everything.

[But I can feel the hotshot rookie's loyalty to him, the long-time loyalty of everyone else on the team to him still. No matter his lesser gleam, his diminished speed. He's their *leader*, he's their *man*. I want him to go out & play one more game, & I want him to ride out high. The movie ends suddenly before we can find out if he does. Puff of smoke, & the film on the screen burns to white.

[Everybody sits around for awhile, some smoked blunts, some talked politics, some looked for M&Ms on the floor. There were always one or two. Since there were no candy concessions at this theater, you had to get what you could. A few of the skeptical hipsters who'd stuck around this long decide to venture into the murk beyond the movie screen to a **Bar** they say is on the other side. Don't see any of them again tonight.

[Anyway, then a short cartoon suddenly comes on, it's about 30 seconds long & it goes like this: *they discovered that what had been slowly destroying their world all these centuries were people just like them, only these people were thousands of times bigger than them, & no more knowing that they existed than these tiny people had known the big people existed. But these tiny people embarked on a great mission to bring them down, by growing bigger in time. They vowed they would grow bigger, & they would bring the big ones down, & before you could even think twice, this short cartoon was over.*]

[[ Pirth & I've sat in the corner of this walls-less room during all this, him quietly on my knee, & paying attention, us both listening with ears, & the room seems to dim, as though the performance is over, as though time to leave.

[[ Did it work? Did they grow enough to defeat their enemies? I want to know.

[[ OK. I'll jump in. I pull my black pen from my pocket, & unfold *Lx* from the small cube it is in my other pocket. We set about arranging ourselves for this task. Scrounging in the dim performance area for some pillow to lay upon, on my stomach, *Lx* now before me.

[[ *Dark*, you say? *Pirth*, I answer. A pat on my nose & he begins to glow, his purple fur now a kind of lamp by which I can see this page. Does he doze, or watch me close with his dark little eyes? I can't tell. He is sitting near this notebook now, glowing, a deep thing of unique beauty, & I'll in awhile break so he can do his dancings, his way to praise the world, & pat it on its nose. But now to an answer. ]]

[[[ Deciding your people need to grow much greater than they are to defeat the strange enemy of your world & doing it means filling in the missing step. *How?*

[[[ The leader of the tiny people, the current one, they take turns, each one rules for a calendar year, from the first green of spring until the last melt of winter, but spring hasn't come in a long, long time, & the current leader is grey & bent now, he calls for the bravest souls to assemble themselves in the great hall for review & determination.

[[[ He declares the day's dawn & its dusk to be the time for this & a final decision.

[[[ Many, many appear to volunteer. Some too old, some too infirm. Some arguing for negotiation, or appeasement. Far most of them are thanked & dismissed.

[[[ Six are chosen of the dozens who came before him. The current leader, bent near half over in his chair, nods to these six alone & then, dusk come, dismisses the rest. Is quiet for a long time, regarding them.

[[[ "How?"

[[[ Silence.

[[[ "*How?*"

[[[ The tallest steps forward with a map he unrolls at the current leader's feet. Long & detailed, their world in all.

[[[ Points to a wide green swathe on one of the other 5 Islands than the one they are on. A great Woods. "There is a place few know. One passes through an ancient Gate to myriad paths within. There's a Cave deep in it. Within, a Beast. We will travel there, we will ask for his help.

[[[ There is silence. The current leader wheezily breathes. Nods. Flicks his hand. *Go.* ]]

I stop. Pirth is awake. I nod.

He dances, slowly at first, then more elaborately, more deeply, back & forth, back & forth, back & forth, ribbons flying about him, a purple glowing poem.

*What next?* I don't know. But a nice memory or dream or wish washes over me as I watch my cool little friend dance his magick praise for all.

#### *lxv.*

I was at someone's house, it was a friend, she had this large jug of LSD, it was brown-tinted, it was kind of a pretty brown, almost like a dye but I don't think so. She was very generous with this LSD, every time I came she made sure I got took care of, that I got risen up, that I got high. She knew I was struggling with my worry about paying rent. Then what happened one night was that, I don't know, I didn't get high, it didn't work, maybe it did, & I just didn't notice, the worry had overcome me. She was tired, she had to go to work the next day, she went to bed, & so I went into the little refrigerator where she kept all her medicines & chemicals & do-dads & I poured a little more LSD from her jug into my cup of orange juice, maybe a little more after that, I just had to finally evict this worry from my mind & not worry about rent except

for the first of the month. But I must have poured out too much because now it looked like there was a lot less in the jug than there was, & so I got panicked & I brought the jug over to the sink & I filled it up with water a little, but now that beautiful brown color was gone. It was watered down & I just didn't know what to do, & it's like in the course of trying to expel one worry, rent worry, I'd taken on another, so maybe there's a lesson in there for you or, honestly, maybe there isn't.

Um. *What? Oh.* Pirth dancing. Weird room. More of that cartoon, but not all. I stand, make a motion with my head, inviting Pirth up to my shoulder, three dance leaps & he's settled there.

We depart this strange room back to the endless hallway through the Attic. Walking along, pale glowing light, after awhile no doors even.

I begin to wonder what next, if anything. Possible to run out, or beyond, narrative?

No. There's always more. When people bore, as they will, just look at those great layered clouds, crafted by air & water. Their kind of magick won't quit.

#### *lxvi.*

"Pen moving is what, always, pen or pencil really, that's what's important," I am writing here & speaking aloud to Pirth as we continue along our way, him dancing in his furred ribboned quiet way, almost soundless, & I wish I spoke Dance but wonder if it's not a kind of self-evident tongue—dancing doesn't *mean*, dancing *is*—

OK, I am no lithe little Creature but I start into moving more dancey now, my large body has its own moves, & it feels nice to let it do so, like dancing is always waiting release in me—

Sort of how I feel writing is in me always waiting to happen—

Write along, dancing along, sure, & when the hallway gives way, awhile to something else, I'm OK, keep my dancing going, whether it's full-bodied or just my fingertips or even the free sparkles at the edge of my eyes & hardly anyone to see—

Here I am, standing in my old hometown. But, I'll tell ya, it looks a lot more prosperous than it used to. I find myself again on the street that used to have the bookstore I went into to buy 10-for-a-dollar paperback books out of a crate, & downstairs in its basement the burger joint where I'd sit in the corner, read my frail paperbacks, & write *lurve* poems.

[Dancing, trying those Pirth side to side moves, I remember that book called *Existential Casebook*, where I first read Sartre, Camus, Nietzsche, & so on. *Loved that book.* Its many strange big thoughts. I think of it often. Likely drowned in that friend's flooded basement as did so many of my beloved books.

[*Lurve* poems. Could I ever write one now? Plain & direct?



[The condition I find myself in  
is that I can relieve myself  
of the *need* for you, the jerk  
& thrust need of you, but  
I cling still to the *want* for you,  
terror over the cost of letting  
this chain go, dull freedom.]

Now it's all different. I stare at the pink neon sign **Mulronie's Original Genuine Gourmet Space Pirate Burgers!** & walk in. Not a paperback book in sight. Not even the Mulronie books. I *loved* those books. Just a weird, worn-looking full-sized cut-out of Mulronie in his Space Pirate suit, standing near the famous Space Tugboat, commandeered by the tiny cackling black & white pandy bear, sitting in Mulronie's hand.

[“Called the Cacklebird,” I, dancing, note to Pirth, dancing, but him not panting some as I am. “Sometimes they would take their vacations together. Relax & enjoy the sun on some semi-habitable planetoid they would find. I always thought this was funny.

[“But I would wonder, too, did Mulronie have his own Spaceship? Or did he come to their vacation spot in whatever ship he could find? Or did she have to pick him up from time to time, from wherever he happened to be?”]

Should I feel this furious? Didn't I leave this joint, this street, this whole town, a long time ago? But I do feel this furious, more than I ever have. Someone asks to take my order & instead I sit at an empty table, saying I am waiting for someone. *OK, sir. Let us know.*

[“Life becomes a complex try at letting go & carrying on. But loss never stops shocking. A loved one, a loved bookstore, a loved TV show, a loved band. There's no real strategy to any of it. One's memory becomes thicker, heavier with what's come & gone, what one does not or cannot or will not let go.”]

