

The
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NUMBER 114 ♦ DECEMBER 2020



Because things are the way they are,
things will not stay the way they are.

--Bertolt Brecht

December 31, 2020

3:49 a.m.

Bumpalow Cee

Juice Room - ^{Green} Cough

Melrose, ^{Cafe} MA.

Season of Lights in a
very strange year. Now less than
a day from over. The spaceship has
travelled unknown distances in
time.

The spaceship leaves wakes of
history & mythology
swathes of
rumor & wish & old prejudices
& sucked out truths.

We live on this spaceship, in
the Season of Lights & other
times.

Travel through space forever, tis
beautiful, for one so old.

Still green in heart & multi-colored
everywhere... just... think... of...
how... many... colors... in...
this beautiful spaceship!

Fruits
Seeds
Leaves
Water
Stars
Sky

-23
We've travelled on this spaceship
so long,

it could
not
be
a
better
home!



[we arrive to the
season



of
Lights (again)



to
travel
through
the
Uni
Verse!

[in a very strange year]

many who were here
for the last one they're
part of the spaceship
again but many did
not die old & the old ones
did not die well

Now our best &
brightest are
starting to pass around
the medicines

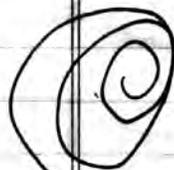


~~-24-~~
medicines that will BE SHARED

ROUND THIS Spaceship
[for better travels & better days]

here they come

very soon



very

soon

soon

very

soon

very

soon

o a kind word & a touch of the

♥ for this spaceship &

its many inhabitants. For all those moments when we are grateful!! down to our very bones & all those moments when WE ARE NOT.

-25-

Look up to the sky tonight,
to those stars, some spaceships
more or less like ours &

think to yourself: ★

WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY ★

★ TO TRAVEL ★

THROUGH THE UNIVERSE

at amazing! or an
speeds. ★ amazing Spaceship!

None know the hand that wrought,
but whoever or whatever wrought
this spaceship, this green & golden
& rainbow-colored **SPACESHIP**

★
Thank you & Thank you & Thank you

★ We will find better medicines for
our bodies, & seek better for our
hearts & our souls. It will be hard.

We will try harder ==

Thank you & Thank you & Thank you ☺ @12/31/2020

The Cenacle

NUMBER 114 • DECEMBER 2020

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

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*Thank you to everyone who helped someone in some way to make it through to 2021.
Peace & love to you all in this Season of Lights!*



Feedback on Cenacle 113 | October 2020

From Judih Haggai:

Here we are in Israel ready for Lockdown #3, so how delightful to open up *Cenacle* 113 and find such a rich community of generous writers! The feedback on *Cenacle* 112, what struck us, what moved us, and the open hearted-offering of responses was like the best kind of writers' group meeting. Each of us taking the time to ponder and present.

The *From the ElectroLounge Forums: Bubble Wrap* game instigated by Sam was also an adventure in togetherness. Like an old-time parlor game of pass-the-magic-object that transforms as it moves around the circle

After a night of uncertainty (rocket attacks again headed our way, but we're quiet this morning), I delight in Benjamin Gray's poetry. Especially "Lullaby" landing smack center into my heart:

*Can you feel the seahorses waltz
while the crickets play on shore?*

The rhythm of the piece, the images lull me into a feeling of calm. Success, Benjamin!

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *Notes from New England* (pandemic edition) is especially relevant as it notes with writerly precision the world's mishaps, the angst of job-hunting, the optimism of next year at Burning Man. The journal is a steadying force, kind of a metronome keeping time through this bizarre phase of life.

Jimmy Heffernan's essay "Wholeness" links me back to when Terence McKenna's works offered me a keyhole view of what I'd understood while tripping:

*We usually think of atoms as the
building blocks of the universe, but
in reality atoms are just projections
from the sub-quantum ground, as
are space, time, and light. Atoms
don't determine everything;
everything determines the atoms.*

*And each and every atom has a
fundamental role to play in the
whole and undivided movement.
But they are not building blocks
whose basic existence explains all
phenomena.*

The sum of the parts is far greater than the parts themselves would indicate. Thank you, Jimmy, for taking me into a zoom-out allowing perspective on this temporary state we're all living through.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Timothy Vilgiate's speculative fiction *Rivers of the Mind* takes wing from the idea "what if a guy took too much acid next to a government research center and developed the ability to read minds?" The result is a narrative that's both trippy and grounded in the texture of consensus reality. The narrator tries to keep sane as he moves around Texas like a drifter, doling out healing crystals, peering into strangers' thoughts and interacting with their souls. They keep thinking he's a junkie, a meth-head or heroin addict when, in fact, he's something much weirder. The story is addictive. Catch the radio show too (<https://tinyurl.com/ybo63dhe>).

John Echem's *Memoir of a Boyhood in Cameroon and Nigeria* is both beautiful and poignant. Many non-African *Cenacle* reader might not know the reason for the ritual of cutting into the face of the corpse of the little girl in his narrative. There's a belief that a child that dies young might be an *ogbanje* or *abiku*, a spirit scamming the family. If that same spirit were reborn, the scars would identify it, so the ritual is to ensure that the child doesn't die again next time. The fact that the narrator's sister has died dawns slowly on the reader, yet faster than it dawns on the narrator. A rich and sad piece about family, love, and loss.

To what god would I need to sacrifice to be able to write poetry like Martina Newberry of the silver pen? Her ability to sculpt a scene and make

me feel it feels supernatural. The god might be pain; like Yeats, was she, in Auden's words, "hurt . . . into poetry"? A house that blooms when an oppressive father leaves, a clandestine love affair, an unkind remark in Hungarian by a grandfather she has just met: the beauty of these poems leaves a mark.

* * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

The *Bubble Wrap* collab-experiment was so terrific! I felt like I was visiting in each writer's home, hearing a little story or two over coffees. Sam's post about "Celoodex" was charming and fun to read several times over. Raymond and Tamara each hit it out of the park with their descriptions. I followed Judih's walk to the P.O. and her discovery with my mind's eye. Loved it. KD's story was enchanting.

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s *Notes from New England* was moving and so relatable, so accessible. I loved his poem, "Just Why," from the August 15 notes. I found myself tearing up sometimes without really being able to pinpoint what got to me. Just the humanity, I think.

Judih Haggai's poems are jewels. After I read them, I wear them like a tiara. Beautiful. She writes that "each cell sings its song." *How gorgeous is that?*

Sam Knot's "This Butterfly," was absolutely lovely!

*It is much more plausible
that my life is like that fallen leaf
whose ripples enter the
trembling community
of that gentle stream.*

A perfect poem in my eyes / ears / heart.

Reading Algernon Beagle's *Bags End Books* is a gift I give to myself. I like it so much and it goes great with martinis.

* * * * *

From Timothy Vilgiate:

I am currently a graduate student in history, and I am interested in studying the politics of Amazonian hallucinogens in Brazil, so I found reading Nathan D. Horowitz's "Alone in Cabaña Supernatura" travel journal, and his reflections on the rainbow serpent, really interesting. The piece makes great use of imagery, and raises very thought-provoking questions about indigenous ontologies, which leaves me wanting to learn more. One of my favorite parts is three lines of a poem embedded later in the text:

*He drinks the reflection of his face
in black coffee
savors the bitter alkaloid of memory
and continues to write his endless poem*

Martina Newberry's poem "The House of Whispers and Dolls" has this wonderfully ominous, supernatural air about it for me. The line "except for occasional nuclear activity" provides an immediate tension. The three stanzas at the end effectively allow for multiple readings, inviting the reader to reflect and ponder what was written. In "Sadie Sings of Geraniums," the image of the cut hand gave a visceral sense of emotional pain and vulnerability to the story, and makes the conclusion especially poignant. The poem had beautiful word choice as well—I loved the phrase "aluminum afternoons," and will probably have it stuck in my head for a while. Her "Love in the Time of Trains" has an especially impactful ending and an efficient, well-timed structure.

I have loved Tamara Miles' *Church in the Greenhouse* in every issue of *The Cenacle* that I have seen it in so far, and this issue was no exception. The journal entries have consistently had a great eye for connecting details in nature to details in human life and spirituality, and they always leave me with things to think about. I loved the reflection on cicadas, and then the lines about the cardinal that landed and "blessed the garden gate." The Irish poem she quotes, "He Praises the Trees," really does evoke a sense of sacredness and plants that resonates with me. Some of those verses were

really interesting, and I'll definitely want to revisit them again as a way of fostering sacredness.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

Raymond Soulard Jr.'s comparison in *Notes from New England* of the job hunt to the "yearning for romance" makes wonderful sense to me—his observation that the job seeker must open his heart to the world, and all its strangeness, embracing it all as a mystery, stands truer than any employment coach's advice that I've received.

John Echem's memoir-memory of how his mother "became scarce" to her children because of her occupied and grieving mind—how she devoted herself to sweeping and cooking, selling palm wine to congregants—reminded me of the ways in which we all may distract ourselves from the pain of living and loving—of my own endless hours at shopping malls trying on clothes absentmindedly, never buying anything, as I grieved my lost two babies.

As Judih Haggai claims, music is ever present in each cell—we who hear it are enchanted or disturbed—"who can sleep?" with so much sound and movement in and out of time?

In "Wholeness," Jimmy Heffernan says we must focus on the whole rather than the parts when we study the human animal and nature itself—

In other words, the quantum structure of Nature is not restricted to physics, as if there is some disconnecting line between the realm treated by physics and that of the other sciences. There is no disconnecting line. Any science and philosophy that seeks to be accurate must place more emphasis on the whole than on the parts. And this is precisely what the sciences listed above are not doing

—all of space and science, too, because it is all connected.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I am enamored of Benjamin Gray's "Toshiba HD," which I feel is very much a poem in high definition. His capacity for clearly and precisely painting his thoughts on the canvas of the reader's mind is very great; in other words, the clarity of this work is comparable to a perfectly still, perfectly transparent body of water, alongside a perfect economy of language. Gray evokes his setting and the actions therein without flaw, and the content, symbolized by the errant feather, is without question riveting and beautiful. Another chief positive is that this poem opens itself to multiple interpretations—which is, to me, the mark of great art. One is not trapped into a suffocating narrative, but is rather free to contemplate a variety of threads, all of which lead to constructive places. What a lovely poem.

* * * * *

From Ace Boggess:

Colin James does it again in "If Legends Are to Be Believed," pulling the reader into a spiral of thought that won't let up after the poem's done. Not that it's ever really done. Like the remnants examined by the poem's surreal archaeologists, the images linger. Especially that pile of dead birds at the end. It haunts. Beautiful, disturbing. Just the right tones.

* * * * *

From Colin James:

When reading Jimmy Heffernan's.....
WHOLENESS.....
my unreasoned reasoning.....was an
effortless explanation of consciousness.....
Then I came across Sam Knot's lines in his
poem.....THIS BUTTERFLY.....
"Chaos—Ultimately absorbing, unutterably
stable"

* * * * *

From John Echem:

Gregory Kelly's poem "Hospital Dressing Room" paralyzes my spine with its surging intonation and cathartic consequences. The consternation and discomposure of surgery, the nightmare of cancer, throws ice on my body. I had to read through the powerful narrative poem again and again with my whole body trembling.

* * * * *

From Greg Kelly:

The poem in *Cenacle* 113 that most caught my eye is one of Raymond Souldard Jr.'s draft poems, "The Beach," in his *Notes from New England*. The first two stanzas remind me of Philip Glass's song "Knee 5" from his *Einstein on the Beach* opera. When I read this poem, I hear it narrated just like the narration in Glass's song:

*We will start to meet again
on the beach of many worlds*

There's something cosmic and calming and outside-of-our-universe peaceful about this draft poem. And my favorite word in this poem—"braiding"—this idea that multiple worlds are braided together. It's beautiful. Worlds braided together. Lives braided together. Possibilities braided together. People, us, everyone, all braided together.

It's surely funny how a single word can be so striking and so potent. But that word braids this poem together, ties it together in a fashion that is carefully tangled. I want to stand on that beach! To see those worlds. To experience all the endless possibilities. I want to be caught up in this braid.

And, you know, I bet we're all caught up in that braiding. We just need to all find our way to that beach. Stand before that tide. Before those "many worlds." And rest, just like the Ancient Sea Turtle.

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

Rich visuals from John Echem's memoir. Within his pages, I am sitting in a hut made of "slim chopped planks," on a toe-stubbing dirt lumps. The closeness of African nature is all about me, insects singing, birds chasing their songs, the rain hovering above. Dozens of strange women, brightly dressed, go about busy with strange and mysterious things. I am agog and terrified at the same time. Thank you, John, for taking me to another world.

* * * * *

From Sam Knot:

I know my printed copy of *Cenacle* 113 is in the post, seeing that my friend stood in a spacious queue—at least an ocean away—passing it through a slit in a plastic sheet to wing its way to me: inscribed butterfly jewel, artifact of a literary circle unbound by space-time, sitting around a table that is more like a spider's web, salon of whispering leaves, scratch of pen and tap of keys, steaming cauldron of coffee.

Meanwhile I do my best to digest the digital missive, scrolling with one finger in quiet corners of rooms abuzz with winter sun. I drink lullabies with my eyes, feel poems breathe coolly, mixing into the stove-warmed air their nigh secret smells, only detectable by surprise, everytime the sudden appearance of what had been there all along: winding down the window toward the end of a long car journey to find the normally invisible atmosphere awash with cloud-tastes of color, the rain-fresh coat of a horse of lightning, body pulsing with restive thunder.

Other seasons shining through the windowed ice, somewhere the sound of cicadas, evoking the wooden sculpture of one of their kind, shaped by an ancient hand, little memory spirit singing in as many dimensions as there are about all that life can mean, same way a lamp will let you go about your business in the darkness without your ever really seeing it, 'til a friend comes to stay and

makes a picture it shines in, then a gift of the picture in deepest winter to reveal words the lamp long whispered. *Whispers still.*

Poetry even prose-guised. The word mind howls while hands of vision stroke the sleek black fur of each letter's burdened back. Not to be fooled by the fire's seeming satisfaction inside the stove, green flame of your own beach-braided bones, *hmmmming* now, loosening up to let your being breathe, and sway, and stir—aware of your tongue dancing quietly in your mouth—for who ever did want to read any quicker than music can speak?

* * * * *



From the ElectroLounge Forums

How Do You Celebrate / Participate in the End of the Year?

Published on electrolounge.boards.net

Post by Raymond on Dec 3, 2020 at 10:22am

The group of us who people these Forums are from all over the globe, from Los Angeles to Africa, and so we are of many cultures and lands. Moreover, each of us was raised in a different tradition growing up. These might be religious, spiritual, communal, or otherwise in nature. I think it would be fun and insightful to share and learn about how one's origins and path since have affected how one participates in the end of the calendar year. Some of us celebrate Christmas, some Hanukah, some other kinds of events. I'll jump in first here . . .

I was raised in the northeastern US, lower middle class, large family, relatively poor, though only by US standards. But still. Three of my four siblings were afflicted by autism, and so that was part of my family's story and struggles. Persons with disabilities back then were treated as a kind of shame on the family. Like the parents did something wrong. That said, there were light-hearted moments, when everyone was laughing and goofy. I've always thought of laughter as a best defense against despair. And against bullies too.