I look around. The exposed brick walls are the same. Just everything in the middle is different. Then I remember something that could help my fury. Up high toward the ceiling, there is a brick that I happen to know is a kind of explosive. The owner of the joint back then only told a few of us regulars about it. Called it his Plan B Retirement Plan. He didn't actually tell me; I just overheard them talking one night. He pointed up there & said in his unearthly drawl, “I just take a chair & climb up there, pull out that brick, & the spike behind it, & drive the one into the other. BOOM! Whatever problems I got, solved. End of the world.”

[Luna T's Cafe was like this. The real one inspired my fixtions about. A Friendly Restaurant, then closed, then some other restaurant, & then some other again. Now it's a sign-less office of some kind. What's visible through the windows is filing cabinets, so many, filled with them. Can't say what's deeper in. Change & shift & change again. Brain, memories, thicker & deeper & sadder.]

So I take my chair, & I climb up there, & I begin pulling at bricks to find the right one. And I hear below the consternation over what I am doing, & would likely be hauled down by the town cop (maybe there was more than one, but they always looked the same to me), but I find it, & I pull it down, the brick & the spike. Set them on the table before me, & think: *Do I want to do this?* Nod, & I raise the spike in my hand, & drive deep right into the brick to end the world!

[“I remember being sentimental & sad over what was lost when I was still quite young. Seemed more like what loved left than new love came to be. The world seemed to shrink, to grey. But new people, new things came. Maybe the shrinking I felt, feel, was not the world so much as what & who I care for in it. I think the human mind is at odds with its mortality. With no sure explanation for any of it. Within awareness that everything changes, & ends sooner or later.”]

I find myself back in a kind of a little store, the one they say has a buried spaceship beneath it. There’s a red-haired girl behind the counter that I knew, oh-so-long-ago, it aches me to think of it. I lean forward to kiss her, since the world has ended, & yet somehow it hasn’t. Has & hasn’t.

Now we’re sitting, facing each other, on the floor, & others are walking past, smiling at us, wondering: *who are these two crazy kids, & why does one of them think the world has ended?*

["Merry Muse?"  
 "Probably. No."  
 "Have I lost you completely?"  
 "I'm answering you."  
 "What would I do with you now anyway?"  
 She laughs.]

### *lxvii.*

Pirth leads me back to the hallway from these reveries & notions, his quiet, insistent dancing ever pulls me back to task.

I try to explain. “It’s like my Art & failures at romance form a depthless root in my mind & heart, & I can’t have one without the other.”

He dances on ahead of me, oh listening after his own fashion, I’m sure. But then I notice it’s hurried, purposeful dancing as ahead is not more hallway, but a room, & my beloved waits for me, her expression love for me, fondness for Pirth, who dances up into the flannel pocket of her flannel shirt, & a sort of familiarity with what all this is right now.

Again we find ourselves in a very cluttered living room, waiting for someone who’s on the phone in the other room. So I’ll be looking around thinking, *what can I put together here to sweeten her way?* And I find a Mason jar, & I mix in a little bit of chocolate, a little bit of coconut, from pouches I keep in my bookbag. Dashes & drops from flasks on the shelf with no labels on them, just for fun. I take a sip on it. It tastes drinkable.

[I look at Pirth in her shirt pocket, & he looks peaceful. Looks like our secret way to wonder. Looks lovely & dear, & wishing I ever knew more of him & all of Creature kind.]

And then a lot of people show up at that moment before my beloved can take a drink of this. Perhaps it's for the better, since what kind of mad concoction had I made? Anyway, I don't know anybody here, that's the kind of strange parties we've been going to.

[I think of years gone & perhaps to come yet of watching Pirth dance in the desert, as he is at least part dust devil, tis said. I try to remember years before I knew Creatures & relied, poorly, upon people to occupy my thoughts.]

But, happily, I sort of ease into a corner, & my beloved eases into the corner with me. Right near to the shelf with the strange flasks, & the empty one above it. I reach up to the empty one, tug, & it comes loose from the wall into my hands. It's made out of lots of pieces of wood, strange pale wood, wood that almost seems to *hmmmm*. These pieces of wood are twisted & braided together to form this board, & I'm going to hand it over to my beloved, so she can study it too, when it just sort of floats over to her. She catches it in her hands, & smiles, & floats it back over to me.

[See? it can all braid together happy. Love & Art. Creatures & people-folk. Watch this happening.]

Then I nod to her, she nods to me &, I don't know how we do it, but we together climb up on that board & float out through the open window into the clear night. *Goodbye, good night to another strange party.*

She plucks out Pirth from pocket & sats him on the front part of the board & of course he sets to dancing. It's a beautiful night to be floating along with loved ones.

### *lxviii.*

I lie back on the board & look up at the countless stars above. The air is perfectly cool. I let myself remember. I take this chance.

I'm with a group of friends. Dear ones. We're sitting around a table in the brown-paneled back room of that old Italian-Polish restaurant, & my old friend the Traveling Troubadour is there, strumming his guitar happily, blue eyes twinkling for all. But I know he's really gone & I have to go out to the bar in the other room to catch my breath for a moment. One of my friends comes out to see if I'm OK. She saw him too.

"He's long since fallen, now ash & gone."

"I know. Yah."

"And this restaurant no long has a brown-paneled back room."

"Yah."

"I keep returning here like it matters, like I can change anything. Like I can save him, or any

of them. Warn. Divert."

"Only in your thoughts. On your page."

"Yah."

We go back in & I ask him, *what's your life like now, wherever you are, up in the stars?* And he smiles big & says, *smokin', drinkin', guitar-playin'*. Then he gets serious with wailing pretty on his guitar, his beautiful voice once again filling this brown-paneled room, like years long gone.

I knew they mattered, those nights, but I could not have imagined what it would be like to look back at them & have not one of those friends to do so with. Not one. All but him still extant, 10, 12 of them, more, & not a one near to hand. Just tape recordings of laughing, shouting, fraternal voices.

Later we all leave that restaurant, 'cuz it's a beautiful night out, & we pile into somebody's car, & we're tight up against each other in the back, cheek to cheek, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip. I feel so fucking happy at this moment, & I close my eyes, & we come to some kind of party, & it's a very cluttered place, hard to say what kind of party's going on here anyway. Two laughing people are floating on some kind of board above the clutter, laughing, laughing hard, departing through an open window.

"Look!" I say to my long-gone friend clutching his guitar & laughing. "That's me & my beloved up there, years after you're fallen & ash."

He smiles & strikes loud, happy, cacophonous chords.

"Enjoy!" he cries. Strikes more chords. Motions to all these other not quite as lost friends to look & shout, "Enjoy! Enjoy!" We all cry out to me & my beloved up there.

We hear the cries from that apartment window we left below. "Enjoy! Enjoy! Enjoy!" We laugh & cry back in spirit. "Enjoy! Enjoy!"

It's a quite a party. Is there more to it?

I get this idea that something really important is in the middle of this clutter, & I go searching through it all, pushing things aside, almost randomly. And then I find them, these Secret Books that I only ever find in dreams like this one, & there they are, unharmed, & I just open one up because I know that my time with them is short, & this kind of reading's the best kind of reading.

I've known the Secret Books a long time, & they seem to appear in many kinds of ways & situations, & I cannot say how many of them there are, or how many iterations. What are they? What aren't they? I'm simply glad of them.

So I dive in, & start reading about the King who summoned his brothers on a great quest, his mission to lead them to a mysterious Island. On the Island, to find a timeless, powerful Gate; within it, a being who might help them save the world. Carries with him a Secret Book of his own, within it a map of the Island.

*What is the Island?*

*What is the Beast?*

But what happens is that one night along their years-long way, tired, drooping, they let loose in a sort of coffee house in a Village, start carousing & fighting. What causes the fight is that they see specters of their lost loves in the murk of the Tavern, people they left behind years back to go on this quest. These loved ones are sad & missing them, yearning for them to return. It's a night where the quest may just fall apart out of sadness for what is gone, & yet their King somehow holds them together.

It is only in Imaginal Space that a great myth like this can play through its strange idealism & fantasticalness. The wonders of the earthly world we mostly know are many, as are its mundane & ugly foolishnesses.

Imaginal Space allows some ideas, some characters, some narratives, to take the fore & dominate the reality of the mythical world contrived.

And so somehow he makes it so the night passes more blurrily & they hang together. By the next morning, they don't really remember much of what happened, & I think to myself, having been through a night of my own, *sometimes I could use a little bit of that blurry not-remembering-so-well-next-morning stuff. But only sometimes.*

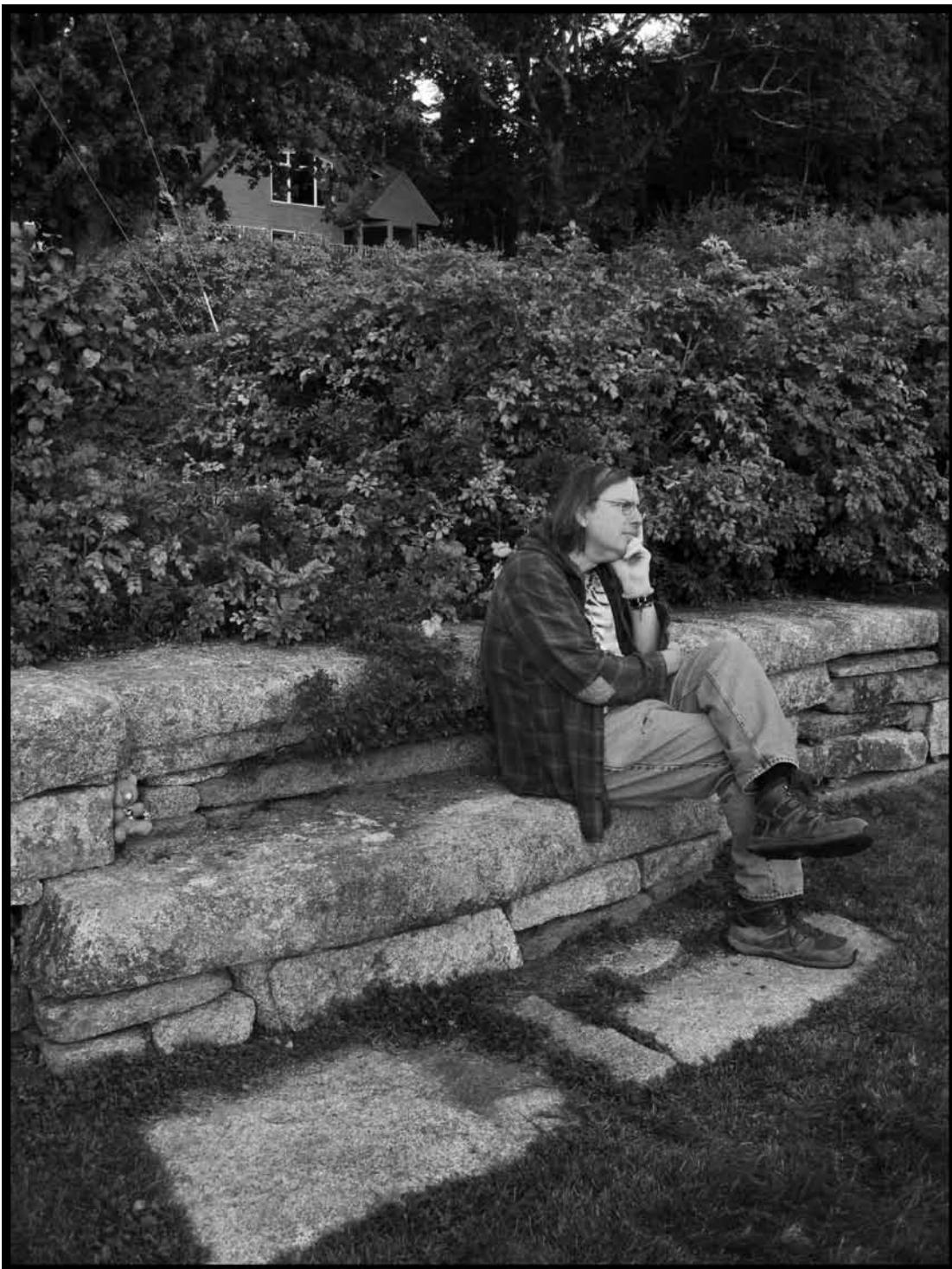
### *lxix.*

[I'm descending a complicated series of ladders & stairs, among many people, continuously climbing down. I feel as I'm descending like it's not just space but time, I'm descending through places & people I've known & haven't known, times that still remain strange to me though I lived in them, through them, in spite of them. I think of people I knew, that I knew so closely, yes, yes, no, maybe. That's all you get at best. Then there are people I remember that became different to me over time. It's like who they are in my mind now is based on someone they once were, & who they actually are somewhere out there on the planet doesn't really matter anymore because they operate in my mind in a different way, they become a kind of a symbol of something, become tied to something, tied to a feeling, or tied to a memory, *tied to something*, like a mascot.]

Pirth pats my nose as we sit in a murky place along the Attic. He knows I'm shambling at times & this endless Attic feels like something powerful & inexplicable.

There is no time here as I keep returning from that otherworld I live in, days passing sometimes, to the precise moment I was at here. It's like in the course of an eyelink I am *there* & then *back here*.

Does, should this bother me? I don't know. In time, no time. I should learn how to work them in some kind of harmony.



[It's like you were once my friend & now you're Cap'n Crunch. Now you're my mascot for regret, for youth, for fun, for foolishness. And I keep descending this series of ladders & stairs & I feel my limbs fall away from me & not really important anymore in this descent. This descent is not into a physical place. This descent is through dream, somewhere else. The faces fall away, as faces do, & other faces come, & they go too. If I'm lucky, as I fall away completely, I will look beyond the faces & see the rest of this wide, wide world.]

I look at Pirth who's crawled onto this page & is touching words & causing them glow purple like his fur. *This descent is through dream, somewhere else.* Hm, yes. OK.

*lxx.*

When I think back on those crazy days, back when I was a spy, there were some funny moments, in amidst the bloodshed & mayhem. There was one I still like to tell about. We had an operation going on in a hotel room. It was a big hotel room, big as an apartment.

[In the Hotel Noah, of course, that's this book's usual hotel, down the street from Luna T's Cafe, in The City, or some dream version of Hartford, or maybe somewhere else now, more, less, & other. A hotel, & something else, & something else still. So tall, so always cloudy at the top, other, *something else*.]

My partner & I were trying to tease something from the air, expose it. He'd brought in this heavy suitcase for our work. It was one of those bulletproof kinds. You could drop it from a hundred floors up & it'd be fine, wouldn't break or open up. You had to use the right thumbprint, & tumbler combination, & maybe a couple of secret handshakes to get into that bugger but, once you got into it, that's what you got. Bugs. In cans, & jars, & containers, all sorts of insects. Ants, praying mantises, hummingbirds, etc., etc.

[They'd been collected from across time & space, you must understand. This account is incomplete, maybe intentionally, maybe by ignorance of the full story. As you'll read, they, or some of their number at least, weren't ordinary insects. The searchers had been told these could help save the world most men had elected to destroy by intent, stupidity, or foolish fanaticism. Collect them, do not harm them, bring them to where & when told.]

I was unclear at first why we brought them in to set them loose, & then my partner took out from the suitcase what he called the Football. The Football was this football-shaped light &, when we set it up on a table, the bugs would gravitate towards it. The closer they got to it, the more likely it was they were going to evaporate. They'd evaporate.

[Now destroyed. No. The writer does not know what happened to them. He does not hear the *hmmm* drawing them, the glowing within the Football's light, the language few know exists, must less how to comprehend. The "evaporation" was simply transportation elsewhere, to where they were needed, & could help. Neither agent knows what's going on really. This account drifts further from facts.]

Well, I wasn't sure what all this was about, because it just seemed like it was a lot of trouble for a bug zapper. My partner assured me this was no ordinary bug zapper, or zapper of any kind. *You see, he told me, blue-sometimes-green eye glinting, mushroom eye glinting too, what's important is not the ones that evaporate but the ones that don't. Because, when they don't, it's like it's some kind of signal, like in their buggy little minds it's time to hurry home.*

[Just further & further from the facts. The bugs that stayed were told to, by the *hmmming*, the glowing, a simple trick. Who remains *must* be more important. Make sense?]