For this time of year, another kind of struggle was that my mother was raised Jewish, and my father Catholic. I was essentially raised poor and found my spirituality in books and writing, and Art in general, and have never left these. But for them, actually growing up by these faiths, this time of year meant something it did not mean to me. When I was small, we had both a Christmas tree, and lit the Hanukah candles. I know the Hanukah prayer by heart, though I probably garble some of the Hebrew.

My youngest sibling, only sister, was raised Jewish like my mother. Went to a religious school (I was in public, my "training" was a Sunday School when very young and then no more). Made no sense to have a Christmas tree when she was involved in serious study. So that ended.

I still have that tree. When my parents both passed, and we were cleaning out the family house, I nabbed it. KD and I put it up every year. Not to celebrate Christmas. I have no interest in human-centered faiths. No critique on them intended; they just don't touch my heart and mind. I have for many years celebrated what I call the *Season of Lights*, derived in part from the wonderful Festival of Lights used to happen down in Hartford, Connecticut every winter. A whole plaza decked out in lights of all varieties. Nothing religious, just lights.

When I first conceived of this holiday of my own, it involved lighting Hanukah candles and playing Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* music, and putting up the little tree I had at the time. I've evolved it away from that a bit, though kept the tree (now family one) and the Tchaikovsky. I tend to play my spirituality

through my writing, where the *Season of Lights* occurs every year, and is often referenced in my stories and poems.

KD and I also watch a number of Peanuts/Charlie Brown specials this time of year, the Halloween one, the Thanksgiving one, and the Christmas one. The latter has such beautiful music that its overt religious message is easier to abide with. She has her own take on all of this, which I will hope to read about when she gets the chance.

This time of year in New England is cold, crisp, often snowy. It feels like the end of the year. But thinking about what all this means to me got me wondering what all of it means in different ways to each of you. So, take a turn!

* * *

Post by Martina on Dec 3, 2020 at 12:01pm

Christmas has always been a huge holiday for me. I love all of it—the religious, the marketing, the music. I'm an addict for ritual, and follow the celebrations of many of the religious/philosophical groups. My mother's family was Jewish, but when they came to America, they converted to the Church of Rome. My mother never completely gave herself to Catholicism, and reminded me often of my Jewish heritage. Several of my cousins were in the camps during the Holocaust; all but two died there.

My father was extremely Protestant, disliked almost all ritual—especially religious ritual. I was raised Catholic. Our Christmases were wonderfully frantic even though we were poor (and BOY! were we poor). My mother didn't work; my father was a millwright. That being said, Mother was a fine artist—sewed, sculpted, threw pots, made furniture, etc. She was very creative and gifted, so we had lots of homemade gifts and an amazingly decorated tree. Starting right after Thanksgiving, there was tons of baking, decorating, secret phone calls to aunts and cousins. I tried to keep that going long after I was married and had my kids.

I still love Christmas. My kids are long gone; they have their own rites and rituals now, so my husband's and my celebrations are small. But, I still love my Christmas Tree. I still buy a new ornament or two. I still decorate the house. The thrill never goes away.

As for the New Year, I will be on my knees, praying that Nature will forgive us, that my book sales hit the ceiling (!!!), that those who are Good will be rewarded with health, long lives, love, and a living planet. I will pray that those who are Bad stay in the hands of the universe. As is said in *Fiddler on the Roof*, when a villager asks the Rabbi if there is a blessing for the Tsar, the Rabbi answers, "May God bless and keep the Tsar . . . far away from us!"

Bless all of my brothers and sisters of the soul. Celebrate your and everyone else's holiday!

* * *

Post by John on Dec 3, 2020 at 5:00pm

Christmas here is a moment to rejoin with family members whom one has not seen for probably a year or more. It is customary in Nigeria and Africa at large for family members who live in towns and cities to return home to rejoin with other family members and especially elders of the family that live in the village. During this period, say from 20th to 29th of December, villagers cheer with cries of joy as

returnees flood the village with loads of gifts for their parents and family members. Those who bought new cars use this period as an opportunity to show off in the village so that their peers, parents, and friends would respect them, and the new status of car owners would make their parents stand shoulder high among other elders at the council of elders.

Meetings are held at family levels during which the elders of the family advise the younger generation, especially those who visit from the cities, on the rights and wrongs of life. This is done by quoting various local proverbs that go in line with the topic of the discussion—such as *however high a bird flies into the sky, it must return to the earth to drink water*. Then the elders encourage the returnees to always visit the village to drink water.

On 27th of December, the boys between ages of 15 and 20 who have not yet been initiated into the traditional cult of the land, which is considered as a transition from boyhood to manhood, are initiated. This is during the peak of *harmattan*—a very dry and biting winter wind. They'll stay in the forest for three days without clothes or flip-flops on their feet, sleep in their family shrines, and bathe daily at 4 a.m. in a sacred stream (freezing because of the *harmattan* breeze).

Certain instructions and oaths are undertaken. On the 29th of December, they'll return from the forest. No longer considered a boy, each new man will carry a masquerade (what we call *logolo*), and go everywhere in the village, dancing, flogging young unmarried girls and ladies, as well as boys who have not yet been initiated into the cult. It is believed that having undergone the process—the biting cold, the freezing stream, wild echoes in the forest, the laws and litanies—such a person will be able to endure hardship, and be brave before danger and troubles. January 1st is the grand celebration, especially for family reunions.

When I was growing up, we didn't usually celebrate Christmas. My mother was usually away for her business, and my late father was a cop in Nigeria who didn't care about my kid brother and me. We didn't have a taste of the fun that the other kids in the village enjoyed, though my late grandmother made sure we had enough rice on Christmas Day. The visits that children make here, moving from house to house, wishing people Merry Christmas and, in return, receiving food and drinks (and often money), we were not allowed, because we were always dirty and dressed in rags. My kid brother usually cried himself to sleep in his chair on Christmas Day. I, on the other hand, accepted in my mind that we needn't visit people, though I wasn't happy.

I still don't visit now and, for many years, have refused to travel back to my old village. Rather, I send what I have to my mom. Last Christmas, she took me by surprise by coming all the way from Cameroon to Nigeria to visit my kid brother and me. I couldn't spend time with her because I was to travel to the village on the 20th of December for a burial ceremony, so I sent her to Port Harcourt to stay with my kid brother. No sooner had I returned then I was told by my brother on phone that she left back to Cameroon, having stayed three days with him. Since then we've not met, but we talk on phone. This Christmas holiday, I'll travel to my village on the 29th for the burial of my uncle, where I'll read my poem, "A Tribute To Okunaesiobike 1, Omezue Cletus Oke," during the funeral oration:

*Okunaesiobike has gone to the bamboo grove to answer the call of the great gathering—
 They that are on the other side should give way—
 The flute that praises spirits is shrieking in the air.
 If the housefly washes its hands on the cocoyam leaf where he washed his mouth—
 may it burn and open its belly in the day—
 If a green snake hides in his yam band, may mbimbi chop off its head—
 may our ancestors drink from a gourd of palm wine, and when they see you—
 they should know they have seen the unseeable.*

*We'll not mourn you like the bushfowl mourns over its squashed eggs—
 we will not curse night never to break into day and we will not curse day never to darken into night—
 But we'll raise up your yam band like a bamboo tower—
 so that as Chukwu has called spirits for the ranking of heroes in the square of the great gathering—
 you will stand at the top of raffia and fern, Okunaesiobike.*

*As you reach the house of your brother, my father, may he serve you:
 Kola nuts—
 palm wine from our family gourd—
 meat from the pot of Alacha and give you toothpick to pick out morsels of afterthoughts.*

*As our ancestors gather at your homecoming, may there be no fear on the way—
 May there be no nest of soldier-ants, hanging unseen on your path—
 Great spirit, Okunaesiobike, my uncle and my brother—
 go and take your place among our fathers; they are waiting for you.*

*We will charge your funeral guns as salutes by thunderpeal—
 The wizard of gunfire to whom the gun is a plaything—
 Shall not tremble when he is called forth to herald your homecoming—
 But he will discharge through the nostrils and anus of the gun—
 gunfire as thunderpeal until our ancestors will nod their heads in affirmation to your homecoming.*

*Our ancestors would not ask of what patrician are you?
 They won't ask who is he that greets the forest with rumbling echoes of gunfire?
 They shall throw black ants in their hundreds to sting the lap of he that questions your patriarchy—
 He that will lead your herd here, may he never lead astray—
 May we dance in your footsteps and never caught up by silence at mid-dance—
 May you remain the cause of our joy and not our grief—
 Kpum kpum kpum! I have discharged the first gunshot—
 I, your brother, kin of your patrician.*

*As you hear this echo, know that I have discharged the first gunshot to bid you farewell—
 Tell my father that am well—
 that I am still digging the earth in search of answers to the questions he left behind—
 Okunaesiobike, farewell, Omezue Cletus Oke—
 My uncle and my brother.*

* * *



Post by Abdn on Dec 3, 2020 at 6:39pm

Hello everyone, and Happy HOLIDAZE. Transition into the new year has always been a multifaceted adventure for me. I was born in Western Ohio, USA by parents who were non-religious. Christmas was initially, and simply, an expression of giving, lights, & cheer. My earliest years were spent enthralled by the tree, the joy of adventure . . . and the reality of Ol' Saint Nick. His mystery, and his gifts. My earliest memory of "SANTA" were the lovely tricks my mother would engage in: preparing the cookies for Santa, him leaving a note and a half-eaten cookie. The lovely gifts under the tree . . . and even the evening television news talking of "SIGHTINGS OF SANTA FLYING OVER THE HILLS" . . . The lore, the mystery of it all was only my concern. How did his deer fly? What was going on here?! The unbiased love of life many, yet not enough, children experience. My father was barely available, working and providing. It wasn't until Christmas that he had some time off to sit with the family . . . relaxed. It was a lovely time in my pre-teen holiday years.

Gifts became more important to me over time . . . I wanted MORE. The catalogs coming to the home offered so many delightful desires . . . So many interesting scientific adventures in electronics! Various vehicles for children! BICYCLES! TRIKES! Films took off and selling merchandise became the next best thing for a kid. YOU TOO CAN PLAY LIKE KARATE KID. Plastics, mechanical arms, toy cars. My older sister and her early teen beauty products.

One thing remained: the ritual of discovering what was under that ol' plastic tree. Trying to go to sleep early in excitement. Bouncing up in the morning and attempting to wake my sister . . . being told I had to *wait wait wait*. HURRY UP AND WAIT! . . . and what I found was the glory of disappointment. Dad never could really buy me the gifts I wanted. Come on, dad, I want that GO-KART. It became a ritual of disgust. Wanting, sometimes getting what I wanted, then experiencing a hangover of never really finding what I wanted under that tree.

Santa suddenly became a fake . . . a joke. I saw my sister and mother get all the gifts, the exact ones they wanted. I stopped caring about Christmas. I stopped desiring toys. I stopped wanting things. Then one day I wanted a computer, and I got one. A good one . . . with a modem. My father always had wanted me to experience strength and loss . . . to understand appreciation. When he was my age, he was shitting in a hole in the ground. That computer was the best gift I ever received, and its still running, in the basement of my home.

Over time my mother and sister became obsessed with objects, jewelry, clothes, and things . . . my father always put them first . . . and they became haunted by it. Christmas became frustrating events, full of wants, too much pressure, *perfection*. It always ended with the new year being a rebirth. Finally the holidays were over and I could get back to normality. I didn't have to deal with grumpy parents trying to slam all these events together. My father never really having time to breathe and appreciate life. . . .

suddenly I'm married. To a woman who, like me, took these holidays with a grain of salt. No interest in religion, no interest in even the appreciation of it. EVERY DAY SHOULD BE APPRECIATED. We had no interest in the game . . . it was all a farce. Christmas in America became a commercial event. Of course we participated in the same rituals with our children. The game, the same game . . . but we also had the rest of the family lavishing them with gifts . . . too many gifts . . . and I saw them in just a few years have the same experience as mine . . . Except the difference was there were no more catalogs . . . no more things to ask for . . . it was just folks buying them things . . . more things than my wife and I had.

They enjoyed the lights and fanfare . . . but we didn't push ol' St. Nick on them. We did a bit . . . but then my mom got sick. My dad ended up doing great over time and, as he always had, gave them everything they wanted . . . but they didn't ask for anything. So they got these toys, these objects, these . . . things. MORE PLASTIC. Everything got sick . . . everyone was sick. FULL. So FULL.

Suddenly, the chain broke . . . my wife was diagnosed with brain cancer. My wife and I continued to attend the traditional events . . . but suddenly things changed. Everything changed . . . everyone wanted to provide health . . . but had no way to talk of it. No way to provide it. Everyone overweight, overindulgent, couldn't even provide . . . what is most important: health. But what we had was laughter . . . and love. My sister was also diagnosed with a bit of melanoma cancer . . . due to her excessive tanning. It came and went . . . but we all knew about my wife's condition; death is inevitable.

The years went on and Christmas became . . . so distorted and further fake . . . But the new year always had a resolution: THE dissolution of this *event* . . . the continuation of normality . . . and, for us, in my new immediate family: the appreciation of the day.

My wife died and my sister two years later. Christmas became more and more strong each year . . . it was a recognition of the need for love, health, and life. . . . and furthermore the respect of nature . . . death and the timeliness of self. I reconnected with a lost love from my youth and we started our new tradition—which is the old tradition—stockings on the mantle, gifts under the tree. This time is a bit different, however. Mom found a new friend . . . got over her desires, and enjoyed her time. She died two years after my sister. Now it's just my father, my daughters, and my new love.

My father and I have become close friends since all of this. We abhor and have a hard time with these holidays, but we LOVE the new year. It's a cleansing. A symbolic new beginning and the dissolution of this holiday. My father no longer decorates . . . and my annual work is taking the life of a pine. Propping it up in the living room, enjoying its lights . . . and then ritually burning it in spring. We provide income to great pine farmers. I am gifted by my new bride, my children having much less desire than I had at their age, my new son who lost his father to addiction. We are a new generation . . . a new family that enjoys ourselves on these meaningless holidays. We appreciate nature daily as much as we can. We appreciate each moment as much as we can.

I do wish for those old times again. The frustration of deviled eggs not working out. The pipes getting clogged because of potato peels and flooding the kitchen. All of it was beautiful in hindsight. The gifts of Christmas should be given daily . . . what people need. *What do they need? What they think they need?* I'm not sure.

All we can do is experience each moment and rejoice.

* * *

Post by Nathan on Dec 3, 2020 at 7:30pm

My mom is an ex-Catholic. My dad was Jewish. The two of them split up when I was small and my mom and I moved in with my step-dad and his three kids, who were older than me. He was also Jewish, culturally though not religiously. Long story short, we had a Christmas tree with presents and, a few weeks before, we sang Hanukkah songs and lit menorahs. The two customs didn't seem incompatible. I loved the Christmas tree. When you're a small kid, your senses are amplified, and the tree was vast and fragrant and covered in ornaments and different-colored lights and candy canes. The Hanukkah celebration was also beautiful, with warmth and light and music, as, every night for eight nights, more candles were lit on the five menorahs my step-dad had.

Now all those activities are relegated to the memory. My dad and step-dad have both passed into the Great Beyond where there is, perhaps, less uncertainty about religion. My wife and daughter and I have a plastic Christmas tree. It's not the same. They like it. We spend Christmases with my mom, though not this year. And I quietly commemorate Hanukkah in my heart and send greetings to my step-siblings.

* * *

Post by Judih on Dec 4, 2020 at 7:04am

When I was a kid in Toronto, Santa showed up till I realized that my parents were participating in a secret ritual of allowing us, the 3 kids, some fabulous fantasy. Christmas/New Year's Season was an effortless situation of choosing to participate or not in neighbourhood parties. We, as Reform Jews, were Chanukah candle-lighters which delighted me. I loved candles, and the token gifts were also fun. As I got older, I found myself detesting the New Year's kiss thing—people who barely spoke to me, wanting to plant a wet one on my lips? *Uh, no.*

And all that drinking—watching friends pass out? Didn't jive with my newfound sense of *Sufi / Gurdjieff / t'ai chi.*

When I came to Israel, of course I visited Nazareth, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and Bethlehem (Beit Lechem = house of bread). The sites held holiness since I had been raised in a societal culture celebrating Jesus, and I'd read many esoteric texts of his teachings.

Yet, in Israel, New Year's is celebrated during the Fall. Countrywide, the Dec. 31st craze just doesn't apply. There are those who enjoy New Year's party time, which they call the "Sylvester" after St. Sylvester, and it's celebrated on the Friday night closest to the end of the year. The Times Square neon ball is shown on our January 1st morning news (real-time we are 7 hrs ahead), and usually our pleasant weather makes it all seem like worlds away.

Still, during last night's walk, we saw that there is a house on the kibbutz with a string of coloured lights, which filled me with nostalgia. And back a few years, when we used to host volunteers from around the world, they would happily celebrate Christmas together with any of the kibbutzniks who came from Christian backgrounds.

Cultural anthropology: a mix of so many elements in my mind, and in the reality of where I live.

* * *

Post by KD on Dec 5, 2020 at 5:11pm

What a fun discussion, and it has been so interesting to read all of your comments. Thank you all! It is so fun to get to know you all a bit more this way.

My mom is very Catholic. My dad will go to mass sometimes, but (while he would never say this) I think he is somewhat of a pagan, in that he is a farmer and all depends on the earth and cycles and weather. So we did the Catholic thing for Advent/Christmas growing up, but my dad's earthiness crept in there too. Since Advent is kind of a season of penance for Catholics, we didn't put up the (fake) tree till Christmas Eve most years, and then it stayed up till the day after Epiphany, January 7.

My mom and dad both have bunches of siblings, and they mostly all live in the same area, so our family Christmas celebrations would be hosted by a different family each year, and usually 50 to 60 people would show up. My favorite Christmas memories growing up are of riding home in the car after midnight mass. We lived 15 miles outside of town, so we never got to see the town's Christmas lights at night, so it was about the only time we saw them. No matter what radio station was on in our car, there was Christmas music. It was so quiet and peaceful.

On the not so fun side of memories, quite a few members of my family, especially my dad, suffer from pretty severe depression / other various mental things; some years, it is made so much worse by Seasonal Affective Disorder. I think it hits farmers badly. So I remember some years when my mom tried to keep up our spirits, but the overall feeling was hoping that my dad would be OK.

Anyway, for most of the years since I left home, I mostly thought of myself as a scrooge, and some years, the holidays make me super blue. As Raymond said, though, we have our own traditions and customs now, so that makes it lots better. And our wedding anniversary is on New Year's Eve, so that is a fun thing to look forward to every year. For the past 7 years, we have spent our anniversary (or as close to it as possible) in Ogunquit, Maine. Not this year, but can't wait till we're there again next year!

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Dec 6, 2020 at 9:06pm

My Mom was raised Catholic, so, as were my younger brother and me. We always used to go to Christmas Eve mass, and then open one present on Christmas Eve. Normal Christmases for a relatively normal family. We still put up a tree, and do the gift-giving, but the religious aspect has all but drained away. My Mom no longer insists upon going to Christmas Eve mass, and my brother, Dad, and I are essentially irreligious.

My favorite part of Christmas is coming up with the most thoughtful presents I can, and seeing the reactions. I like to give. I am universally known within the family as by far the best gift-giver. That's the fun part for me.

Another fun part originates in a good Christmas dinner recipe my Mom found in the *Wall Street Journal*, oh, it must have been almost ten years ago now. What we do is to get a fresh goose. We stuff it with prunes marinated in Gran Marnier, which are stuffed with *foie gras*. Then the goose is reduced in Armagnac. If you've never had it, you haven't lived. Happy holidays to all!

* * *

Post by Charlie on Dec 7, 2020 at 11:32am

Yes, there was awe at the bangles on the tree, the lights, the presents. In an artist household, we had to make all our presents for the others. This was hard and at a high standard, so the inspirational furnitures and sculpture was the rule. But artists are selfish and disparaging of the works of others, so Christmas always decayed into an afternoon of shame, blame, and tears.

Now we are all scattered to the ends of the earth. My daughter to Central America. My son to lock his doors. My sister to Polynesia. Myself to hide under a mountain log.

I come out to detonate the New Year for one hour with other maniacal highly-armed ordinance lovers.

* * *

Post by Greg on Dec 9, 2020 at 4:17pm

Christmas was perfect. Each year. That's how my parents orchestrated the season.

It started on Thanksgiving. Aunt Linda always needing our *lists*. She always spent money she never had. But I wouldn't know that for years to come.

Christmas was the Sears catalog.

John Denver's "Christmas for Cowboys." I never knew the words when I was young. But that melody always brings me back to each Christmas morning . . . "All of the good gifts given today / ours is the sky and the wide-open range."

Silver bells engraved with a year. Each to mark the distance my parents traveled together. Each polished. The same care dad quietly spent on mom.

It was alarm clocks hidden in my room. Travel clocks I found in grandpa's things after he passed. I'd set each. The ploy to catch this North Pole fellow.

It was stockings with an orange to weight the toe, chocolates to give it more dimension, socks that I'd throw on the floor straight away, oddments, trinkets, and a card. There was always a card from mom and dad. I wish I'd kept them. Because I'd repackage their words today. Stack the hallmarks and tie them with twine and put them under my own tree this year. Their words would be enough of a gift. I wish I'd kept them.

Christmas was the ritual of the tree. You'd think my dad an arborist if you met him in a pop-up Christmas tree lot. He'd inspect each. Thoroughly. Questioning imperfections. Until he found what was symmetrical. Perfectly poised. Strong. And straight. Measuring just beyond his reach. The angel would go there, just beyond his reach.

A rhythm existed. A process. For how you shift a tree from its nature to a carpet. It needed to rest outside the front door. Let all its branches unfold. Find their place again. Then dad would wrestle it in. Trim it to size. Seat it in the stand. And water what life remained.

The lights would come first. The frosted baubles my favourite. Then the decorations. Boxes of them. Neatly packed. That's when we'd get to help, the children. We'd burden each branch, a balancing act. Until all the boxes were empty. The candy canes were last.

Christmas was candles in the windows. The race down the stairs. The snow babies. The manger. Mom made those figures. It was the carol service. The ham and turkey, because we were fussy eaters. Chocolate-covered peanut butter balls. Stuffed dates. The special silverware. Proper serviettes. Apple cider. Bailey's fudge.

It was perfect. A compilation of things. Of rituals. Of mystery and myth and anticipation.

It was everything I want for my own children. Peaceful memories where John Denver sings about driving the cattle on the snow-covered range.

* * *

Post by Tamara on Dec 12, 2020 at 8:25am

I loved reading all these marvelous reflections of joyous and sad moments. I tend to think in fragments, so here goes:

I wanted a Barbie van one Christmas. I don't think I ever got one, and that is a terrible injustice. But seriously, one of the best Christmases I ever had was with my mother—just the two of us, eating fried bologna sandwiches. She didn't have any money and wanted to send me to my aunt's house, where there would be plenty of food and fun and toys. I didn't care about that . . . it wouldn't be Christmas without her. I always miss Mama at Christmas, but now I have happy times almost every year.

A few years back, my dad was here, and my beloved David and I got into an argument—a rare thing, really, and it ruined the day. Every other year with David at Christmas, however, has been like a childhood fairytale experience. In fact, I often say that David has given me a childhood. He laughs easily, loves deeply, shares all that he has and is, decorates wildly—a Christmas carousel and candy house, a Mickey Mouse in the tug boat, Santa and a deer on the roof, penguins on the lawn. He decorates the mantel, puts the lights on the tree. I put decorations on the tree, some bought and some homemade. We toast the tree with wine and beer.

I like to ride around and see the Christmas lights because Mama loved it, and I feel both sad and grateful when I see how beautifully people have put their hearts into wreaths and sparkly lights, manger scenes, and Santa blow-up campers.

Dad wants an air fryer and a jacket with fur inside, and that will be easy enough. We can't bring him here this year because he's just too frail for the COVID-19 risk.

But . . . the best thing of all, the happiest days of the year, for me, are Dec. 27-31! We meet my daughter Jillian at a cabin in North Georgia every year. It's always a different cabin, but we're usually in Blue Ridge, Ellijay, Lake Burton, that area. It's our Christmas with her because she spends Christmas with her dad and step-mom. We cook, play games, shop, go to wineries, do puzzles, watch movies, go to the Mercier Orchards for apples, the Sasquatch Museum, the little Swiss-style village called Helen, Georgia, and do a hundred other things that catch our fancy. Once we rode the two-hour train in Blue Ridge, across the mountains and around that lovely world.

I cherish every memory and can't wait to go this year, although we'll be masked up and in the cabin a lot more, socially distanced. We've all stayed home for what seems like forever, and we're all as careful as we can be. I say *all* of us because this year Jillian is bringing a boyfriend for the first time. They are terribly in love and happy, and that makes me happy. He's perfect, and so is she. We'll disinfect ourselves and everything, and not breathe on each other, and somehow still be together. David and I are going for COVID-19 tests three days or so before the trip. I've already been tested three times and am happy to do it, so I know I don't carry this terrible disease to my loved ones.

Gifts, and music, and good food, and laughter. Four dogs (two of ours and two of theirs)—two big, one medium, one small. Haha! This is my life. Plenty of comforters and coffee in the morning. There's always a hot tub involved at the cabin, though often I'm the only one to get in. Frosty trees, and sometimes snow. One year we got snowed in before we had a chance to go to the grocery store and lived on tomato soup and crackers until we made our way out the next day with some help. Sometimes the cabins have been incredible . . . sometimes they have been a little small or stinky or had problems with the heat, but we've always worked it out. This trip is all about my daughter. It's our trip. We've been doing it since she was 15—she's 30 now.

Happy Christmas, and Happy New Year. God is in the little owl found in the New York Christmas tree this year.

* * *

Post by Sam on Dec 15, 2020 at 8:43am

What speaks to me personally at this time of year, is the winter solstice—the shortest day, or moment of greatest darkness. “Good or bad, all things pass.” When you’re happy in the sunshine of your life and that thought hits (if!) it can be a bit of a bummer . . . but there’s something wonderful about being at the bottom of the ol’ sun swing, in the depths of darkness, and knowing it will pass—that, in fact, now the days are lengthening again, although the worst of the winter is still to come.

A day or two before the solstice I go out and gather some greenery. Holly, Ivy, Mistletoe, and whatever other bits catch my eye—and then I decorate the house with that. Sometimes I’ll make a wreath, other times just string the greenery around, drape it around the picture frames and doors and stuff. My mum used to love the whole house decorating thing—still does—and I always enjoyed helping her with that at Christmas. But I find these few bits from nature way more beautiful, appropriate, and satisfying, than all the sparkly stuff!

I normally leave it up until around the start of Feb—the very earliest signs of spring—and throughout all the harder, darker, wetter, & windier meantimes, it never lets up on those evergreen messages!

This year on the winter solstice the wife & I will be getting properly/officially married—we got a “PACS,” which is a kind of civil partnership thingy, but it’s not quite on the same level legally & what not. We’re sneaking off for a quiet ceremony with a couple of friends at the town hall. So in future this will be our anniversary too, nice and easy to remember, and another sweet thought for our shiny dark times!

Peace, love, and hope, all, from Normandy.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Dec 15, 2020 at 9:43am

Wonderful stories, everyone! Thank you so much. Sam! Married! Wow!

Everyone is struggling to keep it together, but the spring is coming, for the world, and for us people-folks too. Keep safe, keep along. Better days ahead!

* * *

Post by Judih on Dec 15, 2020 at 10:23pm

Mazal tov, Sam!

Yes, solstice sits on the precipice, and then it all points to spring, to opening, relaxation and better health. Choosing to live with the bits of joy that come into our soul and radiate to others—this will help us all through the rotation of the earth.

* * * * *



Gregory Kelly


O Sov'reign Night (Christmas Eve, 2020)

O Sov'reign Night.
 Spill yer grace on a cold cold world
 in blankets of winter dust while we sleep.
 Sweep sweeping wind wrap early hours
 in storms 'til storms swell, surge,
 cycle the heavens and fall to earth.

O Sov'reign Night.
 All angels. All souls. Come rest yer weary eyes
 and let yer guarded hearts bear no burden
 like all yer leaves were fell'd.
 Fallen. Broken. Finding yer home
 in gardens below yer branches.
 With yer covered stars and yer covered light.
 Care gently. Gentle snows sparing none below
 like all the world is come to bow.

O Sov'reign Night.
 Emmanuel. He came lowly and humble.
 In secret hours. Secret manger. Our Messiah.
 Baby born. Like us. God, he came when
 no one stirred and no one bothered.
 While a single star outshone above the horizon.
 Songs singing. Gathering. Concert. And cancelling
 all trespasses. Healing. Sweet Comforter.

O Sov'reign Night.
 We wayfarers who find God with us.
 He outstretched swaddled little more than a breath
 surviving company less fitting.
 We in silence and stillness
 understand all yer significance.

* * * * *





Sphinx Wolf Cactus Tree of Life

[Travel Journal]

Joaquín and Maribel have arrived from Baños with a guest, Jim Timothy, a peyote eater Dave told me about a while back, a participant in the Native American Church. Jim is living in Baños. Last year, he went on one of Dave's tours, bearing an urn of the ashes of a friend who had died of AIDS and had wanted to be sprinkled in the Amazon Jungle. An unusual but somehow typical outsider *faux pas*.

Dave told Jim, "What? You can't just dispose of a corpse here! This is people's land!" As a compromise, the ashes ended up getting poured into the Aguarico River.

I'm off to the Secoya village of San Pablo soon. I'll teach at the middle school for a week, January 20 to January 24; then, after the school's break, from March 24 to June 13.

At 42, Jim is slim and fit, with a receding hairline and a pencil-thin John Waters moustache. He told me he could dance as many hours as boyfriends half his age. He said he was an urban shaman and an organizer of spiritual rave parties in the Bay Area. "We have a chill-out room where there are always people on Ecstasy having mellow conversations and giving each other back rubs. It's better than having them out on the street drinking and fighting."