[Later the one with the blue-green eye would learn what was really going on. He would feel fascinated, stupid, but his help would be very much needed.]

[The narrator of this report would find himself on a different path, but we valued him too. This would be the last case they worked together in their short-lived partnership.]

I didn't know what *hurry home* meant, or why it was important, but this is what we wanted to do. We wanted them to approach the Football, & then the ones that didn't get zapped to hurry home. Now the problem with this was that we had to let them out of the hotel room for them to hurry home, & follow them, & this part of the operation went south pretty quickly because they're insects, they go fast, & these were super-hyper-intelligent alien insects to boot. But I don't think our technologies were really prepared to follow these super-hyper-intelligent alien insects back to wherever *home* was.

[This report is so off now that it's hard to untangle. These agents assumed the "insects," as they would call them, leave the hotel room. What happens really, as close as it is to describe, is that the "insects" stay in *space* but move in *time*, backwards, to what the Noah Hotel was long, long, *long* ago. What would explain why it is how it is, this hotel-shaped not-hotel-at-all. Events that occurred on its piece of land, & underneath. Where & how the so-called Football came to be, what it really is, as much as these things can be known & said.]

And so, ultimately, I just sat at the hotel bar a lot until the operation was declared over, & there was a red-haired waitress there who kept my drink filled. I was just watching the news, the same political things comin' & goin' as ever. Saw some pretty shady characters in the hotel, too, comin' & goin'.

[A waitress but not really a girl. More like one of the so-called insects, keeping close watch on this agent. He'd come down only on a break, for one drink, but what she served him kept him there, days really, not noticing how the many hours passed, no feeling of passing time, & the footage on the TV synched to his glass, holding him suspended in a stretch of time on an endless loop.]

I noticed that some of them were a little overly dressed for the summer heat that was happening outside. Some of them passed through the lobby in long coats, big hats. Sometimes their antennae poked out, sometimes tails from under their coats, sometimes they made a *buzzzzzzz zzzzzz zzzzzz* noise as they passed.

[In the same short loop he lived in, the only thing changing is that she would bring him a fresh drink at the beginning of each episode, which would be wearing down by the end.

[Time did pass around him but when Bowie came several times to check for him, he was always at the mark when he was in the bathroom, & she would smile flirtily & say she hadn't seen his friend but she was sure she could find him a table if he'd like to wait.

[Bowie smiled back, didn't. Left hotel eventually, wondering what had happened to his partner. Young, green, gullible, but a good man. Bowie'd liked him.

*lxxi.*

It was a very strange year indeed. I found myself often walking through a series of old factory buildings. It became my regular path. Between the buildings were these wide, wide alleys, dark, & I couldn't tell if they were filled with trash, or if people were living there, or something else stranger still was going on.

[What stranger might this be? Breaches in time & space? Whole villages in shadows? Depthless holes to? But go on.]

I'd always get to a certain point in this walk, or *perambulation*, as one of my stranger friends would call it, where I just had to go to the bathroom. There, over to my left, sort of embedded in one of these old factory buildings, was a red door. Next to the red door was a blacked-out window, but it had a neon sign in it to tell you what was going on. It said **Bar**.

[Red doors are strange & not like others. Those wide dark alleys . . . do they have red doors within them? I'm not sure. I'm struggling to know & say.]

So I'd go over to **Bar**, & it took me a few times to remember that you didn't just push the door open at **Bar**—you had to kick at the bottom twice, & push high immediately, to get the door open. Otherwise it wouldn't no matter what you did, because it was only that combination that worked. I can't tell you how I learned it, but somehow I did. Maybe someone showed it to me. *Who knows?*

[Do red doors always require such knowledge to open? I wonder if I'll come to a Red Door in this Attic?]

Anyway I'd go in, & the bar would be over to the left, & over to the right would be a bathroom stall. Not a bathroom, just a stall. Just a toilet surrounded by three flimsy walls & a door. And I'd go in, & close the door, & I reinforce it with the trash can that was there within the stall, since there was no lock, because inevitably someone would come banging against the door, wanting to use it, not recognizing that I was inside, not seeing my feet, not hearing my noises. [Is this an alley? Why would I think this? It's inside a building; how can it be an alley? What is the difference? What does any of this mean?]

It was often this woman, she'd come pounding at the door, yelling *Fucking secret Moon mission!* & I'd hurry & I wouldn't finish. I'd just escape the whole thing & often, perhaps every time, I'd be attracted to what was going on at the back of the bar because, you see, there was no back wall, there was just sort of a murky inkiness that trailed off for as far as the eye could see, & further.

[If the inkiness goes off in many directions, does it lead to the alleys? Do the alleys have a network amongst them, a series of red doors? I look at Pirth, wondering if he could tell me, if I could ask in the right words, in the right way. He dances quietly along, ribbons flying hither & yon in the glowing hallway we travel.]

And I'd find myself walking into the murkiness &, sure enough, there would be another bathroom, or rather just another stall, but this time nobody else competed for its space. So I'd walk in, I'd close the door, & it actually had a lock. I'd close my eyes to calm, & I swear sometimes I thought I could hear the sounds of a TV show or a movie going on, distantly. Maybe a laugh or two. But I had to get where I was going, so I regret to say I never walked deeper into the murkiness to see what it was. Lazy, cowardly? I don't know.

[Is there something more even than a networked series of alleys in that murky inkiness? A spaceship perhaps, half sunk in the earth? I've heard stories that make me wonder about this.]

### *lxxii.*

Suddenly on the floor of the glowing Attic hallway there appear these words. I read them aloud to Pirth, who dances among them:

“Now this story started slow, those pages back there, so you could follow it really easily at the beginning, but now it’s going to twist, & it’s going to turn, & I’m not saying you can’t do it, but I am saying maybe hang onto the rails a little bit more, just in case.”

We walk into these words,  
down & in & through.

### *lxxiii.*

I'm sitting in a sort of coffee house in the Village. It runs back into its own murk for what seems like miles. And there's this turquoise-eyed girl I'm sweet on. Her name is Figga. I think I'm some other age. It might be younger, it might be older. It might just be some other kind of number. She's friendly but somewhat distant. I'm shy, don't know what to say. Probably I'm younger than I am now.

[How do I see others then? *How?* Her turquoise eyes, her oval smile face, leading to her shapely sweater, her long flowery dress. Her reddish-blonde hair. What she thinks about poetry, about music, what her kiss tastes like. What her warm hand feels like. My later mind wonders what her moan is like when being fucked, how dark & deep her fantasies go, where her farthest

sexual fantasies lie. How to possess her farthest lands, not just be another cock in her, but the *only one that matters.*]

But I do my best, smile, talk about books, Mulronie & so on, & at some point she kind of smiles, & nods, & wanders away, & I see her go off with some pretty guy for a while.

[*Always a fucking pretty guy. Always.*]

Then later she's back, her long red hair now tied up in a fake bob, & I don't remember what we're talking about. It all feels like loneliness & yearning. I'm helpless, but I try to remember back, *how did I get here?* Maybe that'll help me figure out where I am now & what's next.

[“What’s next?” I pull back to the Attic hallway, & kneel down low to look at & ask Pirth. He reaches up to pat my nose. Then resumes dancing on.]

I was on that green bus, the one that runs to the hospital, & I knew that most of the passengers on the green bus are not coming back tonight. It's the last green bus of the night. I got off it, not at the hospital, no, & I was walking the streets awhile, thinking about how a lot of them who stayed on the green bus were not coming back.

[Green bus. Red door. Glowing hallway. Pirth's purple fur. Her turquoise eyes. Blue-green Wide Wide Sea. Deep black of Deep Deep Sea.]

I was supposed to go to the hospital. The doctor said, *you just come on in, & we'll get you cleaned out & fix it all.* Then he added, *you could take your chance with the pills, maybe they'll help. Or you can heal on your own,* & he shrugged. So he really didn't know, & maybe he really didn't care. I'd had enough of that hospital. The crowded rooms, the quarreling roommates.