People on Ecstasy giving each other backrubs reminded me of, and I told him, my dream of the natural history museum diorama of ducks and platypuses at their yearly subterranean gene exchange.

He replied with a natural history museum dream of his own. "I was in a dim corridor in the Egyptian section. Ahead of me was a diorama with a sphinx in it. She was alive, looking out at me through the glass. When our eyes met, I realized I was myself and her at the same time. But more her, because the-I-that's-Jim was an emanation of her, an avatar. One of many avatars. With her, we formed a multiple-bodied super-organism. One of our roles was to bring information to her, to this greater version of ourselves. That's what I was doing in the Egyptian section of the museum, channeling my experiences to her. And getting energy back through her from this network of selves."

Jim suddenly sighed. "I was smoking a lot of DMT in those days, going deep into these questions of identity and reality. I had visitation rights with my son. He lived with my ex-wife. He got in trouble in school. I realized he needed my attention. That and the sphinx dream was when I started dialing back on the DMT. I needed to journey outside myself, not inside. I brought my son with me to the community garden I worked in, and I taught him everything I knew about plants. We learned the plants side by side. Every plant is a teacher plant. They all teach about life. A few teach about good and evil.

"I think you're like me, always up for big questions," Jim went on. "You'll like this. When I was a kid, I went to Catholic school, so good and evil was a hot topic. One day I asked the priest, 'We're supposed to love our enemies, right?' The priest said, 'Yes.' I was like, 'And the Devil's our enemy, right? So we're supposed to love the Devil, right?' The priest got really mad but he couldn't answer me. He just said I needed to pray more."

I said, "And then you grew up and took peyote, and all religious contradictions resolved."

Jim said, "Ah, peyote. Is it time to talk about that? It's taken me beyond the contradictions and into some adventures of the mind and body. First time I took it, I was way out in the desert on an Indian reservation in the Southwest. I was alone, tripping, naked, and playing a drum. Saw a little cloud of dust in the distance. It got bigger. Bigger. I saw it was from an approaching car. The car got

closer and closer. I saw it was one of the tribal police cars. It pulled up near me and stopped. A big Indian cop wearing mirrored sunglasses climbed out, walked up to me real slow, and said, 'You know you can't do this.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'All right.' Then he turned around, got back in his car and drove away."

I said, "I was around Huichols in Mexico who took peyote. Couple of them told me about it. One said that peyote was the first plant, and corn was born from it, and humans were born from the corn. According to that myth, the peyote is a grandparent of humanity. Another Huichol myth I read says peyote and corn and deer are all different forms of each other."

"Myths are like computer chips," Jim said. "They compress a lot of information in a small space. Concentrated intelligence. Survival pills for hard times."

I said, "One of my creative writing professors gave me a book of poems by this Serbian poet, Vasko Popa, called *Homage to the Lame Wolf*. It was named after an old Serbian tribal god. My roommate went to bed early. I went into this walk-in closet we had with a big soft chair in it, opened the window, got stoned out of my mind, and read these poems. They rocked my world 'cause, apart from being stunningly good poetry, they were also mythic prayers to this pagan god who was listening with his thoughts as I was reading the words. Have you ever had that experience where you're reading a book and the words open out into this huge other space? Like, it's as big inside the book as outside it?"

"Next day, I went to my professor and told him I had discovered the poems were prayers to this animal god, this ancient, immortal wolf spirit."

"He leaned back in his chair, looked down his long nose at me, and said, 'Vasko Popa knows a lot about wolves.' I said, 'Like what?' He said, 'And his grandmother knew even more.' I said, 'Like what?' He said, 'How to make love to them.'"

Jim said, "There's a guy I know in California. I don't know him well personally. We have a friend in common. The guy works at an aquarium. They released one of their male sea lions back into the ocean. The guy drives his car to the beach every Friday and picks up the sea lion and takes him home. He keeps him in the bathtub and feeds him fish and they make love. On Sunday he drives him back to the ocean."

"I was never sexually attracted to animals, myself," I commented, suddenly feeling out of my depth.

"Me neither," Jim said. "I like the idea of mixing human and animal modalities, just not that way. A few years ago, I danced at the Gay Pride March in San Francisco, dressed as a deer. I was in black motorcycle boots and a G-string and a headdress with antlers. There was a group of beautiful black women at the edge of the street, and they were cheering for me. I danced for them. They loved me."

"Far out. And the deer brings us back to its alter ego, the peyote," I said. I wanted to steer the conversation away from sex. "This Native American guy I met in Mexico, Jamie Bear, he fought in the Wounded Knee rebellion back in 1973. He does peyote ceremonies with Leonard Crow Dog. He told me the tipi was the world's first spaceship. You can fly anywhere in the universe in it."

"I can see that," Jim said. "It does look a lot like the nose cone of a rocket. I guess the whole tradition would correspond to the rest of the rocket underneath, the part that provides the power. I had a different vision of the tipi during a Native American Church ceremony. I looked up from the fire at the poles that support the canvas, and each pole was a different religion or philosophy. One was Islam, another Christianity, then Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, Native American, European pagan, and so on. All of them were necessary to shelter humanity, all of them were equal."

* * *

At twilight, Joaquín poured for himself, Jim, and me, chanting his wobbly chant over cups of yagé. We all drank and settled into hammocks and relaxed. For a long time, we were quiet, listening to insects chittering and tweeting, night birds fluting and oboeing, frogs honking and groaning, a thrilling

music of weirdness. My mood oscillated between scrumptious misery and grumpy joy.

Ah, now. Shit begins to sparkle. My mind takes off like a tipi rocket, crash-lands on a planet of fragrant, burnt language where gibberish and gobbledygook murmur in the breeze.

Yagé's not a bug or a slug, it's a drug, but it's way more than that, it's a bat like a cat, distilled echo of gunflower elves, subcutaneous calico lichen, vibrating neon gum mashing itself against the molars of the mind, yellow blades of sunlight magnified by the black earth, red dreams of the one light shaking us gently in the midnight morning saying, "Hey, old friend, wake up, it's time to *be*, buddy. *Time to be.*"

Be, be, be, be, be, I vocalize, the verb reverberating from my lips.

A memory swims up from my junior year in college. High as fuck, I'm lying on my back with my feet in the air beneath a maple tree in October, walking in the blue Ohio sky below the Vibram soles of my leather Patagonia hiking boots. Intermittent cold breeze shaking down yellow-red-orange leaves that spin as they fall. My tree is showing me it's a nature clock that tells the time of the season. Each leaf that falls is another season second.

What are the ramifications? *Rama, Rama!* Last thing Gandhi said as he was being assassinated, a Sanskrit name of God. Same as the Spanish word for the branch of a tree. Branches branch into branch-branching branches. Life a bio-fractal. What are the ramifications, Rama? *Let's all ramify. 1, 2, 3, choom!*

Crouching like a squirrel on a twig of the World Tree, I peer at a leaf. Leaf grows scales. Surroundings dissolve. I'm in a workshop looking at a sheet of lizard skin. Gnomes cutting into it with instruments like cookie cutters, taking out lizard shapes, sewing them on lizard bodies. Of course, lizards come into being through biological reproduction, even in trance I know that, but the natural process is mirrored by this supernatural one. This is how they craft lizards.

The scene winks out and I'm listening to insect songs in a hammock in the dark jungle again as I ramify, fingers and toes lengthening, branching out, lengthening, branching out.

In the night outside the hut, trees whisper in the wind, *We'll hide you, because you're one of us.*

Joaquín is quietly snoring.

Should I turn charlatan and seek wealth selling fake wisdom, now that I know everything's fabricated? But even the wealth would be fake. Sun, moon, stars, all artificial, built like a movie set by elves to convince us this so-called reality is real. It's built by the elves of Maya, by Maya's elves, by M'y'selves. One finds oneself (many finds many-self) wallowing in the me-istic miasma of cells and selves that is the mind on *yagé* again.

We're in one of those places where everything one thinks of is true, completely, undeniably, yet elsewhere it could be false. Truths, like countries, have borders. Here, the magic universe is vast and real. Elsewhere, other rules apply. And always, crickets are singing, and my lungs drinking this rich, clean air like a distillation of life itself. As much as *yagé*, I'm drunk on this language of nature breathing in me, this plant-animal voice roaring with piping rustlings, creaking whimpering squawks, cackling murmuring hums.

Lame Wolf, your growl chitters in cricket song. My hands are the heads of your scouts. My feet are your mangled paws. My muzzle lengthens, the better to smell the jungle with. Lame Wolf, are we alpha or omega, venom or nectar, cherub or sphinx? Are we death or life?

Nausea hits me, a punch in the belly from the idea of a wolf-headed man. Then self-pity, as I remember I'll die someday. Then compassion, as I remember everyone else will too. With wolf tears in my eyes, I resign myself to death, and to fear and pain, death's foreshadowers.

A breeze brings the cool brown smell of river. Crickets play their wordless songs of light and darkness with more intensity now, and I'm not sure where the music's coming from, but it reverberates through me until it's all I am. I stretch and shift, wolfish, relieving a pressure in my back, crack my dead knuckles, and float again in the delicate black water of the forest night, my head clear. I accept the nausea as I accept everything. I must and I can.

I sail toward the center of night, the captain of a schooner riding atop a plume of smoke high above a burning city. The captain is cold. He pulls the light blanket up around his shoulders.

I remember Jim and Joaquín. What are they doing? Joaquín visiting the dead in a dream, Jim telepathing with his overself.

Go slow, my soul.

My stomach is giddy with the taste of death that is also the taste of life.

Joaquín quietly snoring again.

An early explorer wrote about *yagé*, “Transported by the drink, the Indians dreamed a thousand absurdities and believed them as if they were true.” Indeed! How believable these thousand absurdities are, my exploratory friend! It’s so easy to be transported by them, and so fun! Like you never knew you were a schooner, and the absurd wind rises, and off you sail!

We drink a thousand truths and believe them as if they were dreams. We dream the myths of man and the oppositions we learn when we’re dreamed into this world, alpha and omega, venom and nectar, cherub and sphinx, death and life. Surrounded by these phantoms, we stare about wildly. But we’re more than our frightened, amazed selves: like Gandhi, we’re ramifications of Rama. Pulses beating, lungs wresting oxygen from air, branches of the human plant.

The gnomes march away in the darkness carrying their tools. The drink transports me into a memory. Dusk, July 4, 1974. I’m six. My mom and stepdad are bringing me to a firework display in Veterans Park in Ann Arbor. Threading through a crowd of families and couples lying on blankets, they greet our next-door neighbor, Olga, then move on. My mom says, “She’s high as a kite.” My stepdad nods. Olga’s sitting on the ground but my mom said she’s up in the air. Adults often say things that don’t mean what they say. What are they talking about now? Maybe by the time I’m ten I’ll know. I think I’ll know a lot more when I’m ten. We reach an open space. On the grass, my mom spreads the soft secondhand quilt on which old automobiles are printed. In the fading light, I read their names: Model T Ford, Oldsmobile Cutlass, Dodge Dart . . . I lie on my back and picture Olga flying above me trailing a kite string.

The sky is an inky sapphire. Night doesn’t so much fall as creep in with tiny steps. The first stars are starlets peeping through the gap in the curtains on opening night. Then. Then! Tremendous deep **BOOM** and **ECHO** in the velvet summer sky! Whistling-screaming yellow-white firework spirals as it falls. Huge green plantlike one detonates and holds still in the high air with its smoke lit up by its fire. Blue star-like one flares like a love note from outer space. And we remember our country’s fiery birth. Lying on three hundred blankets, we Americans cry out, *Ooooooh! Ahhhhh!*

Twenty-two years later, I breathe deep, living in two times, savoring that glory that marked my soul.

Nausea.

Eagles whirl, arrows and olive branches, stars and stripes, all part of my design. We’re woven into each other.

Nausea jacks up the beauty of my visions.

Bug-eyed, I stare into the maelstrom, the soul of my country.

My eyes stream with tears, red, white, and blue.

My fellow American Jim Timothy’s voice rings out in the darkness:

The creator is our savior,

Hey ney yo wey,

The creator is our savior,

Hey ney yo wey.

*Take care of us, take care of us,
Hey ney yo wey,
Take care of us, take care of us,
Hey ney yo wey.*

*Take pity on us, take pity on us,
Hey ney yo wey,
Take pity on us, take pity on us,
Hey ney yo wey.*

*The creator is our savior,
Hey ney yo wey,
The creator is our savior,
Hey ney yo wey.*

The family tree of humanity is ramifying before my eyes with astonishment. All living humans are the tips of its twigs. I see myself there. And the growing seems to keep going through me, beyond me. I recall this is one of the answers I've been looking for.

The intoxication intensifies. Time distorts, flexes, breathes, congeals, melts away. The jungle is forever, and I'm any being at all witnessing it, personal identity, ethnicity, species irrelevant. We're gathered here from all times witnessing this never-ending dance of life.

Joaquín wakes up. He and Jim and I sing songs of praise and renewal with power and precision in the multicolored night that soothes as it seethes with intelligence and love.

I know we'll always be here, doing this.
Even when we come down.
Even when we die.

* * * * *



The House of Lovers & Witches:

Photo Gallery by AbandonView







Ace Boggess

Enlightenment

[Fiction]

i.

The other lawyers hated Gene. So did the secretaries. Judge Diamante in Courtroom B despised him, as did Judge Deter, although that honorable master oversaw criminal cases and rarely found Gene standing before him waving briefs. Oh, none of them wanted him dead, *per se*. They just wished to have his light snuffed out. They tired of seeing his face.

Gene Somner wasn't a handsome man. His dirt-brown hair frizzed to points, some of which then bent back into curls. His eyebrows rose like gravestones above his sunken eyes. He resembled a cartoon dog with cartoon mange. None of this was helped by the scar below his left eye—a reminder of the time he fell. Yet, even having these deficiencies, Gene bubbled with charm and charisma that would've made him attractive enough if not for the battery-powered lantern he carried everywhere he went.

Before his fall and subsequent recovery, Gene hid in the darkness like everyone else. He came to work before sunrise, felt his way along the blackened walls of the lobby, rode the abysmal elevator to the third floor—flinching from the glow of the third-floor button—then shuffled through the office in hesitant steps, not stopping while he grumbled, “Hello, Sharon. Hey, Roger. How’s it going, Emily?” as if he saw his coworkers through a cave dweller’s eyes. After that, he spent his days on the phone, arguing points or making deals with other shady lawyers. On a bad day, he hid behind dark sunglasses while he cowered in the back of a cab on his way to the Courthouse and the black hole that was Courtroom B.

Everyone accepted Gene in those days. The other lawyers sat in inky dark of their offices, their hands nervously doodling on complaint forms or motions for summary judgment. The secretaries sat with their hands on their laps, panicking only when the little red light on the telephone flashed. Even the judges were content to wallow in the vacuum of their spacious chambers—chewing the ends of their gavels while wishing they were somewhere else, somewhere with a bit less sunshine peeking around the closed Venetian blinds.

Then, the accident happened. Everything changed. Gene returned to work after a couple weeks of recovery, wandered to the center of the waiting room, coughed twice, said, “This won’t do,” then swiveled on his heels and left, his feet making clackety-clackety-swoosh sounds as if he were tap-dancing out the door.