I cross the road toward this sort of coffee house, & I see the green bus in the distance, still heading to the hospital, going faster & faster. I know that driver; he won't stay on the street as he gets closer to the hospital. It takes hold of him, that feeling that most people he's driving are not coming back, it takes hold of him, & sometimes he'll drive off the road, into the ditch, & maybe he'll just stop for a moment for a minute, & sit silently, his bus half-tipped in the ditch.

He remembers a dream he had, it was a long time ago, but it feels like it applies to nights like tonight, when I'm feeling like this—*We were all lost, & so we traveled to an alternative time, where the world had been healed of all its ills, & it felt good, & it felt hopeful*—, & so that's how I first came here, this sort of coffee house, it being one of the crossroads amongst the many kinds of worlds. But then something terrible happened.

There was a great explosion of some kind, & there's no more sort of coffee house, & I have this naked red girl, red-haired girl, in my arms. What I am saying is, she's burned but she's also red-haired, red-haired and red-skinned in my arms. And we're being pursued, & I'm looking for an escape, somewhere, & finally I see it. I see that big house that I dreamed about all those years. Been awhile.



I remember there was an Attic, & there were many mirrored rooms, & you could just lose yourself in those many-mirrored rooms. I carry her, red-skinned & red-haired, clumsily climbing the fold-down ladder to climb up into the Attic.

Pirth & I arrive to the mirror & see you through it, & you look like me, but for the girl in your arms, & I have a Pirth, & you do not. Is this what we've come to here, finally? This strange moment where vision & being stand facing each other like this?

You turn away, & carry her over to a couch in the darkened living room on that side of the mirror. She does not stir in your arms yet is living. Is warm. I look down at you & wonder how I can heal your burns, wake you new?

A furry paw taps at me & I look at your deep dark eyes & see deeper into them than I have before, & something so powerful there as I gently lift you up, your fur now glowing beautifully & us both *hmmming* as I use you like a magick tool to pass over the girl's burned body, healing her clean & fine, every inch, slowly, glowing, *hmmming*, & then a gentle lift & push & we tend to her burned back side, & eventually she is clean & fine again, & I dig around in the drawers of the ancient chests & bureaus in this strange room & find lace underwear, ancient but they slip onto her hips & chest with ease, & a thick green & gold sweater over her top, & a long lacey flowery thick & flowing skirt for her lower half, & no shoes to be found, but a beautiful brown blanket with many handsome sober guarding bears upon it, soft & fringed blanket, long enough to cover her, & Pirth & I doze together in a nearby armchair, listening to her sleep peacefully, painlessly, all quiet.

*lxxiv.*

Time isn't linear, no, it's like a big field, moments, places, people, events.

It's hard to believe this, & yet only to be able to point & say, **that's where I came from, back there**, but not be able to point somewhere else & say, **that's where I'm bound, over there**.

*lxxv.*

He was known as Jack the Drug Dealer. He was a polite man, but he was in bad shape. Everybody knew it. The only hint you had of him from his older, better days was that paperback he carried around. *Unofficial Guide to Mulronie the Space Pirate's Universe*. You never saw him look at it, but you always got the feeling he just didn't have to, that he knew all its contents.

But then good luck came to him. He was sleeping in alleys, his only address a cavernous bookstore nearby that was kindly to him. Most of the time, if he ate at all, it was from the licorice roots found in a nearby park. But then good luck came to him, he won some money in some kind of contest, & grew confident, and he was now head of a charity organization, with ten nodes of business. He was on the top; his clothes were clean.

I was new on the job, & I heard this story about him in pieces over time. Then one day I got

called into his office. It wasn't that big an office for the big head of a charity organization. I don't think he ever quite left the alley in some way.

We ended up sitting on the floor together. He told me a story. He said, *there was this baseball game & I was in the outfield. They put me out there because they figured that was the place where I could do the least damage. I was their mascot, because I won a contest with my friends. People paid to see me stand in the outfield & wave to them. They were pretty good defensive team, so not many balls came out my way.*

*But then one time this ball was hit hard, I heard it, it was a crack! a beautiful sound, strange to say, & I think it's going to go over my head, but then it starts to arc low, & I start rushing toward it, & for a moment I forget that I'm no good at baseball, & I don't know why I'm here. I'm in the outfield because they have no use for me, just short of not having me at all. I just leap into it, my body arcs low, & the ball is curving low, & they are going to meet, my glove & this ball, & what happens is this: I squeeze my glove with my eyes closed & by the single thread hanging off the ball, because it was hit so hard that it was kind of tattered, I catch it & hold it above the ground. I catch it cleanly.*

*Nobody realizes. They think I'd just kind of fumbled & jumped & fell my way toward near it somehow. And they were yelling at me to throw to home plate! because the monster that had hit this ball was going to get an inside-the-park home run off my sorry ass. But I raise the ball up, & I yell, I caught it clean! And then, just to convince them all, I hurl that ball toward home plate. It's a beautiful throw, straight on, arrives cleanly in the catcher's glove. I'm not capable of that throw, wasn't then, not now, not ever.*

*Later, someone asked me to autograph the inside of a milk carton. He said, this carton's covered in signatures & statements by heroes, & you're one. So I did.*

"Because you caught that ball, sir?"

"Yes."

"That made you a Hero?"

"Yes. It did."

"No, it didn't."

He stares at me.

"You're a Hero because you kicked your habit & you're here."

"I guess."

"You guess?"

"I just got lucky, son. Won some money in a contest."

"You read Mulronie too?"

"Yah, I do. Did. Don't really have time for it now."

"All five?"

"Yah."

"Wishing at night there was a sixth?"

"Yah, hard. Then."

"He's a Hero."

"Yah."

"You caught a baseball. That's all. You were a Hero like Mulronie before you came here."

He's silent. Doesn't know who or what I am. Better this way.

Smiles briefly.

"Now get out of my office. Get back to work, son."

*lxxvi.*

Pirth leads me from all this through a watery wall in the Attic to a rocky beach to behold the Wide Wide Sea. He dances back through the watery wall & I shuffle & stumble my way along among the larger & smaller stones, countless evergreens behind me, to my left & right. There's also great whitened-out tree trunks strewn here & there, & I bring *Labyrinthine* over to sit on one.

The Wide Wide Sea sparkles in what feels & looks like noontime sun. Can light bouncing off water be a kind of language, a communiqué from hidden sources, a sparkling code?

The rocks are bigger than me, & I'm over six foot, as I approach the water. The Sea's rhythmic song stays with me as I pause & retreat, no mystery solved, maybe new ones seen.

It's easy to say, in a beautiful & peaceful moment place like this, that the world is perfect beyond all reckoning, that somewhere along the way men & women turned too inward to their own kind, confused dwelling on a piece of land, building homes from its materials, with ownership.

The world is why we're here, & we return after a long run to its earth, its air, its water. Nobody has ever eluded this fact. Not King nor beggar nor prettiest smile girl. Not any gnat nor greatest tallest tree. The Sea's song reminds us we are not alone, not orphans, not unloved, & waited for patiently like every other.

Its sparkling code says to me, right now,  
like the old poem:

*Smile.*

*Wake up!*

*Happiness*

*lxxvii.*

There's always these kinds of confusions between one thing & another. I'm sure you've been involved in a few yourselves. You see, this occurred during the Civil War & football. My squad is in the other side's war-torn territory, & we need to find some room for our kicker, when their soldiers rush at us, & we shoot them down so he can kick the go-ahead field goal. And he does. He's very good, you see. *Very good.*

And now we're ahead, holding a slim lead. We then find ourselves in some kind of building.

There are many of them as well. We're all getting food, it's like a cafeteria. *Is this like a timeout? Halftime?*

Now we're returning back to battle, & we get the word that Headquarters wants us to put on a big To-Do, & I am getting confused as to whether this is the Civil War & football, or possibly a Grand Production on the stage in the classic traditions of Vaudeville & Creature Carnival.

[Have I even seen anyone shot & die yet? Even dying? Lotta blood, yes, but is it real? Is any injury fatal? *What is any of this?* My soldier's uniform is tight on my chest & loose below. I study my rifle, no bullets, light as a feather. Pirth is dancing quietly on this battle/football field. I pluck him up & find ample, safe jacket pocket to tuck him in.]