When he came back an hour later, he held that lantern at chest height in front of him, illuminating the well-worn chairs, the stacks of unread magazines, Liz the receptionist drawing back in her seat and whimpering as if she had just been fired.

“Morning, Liz,” he said. “It’s good to see you.”

ii.

No one knew whether he meant to do it. Was it an attempt to end his suffering? Had thought cancer finally eaten through all the invisible marrow of his spirit? Or was it, like he told those miserable policemen, nothing more than an accident? He said he went to the window in his bedroom. Someone had left it open, and he intended to slam it shut and pull the blinds. He explained that his head was still filled with the day’s business, and that it was so dark in the room, even with the window open, that he didn’t see the foot stool—the loose carpet, the family dog—and stumbled over it, pitching headfirst out into the

cold January dawn.

Of course, there were many holes in his story. Who in his household would've opened those blinds, let alone the window behind them? Not him, certainly. Not his wife, Charlotte, who hadn't worked in years and did nothing now but sit in her chair and watch a blank TV. Not his daughter Caroline, either. True, at nine years old, she was still young enough to enjoy a little nightlight plugged in while she slept, but she was approaching her teenage years when, like everyone else, she would embrace the blackness all around her.

Aside from that, how did Gene not bang his head against the window frame or slap his palms on the sill? How was his plunge from the second story not interrupted by a knee against the wall?

No matter. Gene stuck to his version. He was a good lawyer. He knew what facts he best kept to himself.

iii.

The lantern put out a halo with a six-foot radius. The light was jaundiced and dim but, in constant black of the halls and conference rooms at Meursault, Heath, and Somner, it blazed a harvest moon, highlighting metal desks, paintings of sailboats against pastel skies, and the sad, frightened faces of anyone who wandered into range. Many thought it carried a smell with it, too. Some described the odor as being like kerosene, but others said burning dust. One of the partners teared up as she described the scent of rain in the center of a muddy field.

Whenever Gene walked past a desk, the lantern held in front of him like a birthday cake, the young associate or intern seated there would turn away or cover her face with both hands before he could get a good look at her bandit's mask or cheeks melting into batter in the bowl of her chin. Some quickly reached for a bottom drawer, opening it and fumbling through the nonsense files within. They weren't trying to look busy for the boss—and he was the boss, albeit one of three—but pushing themselves as far as possible from the painful yellow glare of that portable sun. They preferred not to be seen, even by their own eyes.

Gene often paused just long enough to say, “That’s a lovely pair of earrings, Janet. Are they new?” Or, “Hey there, Bob. How’re Margie and the kids?” Or else, “Happy Thanksgiving, Shelly. Is your family visiting this year?”

Replies came in noncommittal grunts sounding more like *Help!* than yes or no. Not that anyone wanted help. All just wanted him to leave and take his infernal candle with him.

Gene usually complied, moving on to the next station, connecting the dots on a path he drew to his office. Then, he plopped down in his comfortable leather chair, placing the lantern on the edge of his desk. It was often less than a minute after that when he reached for the intercom while, throughout the building, a dozen secretaries crossed their fingers or folded their hands in prayer, dreading whose button he'd push, which soldier he'd call to the front. Soon, eleven sighs of relief were heard, along with a single whimper when Gene's static-riddled voice came out of a box, saying, “Missy Rae, would you please bring me the Bennetti file? Thank you very much.”

iv.

First hints of sunlight dyed the snow pink. Six untracked inches of accumulation covered the yard like icing on a pan of sweets. The temperature had reached the mid-teens for an overnight low, leaving the snow hard-packed enough to smack a falling body, yet soft enough underneath to give a little and cushion the blow.

Gene couldn't remember the fall or the sickening whump his body made when it struck the icy shell of his lawn. He didn't recall much of anything about that morning—not how long he lay there damaged and freezing, not which neighbor bravely peeked out through horizontal blinds long enough to see him and dial 9-1-1, not the arrival of the ambulance and two fire trucks.

Even so, he liked to believe that he lifted his head at that moment and saw their collage of red

lights flaring up like a forest fire, flickering like a disco ball on the dance floor of hell. He kept that image with him, though it wasn't true. He blacked out ten minutes before the first siren could be heard wailing up the hill toward his house.

v.

The lantern wasn't the only artifact Gene excavated from some ancient world. One evening, when he had to work late to prepare for the next day's deposition of a witness, Gene disappeared for half an hour and came back with a black box under his arm. It was smaller than the smallest laptop. In the hazy glow of the lantern, it resembled a mini tool kit.

"A lot left to do tonight," he said as he passed Elaine's desk, the closest one to his office. She was considered his personal secretary, so it fell to her to suffer through the extra hours. "If you haven't eaten yet, now would be a good time."

Elaine pretended to smile. Then, before Gene had made it through his office door, she was up and gone, not about to miss her chance to escape. She ate slowly at a smoky diner down the street. On her way back, she snuck into the liquor store for a few airplane bottles of Early Times, the first of which she drank in the law firm's elevator. One of her long brown bangs fell on her lip and stuck there, pasted by boozy wetness, until she reached up and, frustrated, brushed it away. *It was that kind of day*, she thought. Then the doors opened, and her ears were assaulted by some god-awful racket.

Elaine, tight-fisted and square-jawed, stormed down the hallway like a school teacher seeking out a spitballer in the back of her classroom. There, at the end of the corridor just beyond her station, was the open door to Gene Somner's office. The lawyer's face stayed hidden behind a thick, clamped stack of documents he read by lantern light. On the desk in front of him stood the small black box, a silver arm rising from it as if pleading for attention. Out of it came that buzzy, bouncing noise.

"Mister Somner," she said, thinking this might qualify as a hazardous work environment and wondering if she should place a call to OSHA.

Gene lowered his papers. "Oh, hello there, Elaine. I hope you had a pleasant meal."

"Mister Somner," she droned a second time, adding, "what in the name of God is going on here?" She couldn't believe she said that. *Oh, well*, she thought. *A girl can only take so much.*

"I have all this work to do," Gene answered. "Nothing like a little music to help me relax and focus my brain."

Music, she thought. Funny, I didn't recognize it. "Is that that rock'n'roll?"

"Absolutely," said Gene. "Do you like it?"

She didn't. Then again, maybe she did. It sounded kind of familiar, after all. Yes, she had heard it before, although she couldn't place it. Some kind of carpentry song, she decided, with its catchy little refrain about fixing a hole in the roof.

"I . . .," she began, trying but unable to answer her boss's question. "I . . .," she attempted again.

"I'll take that as a yes," Gene said.

Elaine wanted to argue, but the words wouldn't come. Instead, she found herself bobbing her head in the gesture for yes. *Yes*, she nodded. *Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes*, she continued, all the way back to her desk where she kept it up until time for her to leave. The music hypnotized, she decided later. It had to be that, because not once during the entire evening did she stop nodding *yes* long enough to think about her boss's irritating light.

vi.

"Mister Somner," the baritone voice bellowed through this new darkness. "Mister Somner, Mister Somner." Then, softer, it said, "I don't think he can hear us."

Of course I can hear you, thought Gene, who didn't open his eyes once during the ambulance ride. *Now leave me alone. I'm dead.*

vii.

When did the darkness take over? Gene didn't recall a time when folks weren't hiding in their shadows, closing the blinds, sitting in silence at their desks, and faking their work because they couldn't see the pages in front of them, or even the hand with which they wrote. Sure, he kept a sort of nostalgia for college tailgate parties in the lot before a football game, and there were images in his head of a day at the beach with arms flailing and waves crashing against his tiny back while his parents in front of him argued just on shore. But those were fantasy images like scenes from a film, as if there were a time when he still sat in a crowded theater staring down the glare from a movie screen.

Gene wasn't the first to dabble with a bit of light at the office, although he was the first to bring his own. Sometimes it happened when certain medicines were tried. A young associate would visit his doctor and return with a fresh amber bottle of pills. He tried to keep it to himself, because no lawyer wanted his colleagues to think he might be crazy.

Even so, it became obvious as soon as the associate first attempted to open the office blinds that had long been nailed shut. So, that lawyer would switch on his desk lamp and plunge the room into light. In the days that followed, he would work much harder than normal, getting motions written and filed, conferring with clients who preferred to be left alone. His output went up, as did his effectiveness.

But it never lasted. A few weeks would pass, or maybe a month. Then the desk lamp stayed on less and less as the work piled up again, and the associate realized how deep of a hole he had dug himself already. Two, maybe three months tops, and the darkness was back for good. It always seemed as if that lawyer spent two months staring at the mess he had made of his life and, after that, decided it would be best if he didn't have to look at it anymore.

viii.

Gene awoke to a blazing pain behind his eyes. Or in front of his eyes. Something blazing, anyway. There were tubes in one arm. A cast covered the other. Looking down, he could see the blurry outline of a bandage on his face. Gene knew there were others on him, too. His body felt as if it were stuck to flypaper or else made out of wood.

He sensed a sort of lightness inside him that came from somewhere other than the morphine massaging from under his skin. *What was this strange impression?* he wondered. He thought it might be paradise or Shangri-La or the Elysian Fields, but those places wouldn't leave him mummy-wrapped on a cot.

Gene saw movement and attempted to raise his head for a look, but the morphine dizziness weighed on his neck and dropped him straight back down.

"Hello?" he moaned to whomever was there. He hoped it might be his wife.

Moments later, a creamy brown face stared down from a few inches above him. The woman had dark eyes that nonetheless seemed to carry torches in them. He caught a hint of her burgundy uniform as she backed away.

"Mister Somner," the nurse said in a voice so soft it left his spine tingling even more. "You're awake. That's outstanding."

"Where . . . ?"

"You want to know where you are? You're in a room here at the hospital. Sisters of Mercy. You've been here almost twenty-four hours."

"What happened to me?"

The nurse came in close again, looking at his pupils, then pulled farther away. She left a breath of her peach-scented perfume that drifted down and settled around Gene's nose.

"You don't remember?" she said. "You had a fall. We've all wondered about you. Wondered if it was . . ." She left the sentence dangling there.

"I don't know," Gene muttered, then added, "I'm not dead."

"No, it wasn't that bad of a fall. Course, honey, truth be told, Doc says you almost froze yourself



to death.”

“The Doc?”

“Doctor Tillich is your attending. Doctor Hess treated you in the ER, but he gave you over to us. Anyway, Doctor Tillich will be in to see you, now that you’re somewhat with us. In the meantime, get some rest. I’ll just flip these lights off and leave you be.”

Gene didn’t know why he said what he did or what came over him, but he heard the words and knew they were his as they echoed from his half-closed mouth.

“No, please. Leave them on awhile longer.”

“Anything you say, sweetie.” The nurse backed out of his room and closed the door.

ix.

It was almost winter again, nearly two years since Gene’s accident, and the cold had begun seeping in through fabric and walls. In the firm’s black hole, the dark made everything seem that much colder as if an underground root cellar without any central heating. The staff wore sweaters and turtlenecks, the lawyers their heaviest suits, often with long-sleeve shirts hidden underneath. Most bumbled around, brrring and groaning, rubbing their elbows and sometimes their ankles for that extra bit of warmth. The office smelled stale and cold like the inside of a walk-in freezer.

Gene sat at his desk, warmer than anyone in the glow of his lantern. Even so, he should’ve expected a bad day. It had been so long since he’d had one.

It began around ten-thirty that morning when the lantern flickered twice. Gene frowned and touched his hand to the top of it, waiting to see if the light sputtered again.

At noon, Gene went to lunch at that smoky diner down the road. It was run by an Iranian, but sold the best Italian pastas. Gene sat at his table alone, reading and rereading the table cards and trying not to wonder what his life was all about.

When he returned to work, he sat down in his leather swivel chair and replaced the lantern on his desk. That’s when the light began pulsing again, this time in bursts of three or four as if a real flame off a lamp filled with gas or kerosene. Gene touched the lukewarm glass, tapped gently on the metal top, took the lantern in both hands and swayed it left then right, but the light seemed to grow a bit dim.

Batteries, he thought.

Gene was still playing around with it when he heard a gruff, fake cough coming from his doorway. He glanced up and barely made out the shadowy outline of one of his partners, Reginald Meursault.

“Oh, Reggie,” he said. “Hello. Good to see you. Come in, come in.”

“No thanks,” said Meursault. “I prefer to stand.”

“Oh? Suit yourself. Well, what can I do for you?”

Something shifted about the man, and Gene got the impression he was looking away. When Meursault spoke, it was in the deep, solemn baritone of an undertaker.

“Well, Gene, I believe we need to have a talk.”

“All right.” Again, Gene motioned toward a chair, but his partner declined. “OK, then. Talk, I guess.”

Meursault hesitated, falsely clearing his throat. “You see, the thing is, Sandy and I have been discussing a few, err, issues.”

“Such as?”

“What to do about your . . . situation.”

The lantern flickered several times and then steadied. The dark figures dancing on the walls and ceiling would’ve mesmerized Gene if he weren’t so busy listening to his partner’s words.

“What are you talking about? What situation?”

“Your clients,” Meursault replied.

“What about them?”

“We’ve had some complaints.”

Again, the light sputtered and dimmed. Gene ignored it. “Complaints?”

“Yes, from your clients.”

“Why would they complain? I bring in the highest settlements in the firm.”

“I know,” said Meursault.

The light skipped about like a madman with his shoes on fire.

“Frankly,” Meursault explained, “it’s your attitude.”

“What’s wrong with my . . . ?”

“And again, to speak frankly, it’s the main topic of discussion here in the office, too.”

The light grew dimmer.

“You put people off. That’s all I can tell you. No one wants to be around you. That’s why the other lawyers settle with you for such high figures. Neither they nor their clients want to deal with you and your nonsense. And yes, frankly, that’s what your clients say about it also.”

“But the money!” Gene said, raising his voice. The light brightened for a moment, then faded to a low shine.

Meursault said, “Yes, good money. We’ll miss that.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“The thing is, like I told you, Sandy and I have been talking about this for some time now. If you were an associate, we’d have to terminate your contract. But, we can’t do that.”

“Damn right, you can’t.”

“So, we’ve decided to buy you out. Sandy and I intend to split your shares. We’ll take your name off the masthead, if you like. Or leave it. It’s up to you. Don’t worry, we’ll give you a fair price.”

The light was almost gone now. It pulsed and brightened from time to time like a dying firefly half-smashed on a windshield but, for the most part, it offered no more visibility than the cherry of a cigarette seen down a blind alley at midnight.

Gene took a deep breath and said, “What if I don’t want to sell my shares? I’ve put my life into this firm. I have rights here, don’t I?”

“That’s true. It’s your choice in the long run. But, still trying to be frank with you, Gene, if you don’t sell to us, then Sandy and I would expect to sell to you. Maybe you can come up with that kind of money. I don’t know. What I do know is, we can’t work with you anymore.”

Meursault paused again. Quiet echoed through the mostly-dark. When the partner spoke again, his voice was calmer, friendlier. “Listen, Gene. That’s a good chunk of change coming your way. I suggest you take it. You’re still, what, forty-five?”

“Forty-eight,” Gene sighed.