[I find myself crawling over the stage, & people are waving at me in a confusion of lights, music, & noise. It just seems chaotic, & I'm trying to figure what's going on, when I fall through this stage, & I fall & fall & fall, until I land in the lounge of a kind of library in a very strange museum. I see in this lounge drawings of a red-haired girl that my friend Harry likes. He made them when they went to dinner. Told me with a shit-eaten grin that her name is Figga.]

[[[Museum? In these White Woods? Yes, of course. The Thought Fleas Museum. I believe it only opens during the annual Rutabega Festival they host. Features many artworks made for Fleastock, the arts exhibition that occurs during the Festival.]]]

[But then I blink twice, & they're not there, & I realize, *wow, this was one of those prognostications.* I saw pictures that haven't been made yet. And I turn to him, he's lying there on one of the other couches, passed out in between a boy & a girl, as is his preference. Ask him, *which one?* He'll say, every time, *Yes!*

[I tell him about those drawings of that girl he really likes, & how they went out to dinner, & while they were at dinner he pulled out his sketchpad because he's very good, you see, he's *very good.* He drew a beautiful, elegant, sweet, lovely portrait of her, giving special attention to her turquoise eyes, & she squirmed about in her seat at the restaurant, wondering who else was watching, & many were, but she liked these drawings very much. ]]

I get up & leave him to think about this, his life, his future decisions. Whether this lounge life with its pretty toys is worth it still. Walk along this vast murky room, Pirth safe in my pocket, & the soldier's uniform melts like a mist off me, but now he's in my regular green plaid jacket front pocket, & I think to myself, *isn't it funny how where you start & where you end in these things can have virtually no relation to one another.*

*lxxviii.*

Houses & many trees, it's nighttime, & I'm lost. No phone to call anyone to pick me up. Then

some fast figures appear, chasing, laughing wickedly, & they seem to herd me along, but they don't capture me. Then someone else they're herding along too despairs & gives in, allows capture, but then regrets it with a yowl.

But I don't. I just don't, & they herd me along, & eventually there's a green bus, & it doesn't seem to stop in this neighborhood. But I run for it, pound at its door, pound & pound it. It slows, & I get my fingers inside the door, & I yank it open just enough to squeeze in. I climb on, & I give the driver a dirty look, like *dare me to pay you, just dare me*.

Pirth still in my plaid green jacket pocket, resting comfortably, & me wondering *what is this strange adventure we are on?* How & what will I report back to Flossie Flea in those far back there White Woods? Will I miss this year's Rutabega Festival & Fleastock? Is there something I should be looking for or trying to understand along these travels? I look down & Pirth reaches paw up to pat my nose with affection & reassurance. Creatures understand so much I don't.

The green bus rides strangely & bumpily out to the hospital, veering on purpose into a ditch at one point, the driver sitting there staring for a while, like his mind is shut off. But eventually it comes around again, & I make it home. Start to make up our bed, but it's a vast bed, & it's covered in papers that I push to one side to get the blankets better spread. They're from a manuscript I can't seem to organize into a proper book. I hate looking at these pages & feeling my failure. Mulronie waiting at the far end of the neighborhood, so patiently.

I pop Pirth out of my pocket & he hops down to the scattered manuscript pages, & his strange dancings affect them in some magickal way; they begin to dance too, like he does, back & forth, back & forth, back & forth, side to side, & they begin to organize, assemble in a way I'd not thought. Too focused on how they should be by my lights, not enough on how they should be *by their own*.

OK, then. I start singing to myself, after this hard, strange night, that old song,

*Goin' down the road, feelin' bad.  
Goin' down the road, feelin' bad.  
Goin' down the road, feelin' bad, feelin' bad,  
& I don't wanna be treated this-a way.*

It's late now, & I'm thinking, *man, it'd be good to sleep.*

I lie down, push the papers again to one side, more of them, they seem to be accumulating again on the bed. *We lost so many, Mulronie. What do I do with the rest?*

*lxxix.*

You know those kind of sunny, sunny days. Oh yes, those kind of sunny, sunny days when you find yourself sitting in a patch of grass, maybe just a big old field, nothing going on in that big old field, nothing having to do with people & their mighty small concerns, no sir-ee. There's

just grass growing, maybe a tree, insects, small animals, whatever else.

Shade or sun, where to sit? I've drunk my Lucy juice, I'm escalating up & relaxing at the same time, feeling the magickal buzz coming on, & the sun might glow my closed eyes bright, but the shadows dance, play, daunt & delight me. Shade or sun? I sit on the border.

I find myself watching this insect pick its way along the grass. It's sort of shaped like a stick with legs. I can't even figure out where its head is. It's a very strange insect, & it puts me into a sort of reverie because I start remembering this red-haired girl I knew a long time ago. Her name was Figga. Strange name, eh? But Figga was her name, & I was in her house, & I was comin' down the basement stairs. I had this uncommon way of coming down these stairs. Halfway down, I sort of swung from them & sideways into the basement. Done it many times.

It reminded me of my youth, maybe it's why I came over so often, this basement, my childhood, that basement, my toy trucks & little brown & white horses. My Nerf football games, using chairs for players, using my imagination, another world, a waking dream midst my waking nightmares.

*Well, OK, you might say, so how did you know Figga?* Well, I think she was my neighbor, & I'd come over to her house to fix things. *And was she old or young?* Well, I'm not really sure. She kind of seemed like she was a little bit of both, & it seemed like everything that needed to be fixed was in her basement. I think that's where she kept broken things. I think she liked to keep all the things that didn't work or needed fixing in one place.

That old childhood basement, & its many dusty & moldy boxes, its old furniture, its mementos & trinkets, its dirty windows, its bare bulbs hanging in the various corners. The noisy grinding washer & dryer that I know now cleaned little. Not enough detergent. I'd bet so. Stupid things I knew far too late.

So I'd come in, & I'd be the fixer-guy, & I had no skills, & I didn't even have any tools. She bought me the tools at the local tool store, what they call in technical terms the *hardware store*. I'd come down, oh 'bout once a week, for a while, & I'd see what had broken & what she needed fixing. Sometimes it was something that had broken in her house, & sometimes she just found things out in the world that were broken, & she thought, *oh well, he'll fix them, he's good with the tools & the skills.* But I wasn't good at either the tools or the skills.

Things of mine from my old childhood basement began to show up too, & I tried twice harder to fix them. The little brown horse on orange wheels. The little brown wooden chair I would hand off to when a running play was called for. *I tried harder to be good with the tools & the skills*

But what fascinated her about me was that I had once lived on a mythical Island out far, far in the Wide Wide Sea. It did not have any attachments to the roots of the earth. I'd gone out there when I was a student. It was one of those exchange programs where I got to live for awhile and study on this Island.

But I must admit I wasn't very good at it because, although it was a very big Island, it wasn't actually even finished, & I used to find myself sort of floating at the edge of it, with my notebooks, & sometimes they would float away from me, & that seemed far more important to me than anything else that was happening on this Island. In fact, I can't even tell you what was happening on this Island, or what I was supposed to be studying.

All I know was that I had a hard time keeping my stuff together & that really wasn't very much fun. But Figga, she just couldn't get enough of hearing that I had lived for awhile as a young student on a mythical Island. And then she'd hand me somethin' else to fix, her turquoise eyes twinkling, & the conversation would continue elsewhere.

Pirth & I are sitting in Figga's basement now, it was through a dusty door in the Attic, down the same stairs, my same leap into it, Pirth in my big paw, ribbons flying, & we land.

There's an old blue suitcase sitting in one of the old wooden chairs I'd drop back to pass to. I look down at Pirth who is strangely calm & still & looking up at me & staring me with his dark dark little eyes.

"It's got a box of threads, a strange map, a little sack of icons, & a secret green & gold sack of 6 or 7 colored stones," I say to him, not touching the suitcase.

OK, OK, I pick it up, & Pirth up, & we go back up the stairs.