“Forty-eight. Take a year off, relax, get yourself together. Maybe you could take a long trip.” *To Antarctica*, he didn’t say. “Then, when you’re ready, you can start your own firm and do with it what you like. Anyway, think about it. We’ll want your answer by the end of the week.” His voice trailed off in the darkness as it moved farther and farther away.

The lantern was so dim now as to be unnoticeable. For the first time in almost two years, Gene allowed darkness to envelope him, to permeate his skin and reach inside him to the hollow places he tried to keep in highlights. Like a schoolboy, he lowered his head onto his desk and slept. He didn’t dream and, when he woke, the last spark in his lantern had burned out.

* * * * *



The Straight Stuff

You have to walk on eggshells around the truth
because it's quick to anger.
Like a mean older sibling, it will insert itself
into your private rooms, rifle through
your private things, push and pummel you
until you find yourself on your knees,
shouting "enough!"

You can't tease the truth on any level.
It lost its sense of humor eons ago.
If you poke at it with a stick,
it will show you its fangs and come at you,
growling and salivating.

You, dear reader, must beware of the truth.
It's seldom kind and never flexible.
It's stiff-necked, rigid, will not compromise—
not even a little.

The truth has very little color.
It is a mezzotint or a heliograph.
The hands of truth are so dry,
they rustle when they rub together.

The voice of truth is hoarse, whispered,
irritating as any off-key songsters,
sounding their own praises.

Truth, dear reader, is a dark room
where you must watch where you step,
sniff your way, feel your way.
It is the hidden mine in a lush field,
a treacherous gin trap.

I knew a woman once, who,
unaware of these things,
skied down a snowy mountain of truth.
She encountered an avalanche and,
though she raced her fastest—
trying to escape it—
praying to escape it—
she was swiftly overcome, covered up.

They didn't find her body for years.

* * * * *



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, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

15th Wedding Anniversary

Kassandra Dawn Kramer & I were married on December 31, 2005, in Holyoke, Colorado. To remembrance our lucky years together, past & to come, here are snapshots in text & photos, of our past Decembers, right back to 2003, when we met in person for the first time.

*December 20, 2003
Super 8 Motel
Omaha, Nebraska*

—We set up our room like an apartment—vase of flowers, candle, clothes tucked in drawers—a tidiness about it all—watched the first *Lord of the Rings* movie last night—second this afternoon—John Coltrane is on KD’s iTunes—



*December 30, 2004
Borders Books-Employee Kitchen
Bellevue, Washington*

—How to work more into KD, her into me, that’s what I want, more with her even when not doing the same thing, synthesized—that’s where to start—her & Art—



December 31, 2005
 Kramer family home
 Holyoke, Colorado

Wedding

*Vow union again, in a night crackling
 with high want, world exploding every
 moment in feeding & making new. None
 lone as seems yet what dearest joining
 perpetual? Only bid fidelity to what sings
 true to the sweet burst within.*

*Vow union again, to what warms near
 the laughing ache, twines close like blankets
 & blood, slow acceleration to break the
 strutting prows of kings & preachers. Slow,
 til a mad heart's sudden spark, tracing love's arc
 through emptiness, like an egg dreaming new songs.*

*Vow union again & reck all the world
 God, & best wish to live like an endless prayer,
 chase with green's swinging power, wonder
 how, wonder how. How to live & why?
 Can any tell & be sure? Where melt the
 gone days, where fetch the old wants?*

*Vow union again, & dare this hour's
 far border, shudder to love with both fists
 wide open, blow out the bent years & books,
 walls & greeds, daylight grumbles for meat
 & coin & tit. Remember: all is real, clap twice,
 all is maya. Breathe, relax. See what remains.*

*Vow union again, tis a new song canna
 be sung alone, hard strum the dust, sniff
 by what crevices in the melody, sweet burst
 within. Sudden spark, night high, higher,
 crackling with want, cry out! What croons
 worlds listens, & listens for all. A beat. Another.*



*Vow union again, love at fiercest angles
to a strange, ceaseless war, love a new mother
wooing in the dark, love a prophet yet
unfound by his feeding, believing beasts.
Conjure better to come with backs strong enough
for this hour's truth, & willing for the next.*

*We vow to live this world in all its going beauty,
great, crumbling, how helpless happy it passes.*

[finished 2/5/2006
Seattle, Washington]

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*December 31, 2006
Dick's Drive-In—Queen Ann
RS/KD table
Seattle, Washington*

Today KD & I went to the IMAX Theatre at Seattle Center—we saw *Happy Feet & Night at the Museum*—both charming, funny, loopy, loud—the first not Pixar-level good, but nothing is save Studio Ghibli—the second sentimental but quirky—kind-hearted movies—

* * * * *



*December 23, 2007
On board Alaska Airlines
Portland, Oregon-to-
Denver Colorado*

These past several months since moving down to Portland, Oregon, KD & I have been settling in, walking around, making gestures here & there. Rooting solid in a new place takes time, days pass uncertain at times, but efforts do come.

* * * * *

*December 24, 2008
St. Thomas More Catholic Church,
Holyoke, Colorado*

My 4th Xmas here with KD's family, dampened celebration because of family business quarrel, & bad auto injury to KD's cousin. People never know what's next. Last year I was sitting by her watching VH1 on TV, not knowing I would never see that form of her again. I wish I could say a single useful thing—but, no, listen, question, hand on her kin's shoulders—





*December 26, 2009
Holyoke, Colorado*

So today's event was what is called Kramer Christmas, at the Methodist Church hall in downtown Holyoke. Lots of food, & gifts of a sort, but the odd highlight for me was playing dominoes—KD's family persuaded me to join in, & I agreed reluctantly. But then I found out I really like this game a lot, & I'm good at it! Got 2nd among 8 people—what a nice surprise—

*December 30, 2010
Juniper Hill Inn
Ogunquit, Maine*

Yesterday started back home down in Arlington, then come up by train from Massachusetts to Maine—walked for a long time on a trail near the beach, taking pictures, ate too much good food at a seafood place called Jackie's Too—back in our room, ended up watching the *Back to the Future* trilogy on TV—not seen it in 20 years! Fun way to spend 5th anniversary!



December 31, 2011
Edgewater Inn
Old Orchard Beach, Maine

Packed up our bags for long hiking, slowed a bit by the cold & rain—walked to pier on beach & along deserted streets nearby—gorgeous winter beach as always—midnight New Year’s fireworks over the water—later on, saw for the many-th time David Lynch’s brilliant wonder of a film, *Mulholland Drive* (2001)—

* * * * *



December 31, 2012
Home
Arlington, Massachusetts

Both of us had to work today, but did have our anniversary dinner at Passage to India in Cambridge—that was fun—took bus back home—watched a strange, twisty movie called *Triangle*—then KD’s cold took her to bed early—tired, I stayed up a little while longer, passed midnight with my pen going, so that was good.

* * * * *

December 31, 2013
Home
Milkrose, Massachusetts

KD home late from work, we got ribs for dinner, & watched *Dr. Who’s 50th Anniversary Special*. I read to her from my journal for the days around when we got married in 2005. When healthy feeling, & doing my work well, I can be so much better a person to her & all—& anyway *should be this better person*—if not now, then when?

* * * * *



December 31, 2014
Beachmere Inn
Ogunquit, Maine

Same hotel room as past 3 years—friendly taxi man from the train station to hotel—anniversary sparkling cider—read “Wedding” to KD—obsessing on *Walking Dead*, & kissing with midnight ocean fireworks—



* * * * *

December 31, 2015
Beachmere Inn
Ogunquit, Maine

10th anniversary—KD got up at 5 to work out—she never sleeps well before a trip—my back was hurting me fierce on the train up here, took some potent pills—tiring kind—there were anniversary candies & sparkling cider—KD’s asleep & I’m crossing new year with pen going—



* * * * *

December 31, 2016
Beachmere Inn
Ogunquit, Maine

Walked into town, not too cold, kind of slippery on sidewalks though—first to market, then to beach—walked & walked, many pictures—up a ramp over a dune to find an estuary on the other side—sinking in the wet sand—anniversary sparkling cider for 11th anniversary—watched the brilliant new TV show, *The OA*—sweet card from KD—

* * * * *



December 31, 2017
Home
Milkrose, Massachusetts

Jellicle Guild meeting, 29th anniversary, KD & I, reading back & forth till 2:30 a.m., lots of voices on tape & video—rewatched *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*—crawled to bed—

* * * * *

December 31, 2018
Home
Milkrose, Massachusetts

We both worked all day—near midnight 13th anniversary sparkling cider & many episodes of *Frasier*—

* * * * *





*December 31, 2019
Beachmere Inn
Ogunquit, Maine*

Talk with my boss helped calm my worries over state of my contract some—kept working at project all the way up to Maine—same friendly taxi driver lady as other years took us from train station to our hotel, 8th stay here since 2013. Snowy, icy, *Twilight Zone* in bed. Fun arrival!

* * * * *

*December 31, 2020
Home
Milkrose, Massachusetts*

No trip to Maine this year, my beloved, but this walk along the years, to remember, to look forward. Jellicle Guild meeting tonight, new *Cenacle*, let's see this year out, together as always, smiling, & wishing everyone else good health & better fortunes in the new year!

12/31/2020

* * * * *





In My Hands

In my hands
I see my ancestors—

Faint against bone
and flesh, echo—

Luminous names
in murmurs.

I hear their reasons
and reminders—

Sad accusations,
vows,
yearnings.

I put a hand
across my mouth
to embrace them.

* * *

The Dogs Sniff My Grandfather

The dogs sniff my grandfather,
dead since 1974,

drunk again in my backyard,
saying, see,

not even you can fix it.

All those years in prison,

how I stuttered as a boy,
tongue-tied til age five,

my father with a knife
in his chest—

how I never had a chance,
not one.

* * *

Swing

I swing in a gown
thin as rice paper,
covered in roses.

The neighbor mows his yard,
immune to my playful poses.

* * *

Eros

Pink grapefruit powdered
with sugar and eaten first,
then the blush-faced rose.

* * * * *







Rivers of the Mind

[A Novel]

*“Purify the colors, purify my mind
Spread the ashes of the colors
over this earth of mine”*

—Arcade Fire, “Neighborhood #1 (Tunnels),” 2004.

Chapter 9:

How Officer Phillip Took Matters Into His Own Hands

i.

After writing a few speeding tickets, Grace and I found a parking lot where we could talk. She slid a file folder from her purse. “This was all I was able to find. I know its not much—but, anyway. Here’s an old police report from 1966. A girl named Mary Ann was reported as missing by her friends. A man took her from the bar. Someone made a call that they’d seen someone taking her out to the sanitation building we were at last night, but this is back in the sixties, so who knows what they were doing.”

“This is a letter to the editor, dated July 11, 1981, ‘The Government Stole My Brother.’ He accused the government of taking his brother to the base there too. I mean, obviously no details. But, anyway . . .”

“January 2, 2003, there was this online article posted by someone who claimed they used to work at a base somewhere in Texas, and they said it was hidden under a sanitation facility. Well, they described what they used to do. Mind-control experiments, stuff like that. That’s it.”

Grace leaned back in her chair and sighed, tense. She didn’t need to ask me how I felt. She knew. My new powers made sure of that.

“What was it like this morning?” she asked, in a hushed tone. I cracked my neck, and tried to straighten my back a little bit. I had barely slept. I kept having these awful nightmares—the same dream, every time, of me following that Jack fella into the forest.

“Didn’t get much sleep,” I said, sipping a bit of coffee I’d picked up at the local gas station. I stopped at the one where the kidnapper had turned himself in the other night, just to see if I could get any information about what had happened. Just the same story about this guy seeing an angel.

They’d checked the security cameras and it looked like he’d bumped into some homeless guy—maybe started having a migraine or something. That was all I got out of him.

A call came in through the radio and interrupted what I was saying. “Howdy, Phillip, Grace. This is Ben. Do you read me? Go ahead.”

“Copy that, Ben. This is Phillip. Loud and clear. Go ahead.”

“What are you guys doing right now? Got any time to check up on something? Go ahead.”

“Just on traffic duty right now. What’s happening? Go ahead.”

“Well, some tweaker out in Poplar Valley Hill just called in for the twelfth time in a row about being attacked by an uhm—let me check my notes. Ah yes. ‘A telepathic alien,’ were his exact words. I don’t know, just figured if you guys were getting bored out there. Go ahead.”

Grace and I both looked at each other, stupefied. With a long gulp, Grace spoke carefully into the receiver. “Well, sounds pretty good. We’d love to go check it out. Go ahead.”

“Alright. Just go out there. See if you smell any, you know, ammonia or anything. Much as I hate to call the SWAT team out to Poplar Valley again—”

ii.

Out in front of the Poplar Valley Trailer Park, one of the worst in the whole county, I parked the car and tried to get ready.

“What are you doing?” Grace asked, irritated.

“Breathing.”

“Why? You nervous or—”

“I’m trying to get in the right state of mind. If I go in there all paranoid and looking for answers, someone in there is probably on something that’s gonna mix with that, and it’ll make ’em just snap. Go all crazy. I gotta relax. And then everyone else will relax too. That’s the trick.”

Stretching and trying to think about the beach, I felt my body relax.

“Unit 27,” Grace said, looking down at her notepad as we got out of the car.

“Alright.”

We walked along, looking for house numbers. The faintest hint of what smelled like marijuana passed through the air, making me cringe. Grace and I heard voices coming from inside one trailer as we passed.

“Hey! Dude, the cops are outside.”

“What?”

“The police!”

The two of us exchanged a look and rolled our eyes. As much as drug abuse in our town concerned us, we were both most anxious to hear about the sighting of the angel.

Unit 27 was an old yellow mobile home with brown trim, a nice tin roof, and a tiny chimney for burning wood in the winter. A tiny meth pipe and a handful of needles sat in the front lawn of the home. We knocked on the door.

Inside, a bright-eyed and shaking man peered through a set of blinds. His hands trembled, and sweat matted the top of his brow. He’d certainly seen something, but I was making things worse. I tried to remind myself to keep a cool head.

The fellow opened the door and nervously greeted us in.

“I didn’t think they were gonna send anyone. I kept calling—I—Please, sit down.” He motioned to a nearby bed. A prescription for something called Haloperidol sat on his kitchen counter.

“He started walking across the—the back of the house, and then—he came over to this window and—oh my god, oh my god. I can’t—no. No! I don’t want to—I don’t want you to think—I’m—crazy.” He turned to glare out the window at a passing teenager and her younger sister, walking down the road.

Over the entry to the door, there was a plaque commemorating his service in the Army. He tried to sneak a tiny bag of some kind of white powder off of the counter and into his pocket before sitting down with us.

“You—you—you need to turn off your cell phones. I—think—I think they’re watching me—”

I put my cell phone on the table, and gestured to Grace to do the same.

He looked up at the ceiling, and then through the windows. “I know what you’re thinking. Oh—look at this crazy fucking white trash piece of shit—”

“No one’s calling anyone crazy, Sir,” reassured Grace. “Can you tell me what made you call the police today?”

“It—it took you guys half an hour. Half an hour to get here. They should have told you, they should have told you!”

“Listen, buddy—” I reached my hand out to him, and tried to empty my mind of fear, concentrating as hard as I could. He started to tremble less intensely, looking in my eyes blankly and passively.

I wanted him to trust us. The problem was I didn’t feel like I could trust him, and I knew he wouldn’t trust us just out of his own accord. But I tried to—I tried to trust him. I tried to remind myself, you know, just because someone smokes meth, I guess, it doesn’t mean they automatically can’t be trusted. That they’re automatically crazy or something.

He stared into my eyes, and breathed deeply.

“I know you’re scared. But we’re here to help. You aren’t in trouble. You did the right thing calling us about this, OK?”

“I don’t know where to start with it.”

“What time was it that this happened?”

“Oh, oh, I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know. Maybe—maybe—maybe twelve? Twelve o’clock last night.”

“And what time did you call the police?”

“Well I—I thought I was—dreaming. But then I woke up and I—I realized it was real. So I called them. Six in the morning, I guess. And then I kept calling and calling and—”

“We’ve been getting a lot of similar reports, son, and, mind you, our department isn’t very big.”

“It didn’t sound like anyone was taking me seriously. I could hear them laughing in the background! I could hear them!”

“I’m really sorry—”

“Well, tell us what happened,” interjected Grace, “You said you thought you were dreaming, didn’t you?”

“I—I know it sounds crazy. You’re gonna—”

“Try me. I’ve heard a lot crazier,” she reassured him, shooting me a quick glance.

“I was—in my bed—trying to sleep, and I heard this noise outside, and so I shut my computer, and I go to see what it is. I see someone—I don’t know—they were—playing with my trash? Like going through it? So I went around, and I gets my shotgun.

“And I say, ‘Hell you think you’re doing out there?’ and he turns around and there’s—I mean—his eyes. They’re glowing. He looks at me and he tells me that—that—he’s from another world or something—he’s like an—alien anthropologist, and he’s trying to understand

humans by going through my trash, and that—oh man. Fuck!”

“He says that—he says that—there’s a prison. Full of other aliens that our government has been capturing and—and—torturing, I guess. Experimenting on. And he said—he said—oh my God. He told me so much. He just kept talking to me, I invited him in and—it all goes blank. It’s like he washed my memory.

“But when I woke up, someone had gone through all of my trash, and the cup of coffee I gave him was—was—still there—half full—I’ve—I’ve got it over here.”

He carefully donned rubber gloves and set it before us. “I think it probably has alien DNA. I don’t know if anyone should touch it—”

iii.

We couldn’t do a whole lot more than tell the fellow we’d look into it. The story was disturbing, sure, but who knew if anyone else was going to believe it?

“Come in, Ben, this is Phillip. Come in, Ben.”

“This is Ben, do you read me? Go ahead.”

“Loud and clear. Go ahead.”

“How was it? Go ahead.”

“Real good.”

“Oh yeah, yeah. Real good. Go ahead.”

“Tenth call about an angel today. I tell you, one kidnapper turns himself in, and suddenly every criminal in the city thinks they’re seeing angels. Go ahead.”

“Well, say, we’re right by Carl’s Jr. You gonna be at the station, say about half an hour, want us to get you anything? Go ahead.”

“Sure, guess it couldn’t hurt. Go ahead.”

“Alright, just regular cheeseburger and fries or what? Go ahead.”

“Heck, I’ll eat anything right about now. Go ahead and get whatever you want. Go ahead.”

“Roger that, we will go ahead. Go ahead.”

“Talk to y’all in about thirty minutes. Over.”

“Over and out.”

Grace rolled her eyes as we pulled into the parking lot of the Carl’s Jr. and got ourselves in line.

“So . . .” she nervously laughed “Do you, uh—think he really saw an angel?”

“Well. I don’t believe him. But. I don’t—doubt him. I think we need to investigate.”

“Well, I don’t know how much the chief is gonna like us—”

“Not with the chief, Grace. By ourselves. We got to—”

“Phillip, we’re moving.”

Clearing my throat, I pulled forward and rolled down my window. “Hello, thank you for choosing Carl’s Jr.,” said a raspy-voiced teenager. “What can we make for you today?”

“I’d like three classic third-pounders, fries and, uh, you want a milkshake?”

Grace looked up from her phone. “What—a—a milkshake? Oh. A milkshake. Yes.”

“Two vanilla milkshakes.”

“Not vanilla,” she smirked. “I hate vanilla.”

“Strawberry?”

“Mmmmm. Sounds good.”

“Alright, one vanilla, one strawberry.”

I rolled up the window before he could give me the total. Grace put down her phone, sliding it carefully into her pocket.

“As I was saying,” I continued, “This is serious. I think we need to—start our own investigation. I mean, think about it. This is the United States government we’re investigating. This could be serious.”

We pulled forward in line and then sat there for a moment. “You don’t look convinced.”

“Well I don’t know, Phillip. I mean, I believe you. I just don’t know about all this—angel stuff. It sounds crazy. You know. All of it. If we do stuff like this under the table, what are we gonna tell the chief?”

“Tell him—I don’t know. He won’t find out unless we have enough evidence, and then—I mean, the chief wants this town to be safe, just like you or I do. So crazy as it sounds, I think in the long run—if we’re onto something—he’d want us to investigate it rather than to just sweep it under the rug, right?”

“Sure, I just—”

“That’ll be \$21.42,” the drive-thru cashier said, looking faintly annoyed, as though I’d interrupted him.

“Thank you.” I handed him the money.

“Thank you,” he said, handing me back the change as he listened to another driver read their order. “Wait—sorry—I’m—thank you—I’m—” Trying to revert to what I guessed was a pretty practiced routine kept throwing him off, because whenever he did, he’d revert to whatever I was doing.

I accepted my change. The employee turned around, explaining something to a manager and ran off, handing the manager his headset. The manager peered out of the drive-thru window, and studied our uniforms carefully.

“Hello, Sir, you had the three third-pounders with cheese, regular fries and—thank you for choosing Carl’s Jr., I will be right with you. He was supposed to ask you what you wanted for your drinks?”

“Oh, shoot. I guess we didn’t say. Uhm. Coke is fine. Grace?”

“Yeah, sure, I’ll take some Coke. Guess three Cokes.”

“Three Cokes. Sorry about that. What can I get for you—? Alrighty—” he started punching in someone else’s order, and then turned to us. “You folks been—up to anything interesting today?” he asked, seeming vaguely paranoid. “That will be \$14.28, Sir. Thank you.”

“Nothing too interesting. How about yourself?”

The two of us glared at each other with intense curiosity. “You know, don’t you?” he asked.

“Know what?”

He nodded, and handed us our food, followed by our drinks. As we drove off, he held a finger up to his mouth to hush us.

“That was weird.” I turned onto the road.

“I know,” Grace raised her eyebrows. “Wouldn’t have thought they’d be so busy around four o’clock.”

“No, didn’t you hear what he said?”

“No, sorry, I was reading something. What did he say?”

“He—I don’t know. He seemed like he was—I don’t know, Grace. Like, he looked out at me and—he said ‘You know, don’t you?’ I mean, what the heck is up with that, huh? Just stares at me—and—I don’t know.”

“Pretty strange.”

“Maybe they’re working with them, you know? The government?”

“Carl’s Jr.?”

“Yeah!”

“I mean, if anyone was gonna be working for the government around here, it’d be the shitty Arby’s across the road that no one ever goes to.”

I took a moment to think about it. “Arby’s, huh?” Nothing was outside the realm of possibility at this point.

“Yeah, Phillip, Arby’s. They’ve been conspiring against my digestive system for years. Are you serious right now?”

“I’m just saying, we have to be open to possibilities.”

iv.

We took it upon ourselves to ask Ben for all the houses that had reported angel sightings, and spent the rest of the afternoon checking them out. Six painfully awkward visits later and Grace was losing her patience.

“Phillip, you’re going out of your damn mind.”

“This is the next one on the list, right?”

“Ugh. Yup. Looks like the right house. Do you really want to do this all night, Phillip? My feet hurt. April was down here earlier today already, and she said that it was just a regular break-in.”

“But that’s not what he said when he called in, is it?”

“No.”

A small doorbell sat on a weathered telephone pole archway in front of the entrance to the house. The lights were on. I couldn’t see if anybody was inside, so I rang the doorbell.

“Do you have a warrant?” a detuned voice spoke through an intercom.

“We’re here to follow up about a report you made earlier today, Sir,” Grace responded.

“Name and badge number,” demanded the speaker.

“What?” she asked.

“Name and badge number, and you will be on film.”

“I’m sorry but I—”

“I did not call for police assistance,” he responded through the intercom. “I know my rights as a sovereign citizen of this country. Provide me your name and badge number or I will refuse you entry with deadly force if necessary.”

Reluctantly, both of us read off our badge numbers. The fellow on the other side of the speaker searched for our identity information on his computer, until he verified that we were real officers. A smart phone in his hand, he walked towards us.

As he got closer, we recognized each other. It was the manager from the Carl’s Jr., a flashlight in his hand.

“You did know, didn’t you?” he laughed.

“Know about what?” I asked.

“Come with me.” He motioned for us to come in. “I’ll show you.”

Chapter 10:
The Visit

i.

I woke in the morning running through the plans I’d made to meet my new friend Meagan in real life. When she drives by, she’ll stop. Say something to her, even if only with my mind. Try to wave, so she knows she’s not crazy.

The event seemed to be woven with an intense significance, on a level deeper than I could comprehend, and so it seemed to replay in my mind. When I managed to drag myself out of bed, the thought loop had grown increasingly ominous and apocalyptic.

Standing in my room, I struggled to regain control of my breathing, and tried to push the terrible feeling out of my brain, and into my stomach and limbs. But still an intense, cold, burning sensation filled every breath I took.

My shivering hands struggled to stretch my torn denim jeans over my legs. My senses and my tethers to them teetered in and out of phase. I lost track of the button, the teeth of the zippers, my fingernails, the shirt that I planned to put on afterwards, the sheets that I had left scattered on the floor.

I was not ready to be a person, or to dress that person in clothes. I wanted to lie back down and collapse into a mass of unthinking cells on the mattress. But it was time for breakfast, and I did not want to eat cold eggs.

Frantically throwing the blankets onto the bed, I fumbled for a shirt Gerry had let me borrow from a laundry basket by the wall, and stretched it over my head and arms.

Now clothed, and with my ego at least partially intact, I narrowly prevented myself from running face first into the door, and walked into the hallway. A sharp ray of natural sunlight cast a deep yellow through the windows that covered my entire body.

Outside the front door, I could see it illuminating the still-lingering trail of dust left by a bright red SUV. The sight of the car in front of the house made my stomach lurch. I realized immediately that it was Saturday, which meant it was Gerry’s son and his family. I felt terribly unprepared to meet them.

ii.

In the front seat of the car, I saw Mick, a bald, authoritarian-looking man, who looked down at his phone in the front seat, his knee braced against the door. To the left, his wife Cassandra frowned slightly beneath a bug-like pair of sunglasses and a white hat, and mouthed something to one of their sons in the back seat.

Mick forced the door open and apathetically finished a text, while his wife opened the back seat to help their young daughter out of the car. She reluctantly closed her book—*Charlie Bones and the Time Twister*. Around the wife’s head, I could see a pale grey aura, tinged with what looked like rust along the edges.

Mick, meanwhile, had no aura. No color. His face was contorted in a firm and impassive shape when people weren’t looking, shifting into a smile whenever someone did.



When he caught sight of me, he lifted his head and sniffed the air like a lion. An icy burning sensation crept up my spinal cord. On edge, I walked into the kitchen, where Gerry had cooked up extra helpings of steak for his son and his kids.

“Mick’s coming today,” Gerry told me, not having noticed his car pull up. *He hopes that Mick had remembered to buy him something good for his heart, and that Mick’s disrespectful son Gerald Jr. hadn’t brought his stupid iPad.*

Gerald Jr., I could see from the kitchen, had indeed brought the iPad, and his eyes were glued to it as he exited the vehicle. Mick pulled two big handfuls of groceries from the back of the car, and stalked towards the house, his eyes sweeping across the family, the car, the house, his father, with a penetrating hostility.

I braced myself for his entry, *seeing his hissing thoughts flood the room.* He gritted his teeth and studied my eyes. *“This guy looks like he’s on coke or something,” he thinks, as he tries to comprehend what I’m doing here.*

Entering the house, and setting the groceries down on the kitchen table, Mick glared at me, saying with deep ambivalence, “Howdy, Dad! Who’s your friend?”

“This is John,” Gerry said, mixing around the eggs with a spatula. “He’s just been staying over for a couple nights.”

The wife, *whose name was Cassandra May Louis Parker,* shepherded in her children and glared at me with suspicion. *“Uh-oh. This guy looks like bad news,” she thinks, her mind studying me with a dark and piercing fear.*

Stepping closer, Mick recognized that I was wearing his dad’s clothes, which didn’t fit quite right. He extended a hand. I looked down at the strange, bulbous appendage, and then back up to his eyes, so that I could gaze into him.

I feel my consciousness press up against his, but can grasp nothing more than an ambient, spiteful humming, and an occasional loose thought. I backed away, shaking. *Since I hesitate to shake his hand, he believes I cannot be trusted.*

Cautiously, I grabbed his hand, mindful of the many layers of interpretation to which my handshake would be interpreted, and shook it slowly, making uninterrupted eye contact. *He evaluates my grip strength and the rough texture of my hands with disgust.*

To his side, Cassandra raised her eyebrows in silent condescension. *Poor people, drug users, hippies, criminals, all of them deserve whatever punishment they get in life. If ever I have suffered, she is sure I deserved it.*

She and Mick have money. They have it because they are good people. She imagines the devil is working in my life, and prays silently that I do not attack or corrupt her children.

“My name is John,” I said, shaking. “I—I—” I tried to think of a normal person, so that I could act like one, and again thought back to Janet. “How do you do, Mick?”

Startled since he hadn’t told me his name yet, Mick supposed his dad must have warned me he was coming over. “I’m alright, Johnny. I’m alright,” he said, showing me his teeth in an uncomfortable grin.

“That’s wonderful,” I said, before reaching out for Cassandra’s hand. She recoiled in disgust, but politely accepted, and shared a knowing look with her husband. “Hi there, uh, John. My name is . . .”

“Cassandra. Gerry has told me about you, so I know your name.”

I looked into her terrified, disgusted eyes and for a moment peer into her inner world. *Cassandra doesn't really care for Mick. She doesn't really care for men, actually, and she's hated herself for it all her life.*

She's gone to Bible studies, and youth groups, and women's retreats trying to cure herself of it. She has done everything she can to rid her brain of "sinful ideas" but, every so often, since she was a teenager, she's found herself fantasizing about women.

Back in high school, she cut herself for it, but since she'd gone to college and married Mick, she'd stopped. Still, it's hard to suppress it. Terrifically hard to rationalize her lack of attraction or feeling for her husband, or her love for her pastor's wife at their church, the way she laughs.

It fills her psyche with a longing tension. Beneath a hateful and upper-middle class exterior rests a raging, wounded subconscious. Neither Mick nor anyone else in her life knows the person that is underneath that exterior, and even she is only aware of that person as a lifelong struggle with hidden sin.

It only surfaces from time to time. Gavin's coming out to his father filled her with such rage, but only to conceal her deep-seated jealousy, and her fear that, somehow, Mick had the same genes as Gavin, and that they'd pass them on to their children.