*lxxx.*

This happened long ago, or far on from now, depending on your point in things. In the year 2402, or was it 24,002? I'm not sure of the details, but my love & I are in a house we share with another couple. We've been away but now are returning, & it's still new to us, even though it's an old house. There's still shelves to build, places on the walls for pictures. How can something be both new & old? Known & novel, *how?*

And I don't think it matters so much if it's 2402, or 24,002, or Timbuktu. There's always a couple, a house, the new, the novel. Our bodies blessed with time, finite time, blessed more with minds that can stretch a joyous moment or tragic one out a year, a century, an eon. Nothing to understand but everything yet to know.

I leave the next morning, very early, to go to school, to try to catch up. I'm behind on my classes, & haven't paid for anything. And I think what happens is that I walk down the wrong hallway, & I arrive at the wrong school, & I get turned around, & I end up on the ceiling. But it's one of those places where you can walk on the ceiling, & walk on the floor, & everything kind of spins around, & time passes, & I come upon a girl who seems friendly enough, & I ask her what time it is. She says, *it's 1:30.* I want to ask her what year, but I just quietly despair.

Open my eyes, slumped against wall in the Attic hallway, purple furred Pirth on my knee, & I lean down, & he reaches up, & furry paw pats nose. *Ahh yess.*

lxxxi.

So this is what happens when you go to that strange Nada Theater, at that strange No-Tel, after midnight, well after midnight. You've seen more of **Remoteland** tonight, sure, it went on for hours, it seemed like for more hours than there are in a night. But now, if you can outlast the crowds, such as they are, stay on & on in your seat, don't find some reason to leave or let someone persuade you it's time to go & have a malted at the local sugar emporium, you might get to see the movie that comes on near dawn, pre-dawn they call it. You might get to see **More Fun**.

Advertised in the local newspaper thus:



It's a strange world of **More Fun**. It's like our world but worse, if you can imagine that. No zombies, no vampires, no nuclear apocalypse. No, something happens, & people just start dying. They get weak, & never recover from this weakness. And what's funny, though not really, is that when the weak ones start to die, they sort of melt away, parts of them becoming invisible. Still there, but invisible. Then the invisible parts fade out completely. Some people call these poor unfortunate souls Melties.

Our hero, such as he is one, is the Postman. He finds a gun shop, & takes a few, & then he finds a grocery, & ransacks it for food. Then he leaves his known places behind, & eventually meets up with a man called the Recruiter.

The Recruiter is rebuilding the population of the world by killing the Melties. He does it kind; they never see it coming. Often he spends a last night with them, sharing their meal, maybe singing their songs, letting them tell memories of what it used to be like. How it is now, maybe any hopes they have left. Kills them quickly in their sleep, buries them carefully somewhere peaceful. If he can't do it mercifully, then he parts them still breathing, still melting.

But his goal is for humans to finish the race, & then the world will carry on from there. He's good at finding people in holes & hideaways. He says to the Postman, the first night they are traveling together, *we just can't have human beings like Melties, who are more like hotel soap in a*

*hot shower. We just can't have them.*

I look up from the newspaper ad suddenly, or down, at Pirth still on my knee, & I realize, *yah, I wrote all about this already not long ago, so what more now?*

What about those Melties? What does it feel like to melt, lose one bit of one's self, & then the next, to nothing? Is there phantom pain? Is it painless? Is there acceptance? Is it better or worse than the burial or the burn?

### *lxxxii.*

It's Attic still but it's more White Woods now too, two are one, as ever & always. Pirth dances along happily, a Creature, loves, native to these Woods. I try my few dance moves again, just to see.

I just wonder, as I travel through these White Woods horizontally, a sugar cube of LSD melting through me, allowing me to travel in this new & pleasurable way, I just wonder: *how it is that the Woods more welcomes me this way, horizontally? What is it about my human form that fits better this way?*

I come at last to the road that I didn't know was here, because there are no roads in the White Woods, & yet here is this road, passing through the White Woods, it's a simple paved road. *What does that mean?* And I'm feeling for my horizontality, *but it's gone.* I'm upright & walking again. Whatever that was, it's gone. It feels like I'm walking on this road forever & ever, but never getting anywhere.

A touch at my ankle below, a beautiful furry purple paw. *Oh. Why do I forget?* Who am I when I *know* in contrast to who I am when I *don't know?*

No answers. Just dance dance dance along these nearly pathless White Woods & wonder as well at how much of the rest of the world is *far less interesting.*

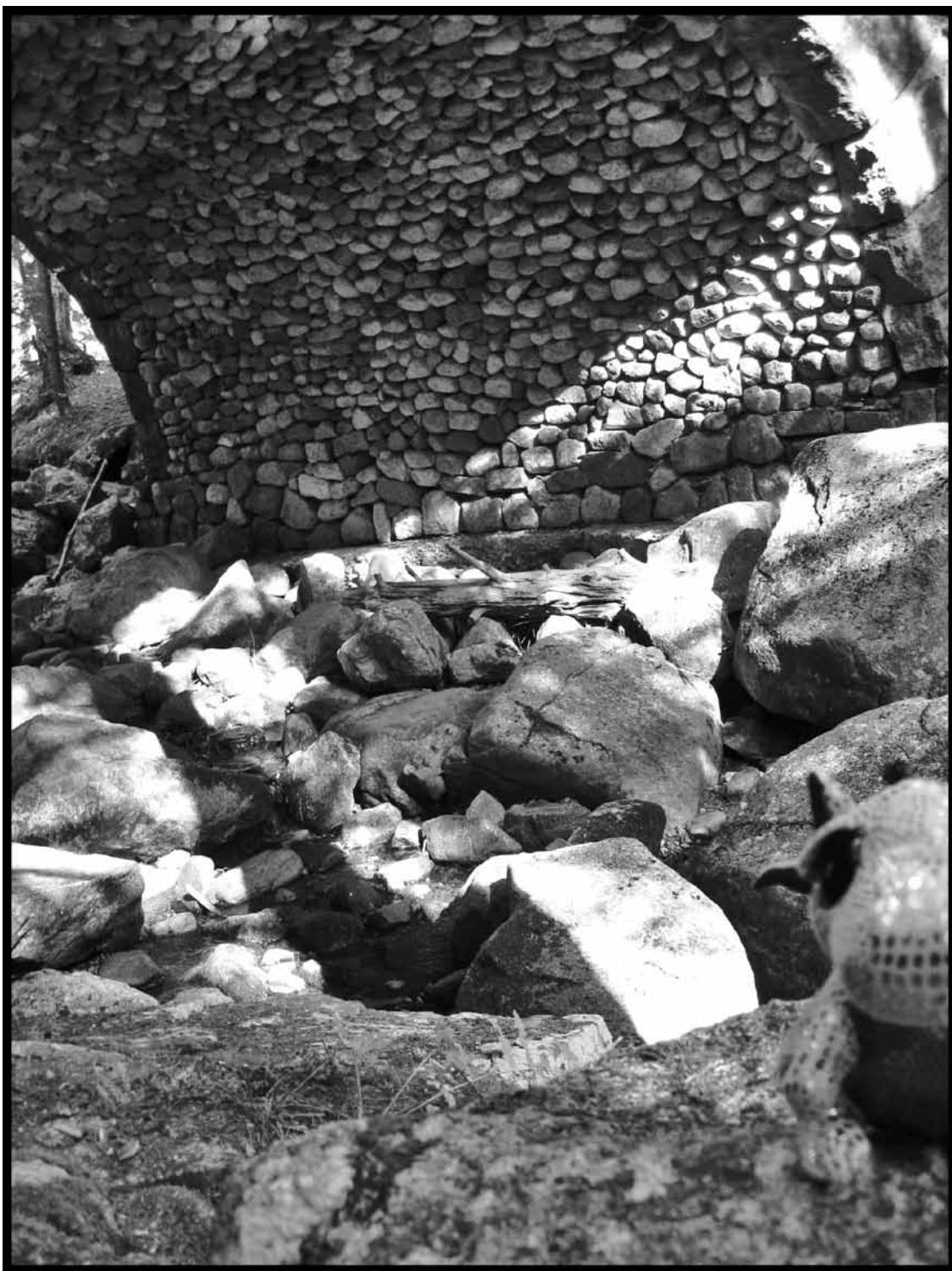
*Why am I not here more?*

Familiar. Strange. Mysterious fun. Something new in it most every time. Thrill in it big or small.

*Keep coming back.*

### *lxxxiii.*

There's lots to say about when I was a student. Lots of crazy things, lots of subtle quiet things. Lots of things that I can't say too, like they were just of their time, of their moment. They weren't things that traveled through space & time to be tellable at some later time. They're just not; it's not possible.



A song among its own time's songs.  
 A fad after the previous one.  
 A fear of something to come, & it didn't come to pass.  
 Someone still alive, famous or just your own, & that no longer.

I had this lady teacher at one point, & I go over to her house. I think she was having a party & I was invited. It was one of those parties where all the students show up, & the teachers, & everybody relaxes, calms down a bit. Not in the classroom right now, don't have to put on an act, not as a student or a teacher.

Smoke some ganja together.  
 Talk about how good & bad these days are.  
 Smile new & strange each other.

She was a good teacher, she taught history. I wasn't a very good history student because, at that time, I didn't understand that wherever you drop your coin in the stream of humanity, anywhere along it, by time or place, you're going to find most of the same things. They resemble each other way more than they don't. She tried to teach me that then, & I only learned it later on my own, sloppily. Took way too long.

And this sort of comforting & maybe sort of not.

I sat with her at this party, on the floor, in a corner out of the main action. I had the impression that she'd never eaten magic mushrooms before, & I offered her some from a paper bag I had with me. She took a look at the bag, peeked inside, pulled out one of the little curled bits to hold in her hand, examine, sniff. She smiled. She was kind of an older lady, but not too old.

[Oh really? Once she had eaten so many she found herself sitting on the back deck of a middle-sized suburban house watching a hand with a pen write all the words that follow here]

Then I told her I had something else too. I pulled from my pocket, in a rather debonair way, as though offering her a Cuban cigar, a really long blunt, & I started telling her about the times that I had lived in out West, in Seattle & Portland, how I'd go trippin' on Saturdays. I told her that I'd been poor & jobless & struggling then, & writing saved me on those tripping Saturdays, all those years ago. A black pen, a notebook of lined white sheets, a tab of Lucy, my Walkman & bag of rock-&-roll cassettes, & a green city to play through.

She looked at me curiously & said, *well, how old are you?*  
 And I said, *well, I'm 22, ma'am.*  
 And she said, *well, what years ago are you talking about?*  
 And I said, *well, truth be told, I'm talking about the future. Now if you want to take a few of those mushrooms & chew them on down, you might understand a little better what I'm saying. But it's OK if you don't.*

And she said, *well, so what was the craziest time you ever had out there, with those crazy Saturdays*

*you're telling me about?*

And I said, *well, I don't know whether I am being a clown & entertaining you, like that guy on TV, or if you really care, but I'll tell you a story that didn't actually happen. It was more like a fantasia that I might have conjured up while hanging out in an alley one time. One of the homeless guys was saying to me, oh yeah, this was years ago, I was in the Woods, & there's women tied to the trees, all over the place. Now they weren't victims or kidnapped, nothin' like that, no. They liked it, they liked being tied up to the trees, & fucked that way too. It was really good, those nights, & there was nothing profound about it at all. So take that, Mr. Book Learning, you take that. It's the kind of reality that's out there for you to find.*

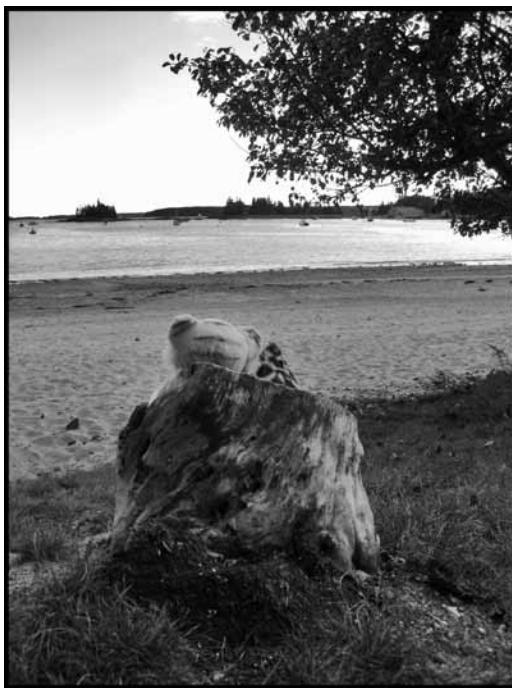
And so I told this story to the teacher, & she looked at me, smiling still, & said something I'll never forget. She said, *the key thing to being tied to a tree & fucked is that your hands are tied properly, not too tight, not too loose, & then when the man screws you, he positions your hips just right.*

And after that I knew, whether this lady ever had or ever would eat magic mushrooms, she'd always be OK in my book.



*To be continued in Cenacle | 102 | December 2017*

\* \* \* \* \*



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S C R I P T O R P R E S S



N E W E N G L A N D

## Notes on Contributors

**Algernon Beagle** lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper feature regularly in these pages.

**Charlie Beyer** lives in New Castle, Colorado. Charlie was in the hospital recently, but came out OK, not yet “paying the ferry man for a ride over the River Styx.” Much good health & love to you, brother. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeyle.blogspot.com>.

**Ace Boggess** lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in this periodical. “Status Report” & “The Feeding of the Birds” in this issue are from his volume *The Prisoners*, published in 2014 by Brick Road Poetry Press. *Ultra Deep Field* is his new book, out sometime in November.

**G.C. Dillon** lives in Plainville, Connecticut. Probably. Been awhile. But this story brings me straight back to those fargone years, & to the excitement of our friendship & listening to his writings. His short fiction in this issue was originally published in *Cenacle* | 1 | April 1995.

**Joe Ciccone** lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poems most recently appeared in *Cenacle* | 89 | June 2014. The poems in this issue are from a series called “Island of Bone” that he wrote while staying on Nantucket Island this past summer. Great stuff. More to come next issue. His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html>

**Judih Haggai** lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She’s back to teaching, studying, & writing. She’s good. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

**Jimmy Heffernan** lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His essay in this issue is from his *Divided Quantum* series, found at [dividedquantum.net](http://dividedquantum.net). Lots of good writings to found there. Jimmy’s new book, *Nonlocal Nature: The Eight Circuits of Consciousness*, has recently been published by New Falcon Publications.

**Nathan D. Horowitz** lives in Kansas City, Missouri. His prose in this issue is from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*. Nathan is now living & teaching in the US, & fools everywhere are on the run! More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz>.

**Laura Huxley** was born in Turin, Italy in 1911, & died in Los Angeles, California in 2007. She was a musician, writer, & counselor, in addition to being wife to author Aldous Huxley. Her letter in this issue was written to Aldous' older brother Julian, just days after her husband's death.

**Colin James** lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry regularly appears in the pages of *The Cenacle*. Now he has a book of his poems, too, a pretty little thing called *Resisting Probability*, published by Sagging Meniscus Press.

**Tamara Miles** lives in Elgin, South Carolina. This issue marks her prose's debut in the pages of *The Cenacle*. She recently took a writer's trip to Ireland, singing her fine songs all over the Emerald Isle.

**Pablo Neruda** was born in Parral, Chile in 1904, & died in Santiago, Chile in 1973. A world class poet, one of the best ever. A gift for language & music you could lay before anyone's eyes to convince them poetry has value & beauty. This issue's poems can be found in Scriptor Press's 2002 Burning Man Books volume, *Everything Carries Me to You*, online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

**Martina Newberry** lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry regularly appear *The Cenacle*. Wishing her the speediest recovery from her recent ills. Her new book is called *Never Completely Awake*, published by Deer Brook Editions. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

**Tom Sheehan** lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His fiction appears about once yearly in *The Cenacle*. Missing Tom's face at Jellicle Literary Guild meetings, & his son Jamie's too. Hoping to see them again in better days to come.

**Kassandra Soulard** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She's listening to her hero Reba M. lately, who advises, in all struggles in life, to *walk on!*

**Raymond Soulard, Jr.** lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Thinking about the accumulating leaves, the October cool, & days to come, soon, hidden away in old beloved joints, with pens, notebooks, & my dear Polly iPod.

\* \* \* \* \*



I'm learning to fly . . . but I ain't got wings . . .  
Coming down . . . is the hardest thing . . .



-- Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers, 1991.