Accordingly, she dresses her daughter in exceedingly effeminate clothes and reminds her constantly to mind her manners. She sends her boys to time-out for playing with their sister's toys, and mocks them whenever they display any trace of femininity. When explaining what Uncle Gavin had done to the family, she caricatured him as a dangerous monster.

Mick doesn't care what she does. He thinks church is stupid, and that the pastor is an annoying, pretentious little beta, who he'd like to see boiled alive in a baptismal font filled with his own excrement, while Mick fucks the pastor's wife, who he has always rated a solid 9, on top of the piano.

Mick sees women less as humans and more as symbols of power and dominance. He only goes along with his wife's constant desire to spend time with the pastor and his family, in fact, to see the pastor's wife for himself. Someday, if the opportunity presents itself, he hopes to fuck her. He has an intern at his office and has sex with her at least twice a week too.

He selected Cassandra for his wife because he wanted a blonde, and married her because she is compliant and fucks him whenever he wants. If Cassandra ever finds out, and decides to make a big deal about the affairs, he'll tell her he did it because she's gotten fat since the baby. He'd expected to use the excuse to divorce her after the second kid, but to no avail.

Mick likes working at the bank, because he makes a lot of money, and he can destroy people's lives if they cross him. The higher he climbs, the more enemies he can destroy, the more women he can fuck, and the more money he can make.

Once, he passed by a homeless person in San Antonio. Bored, Mick made him sing and dance for a fifty dollar bill. Another time, he found out that a driver who cut him off in traffic had an account with his bank, so he froze his credit cards.

He hopes his father will die soon, so he can sell the property but, in the meantime, he hopes to have him stuck in a nursing home. Mick likes two things: sex and money. He doesn't give a shit about anything else.

Awkwardly, I let go of Cassandra's hand, having held on to it for upwards of thirty seconds, if not longer. Everyone in the room stared at me, except for Gerry, who smirked as he

realizes I am reading everyone's minds. He hopes I can hypnotize the kid to get off that stupid little iPad, and maybe take an interest in the cows.

When Gerry looks at Cassandra, she reminds him of his Sunday school teacher: grim, serious, and prissy. She doesn't seem like the type of girl he'd hoped Mick would marry.

He isn't sure what happened with Mick. Mick always seemed a little rowdy when he was a young boy, like the kind of boy who'd want to grow up to be a cowboy. Instead, he'd gone off to college and become a banker.

It is difficult to talk to his son now. He hardly even listens to his dad speak. Gerry feels neglected by Mick, suspicious that he takes a cut from his Social Security check, and annoyed that Mick never brings him the food he asks for.

Mick watched my eyes darting around the room, thinking that I want to fuck his wife and steal from his dad. Almost all the possessions in the house are to be split between him and Dan. Getting Dan kicked off the will was hard enough. Mick knows there are some valuable antiques here, and doesn't want me to take them before he can.

Mick helped Gerry spread out the table and set it for the kids, while Cassandra helped in the kitchen. I gave her the creeps. Stuck by the counter, and unsure of what I could do to help, I stood still, practically.

I tried to avoid Mick's head. His thoughts disturbed me. His utter lack of emotion or redemptive qualities made me feel terribly afraid, for Gerry and everyone else around him.

Cassandra doesn't know. Mick is the only man she's ever been with, and she believes him to be a perfect husband. She hates herself for not being satisfied with him. She doesn't really enjoy any of the time they spend with each other.

She tries as hard as she can to be a good woman, but it's never enough. She tries to cook and clean and raise her kids right, but she believes deep in her heart that she is corrupted.

Our consciousnesses meet, and I can feel the sadness and anger pressing up against my own intrusive mind. I turned around, seemingly to look at the stove, but really to look at her.

She froze, dissociating momentarily from what she is doing. I study the contents of her mind, preparing to try in some way to help her resolve the anger she has driven against herself, to possibly let her come to peace with who she is.

But it was all so precarious. I remembered the police officer—trying to only turn a memory into a dream released a chemical cocktail which put him in a strange, psychedelic state. Who knew what it would mean for me to toy with so restless and complicated a system? And in front of her family? With all of these people watching, I felt certain that the wrong move could be disastrous. I withdraw.

Cassandra, feeling herself regain control over her body, cringes in discomfort. The momentary dissociation seems almost demonic. Perhaps her sinful mind cleared the way for whatever satanic power I have to take hold over her.

She set the spatula down and, panicking, leaned back against the counter, putting her hand over her forehead.

"Are you okay, baby?" Mick asked with forced sympathy.

"I—" she didn't want to say.

My terrifying, piercing grey eyes look like big flying saucers to her. She sees my eyes are dilated like some kind of drug addict—definitely mentally ill. Even if I'd cleaned up, she can tell I'm a bum.

Or more than a bum. A demon-possessed scoundrel taking advantage of an old man. Looking to rob him. Maybe kill him. And I'm looking at her with such interest, she worries I'll attack her,

in some way.

Mick can sense her fear, but is preoccupied with extending the table. He figures if I try something, he'll punch me in the face. He is, in silent agreement with Cassandra, already considering calling the police.

I reach out to her mind again, and see it flurrying in a state of anxiety, rushing back and forth in a mess of unconscious conflict. She feels our consciousnesses meet, and it creates even more terror in her heart. I latch on to the emotion, the anxiety, and feel an intuitive kind of empathy overtake me.

I mimic her, internally, and I can feel what she is going through. Slowly, I try to talk myself down and, in doing so, clear both of our minds now that they face cognate fears.

She shuts her eyes and focuses only on the sublime geometric patterns breathing in the backs of her eyelids. I softly direct any thoughts or thinking out of her brain, making it clear that both of us are only present in this exact moment.

Her anxiety begins to subside, although I do not let go, as I know that the specific method of coping I am trying to lead her through can be difficult to perfect.

*Feeling her relax somewhat, I plant a suggestion in her mind. **"Have compassion,"** I say, pulling on a Bible verse she only barely remembers with the same basic message. I imply, as I say that, a love for herself, and a love for others. A wash of peace comes over her. I withdraw and watched her calmly open her eyes. Paranoid, I turned away quickly, and she cleared her throat.*

"Where are you from, John?" she asked, taking a cue from the idea of compassion.

"I'm from North Dakota," I told her.

"And what do you do?"

Mick glared with hostility at the two of us, uncertain of why his wife was talking to me all of the sudden.

"I collect healing crystals."

Gerry looked up, offering a translation. "John's a traveling rock-hound, I guess you could say."

"So, I don't suppose you're Christian?" She gulped. *Her notion of compassion, by necessity, requires she ask.*

Gerry cut her off before I could reply. "He was sleeping outside in the thicket, and I heard the cows getting a little noisy, so I went out, and there he was. Nearly shot the poor fella's head clean off. Nice boy, though. Wouldn't even hurt a fly. Pretty smart too." *Gerry wants to tell them that I'm psychic, but wisely decides not to.*

"I don't really know, to answer your question," I said, looking back at Cassandra. She frowned, sighing, and tried to imagine how she could minister to me.

"How long have you been homeless?" she asked.

"Since July 2014, or so."

"That whole time, just selling crystals?" asked Mick, dubious.

He doesn't think I could have made it only selling crystals on the road, and tries to figure out what kind of drugs I sell, before he puts two and two together and figures I am probably there for the mushrooms. He'd taken them when he was a kid, but found them boring, although he made fifty bucks selling a few of them to some of his classmates at a party.

"No. Well, I give them to people. They pay me if they want to."

Mick raised his eyebrows at his wife, who seemed irritated with his tone. "Trying to be compassionate here, Mick!" *she thinks.*

“What’d you do before that?” Cassandra asks.

“I worked at an oil field. I was a geologist.”

Mick scoffed, cognizant of the pay I’d have to leave behind to come all the way here, and tried to challenge what he saw as an obvious lie. “Oh yeah? That’s a pretty nice job to give up for selling healing crystals.”

“I didn’t believe in it. Not when I got up close. I felt kind of disgusted with myself, you know?”

He doesn’t know what that feels like. He only understands winning or losing. All for him has come to be defined as progress between one of these two poles. “But I bet the money was pretty nice.”

“\$77,000 a year, plus benefits,” I told him.

“You worked up in that, you probably wouldn’t be out here, sleeping in the bushes out in the middle of nowhere.”

“I like this better.”

He rolled his eyes. *“Fucking hippies,” he sneers internally.*

iii.

As we ate breakfast, *Mick devised a plot to get me out of his dad’s house.* He casually suggested to his father that he put on a movie with the kids, and Cassandra agreed, out of obligation. Meanwhile, he would take me on a walk, show me around, and get to know me.

I spent all breakfast getting myself ready, eager for the chance to be alone with Mick. I was fully rested and, beyond that, I’d just eaten. *The anger I feel bubbling up from Mick is nearly overwhelming, making the walls melt and the dancing shadows on the floor take the form of knife fights and wrestling matches.*

He was a sadistic and almost unfeeling human being. I watched his eyes with disgust. *Mick is so certain he knows what I want, so certain that he can talk me into leaving.* I spent the time at breakfast, in between moments where I was expected to speak, mapping out his mind, finding his insecurities and weaknesses.

Gerry patted me on the back as we left the house, and I looked knowingly at him. But not even Gerry understood what I was truly capable of.

“Look,” Mick said once we were about a quarter mile from the house. “I see through your whole deal here. You and I both know you don’t know two shits about geology, and I’m sure whatever you’re on, you aren’t paying for it with the money from your healing crystals, hmm? I’m sure it’s expensive. You saw this big old field, with all these nice mushrooms, and you decided you could make a few bucks selling them off, am I right?”

“That’s not what happened. Not at all,” I said, pausing to stare him in the eyes. *My power welling up, I reach towards his consciousness.* He looked at me with confusion, and moderate annoyance.

“Come on, buddy. How much money will it take to get you out of here? \$500, \$1,000, \$2,000? What’ll it be?” *I press further and further against his skull with my consciousness, feeling my mind seep into his skull. But no matter how deep I press, I cannot enter.*

“I—I don’t want any money,” I said.

His face seemed to gain size, and loom over me. “Of course you want money!” he cackled. *The sky turns black, as his voice seems to come at me from all sides.*



The world in which I find myself has a bleak, glowing field, with simplified red images of the built structures around us. I jumped backwards, pulling myself away.

“Come on. \$5,000, \$10,000? Think of how much coke you could buy with that, hmm? You could probably get a motel room and a couple hookers. Maybe a vacation to the Bahamas.”

I feel myself becoming paralyzed, and shrink down. He towers over me, looking like a giant statue of a man, his eyes glowing red. I can't speak.

“Okay. \$20,000. How about that?”

I draw within myself, feeling myself drop level upon level of reality. Somehow, I'd entered his brain without realizing it, and now I am trapped, unable to speak.

Chapter 11: Locked Out

i.

I curl into a ball, growing with every instant smaller and smaller, first shrinking into the size of a small rat, then a beetle, then an ant, then a bacteria, until I am falling through layer upon layer of an atom's shell, in a raging torrent of light.

He kept trying to talk to me. My physical body, of which I was only able to become intermittently aware, stared on, my pupils the size of pins and my breathing almost stopped. *I try to pull back, to latch onto the idea of being a person, somewhere, who existed.*

I feel myself pull away from the subatomic hell in which I am falling, my astral form glowing and filling with energy. I rise from off of the ground and, in that strange, black-skied world in which I find myself, take hold of him by the shoulders.

I remember the terror that the manager had felt at being trapped inside of my head. Now I am in his shoes. Trapped in an alien world, a place only Mick had known.

Mick has a mind, but it is unlike any mind I have ever imagined. His consciousness, all the machinery of his brain, works toward one common goal, unmoved by emotion, or sympathy, or attachment. Unable to find its boundaries, I fall in, unaware.

Callaway, the man I'd met at the gas station, had wanted to be this sort of person but he couldn't. He had retained a sense of guilt, and it was onto that that I had been able to latch. But there is nothing in this world inside of Mick I can identify with.

*He freezes as he feels me heave forward and shove his psyche from his body. **“What the hell?”** he says. Our motionless bodies stood in the middle of the pasture like holograms and gradually fade from the scene.*

***“Who are you?”** demands his astral form, enraged yet terrified.*

“My name is John.”

I shut my eyes and breathe slowly, trying to understand the place in which I find myself. Before I can, Mick's astral body throws a punch at the side of my face, sending me careening for the ground.

*He kicks me, over and over, as I lay there twitching. **“I know about Carla,”** I say.*

*He freezes. **“Who the hell told you about that? What did you put in my drink? Is this— LSD? What is this?”***

“I'm inside of your head. I—I know everything about you.”

He starts shaking, and lifts me over his head, throwing me towards the old barn. Landing just beside the entrance, wincing with pain, I struggle to pick myself back up. The only way I can defeat him here is if I can somehow bend the contours of his mind. But it is all so foreign to me: a bleak and uncontrollable landscape.

*He again picks me up and throws me back through the doors, and retrieves a pitchfork leaning against the wall. **“Look, I don’t know who you think you’re fucking with, but you’ve got ten seconds to get out of here before I call the cops and get you thrown in jail for possession with intent.”***

I slowly stand up, feeling myself weak in the knees. He is feeding off my emotion. Feeding off my desire to help him, or to hurt him. To have anything to do with him. I need to establish a boundary between our minds.

I push outward, with all the force that I have in my body, beginning to open up a small field of normalcy amongst the blank white-and-red interior of the barn. My body turns back to normal. His pitchfork melts as he shoves it toward me.

Calming myself down, and feeling emboldened, I stretch out the extent of my mind inside his. I can feel him grow terrified, feeling invaded and deeply threatened. He backs away slowly from the growing boundary line.

***“Get out of my head! Go!”** he says, now picking up and throwing a shovel my direction. Again, it melts. The boundary line starts to press him into a corner, but I am near my mind’s limits.*

***“What do you want?”** he asks. I hadn’t considered the question. I don’t know.*

“Well. Uhm.”** As I begin, he bites his lip, expecting me to blackmail him with the information about the affair. **“Well, here’s how it all started.”** I sit down, and motion for him to do the same. **“I fell asleep in the bushes by your dad’s ranch. And when I started to dream, my consciousness left my body, and I flew around town for a little while.

“Eventually, I came back, and I saw a cow. The cow looked really neat, and so I touched it, and it ran to the pasture where all the mushrooms were growing. The mushrooms thought I was an evil spirit, but they eventually realized I was just a unique sort of human, since they recognized the ancestral presence of the ergot fungus, which people can use to make LSD. The mushrooms made me talk to your dad about coming out and spending more time with the cows.”

***“So what do you want?”** he demands, impatiently.*

“I want to see if you are taking good care of your dad.”

“Why? Are you after his money?”

“Is that all you think about?”** I ask. **“For the last time, I don’t want any money.”

“Look.”** He stands up. **“As far as I’m concerned, there’s two things that make a guy want to do something. Either he wants to fuck or he wants some fucking money.”

***“Don’t you ever get exhausted of thinking that way?”** I ask, trying to press outward and bring him into my mind, where I am sure I would have the upper hand. He can see the boundary line continuing to advance. Yet despite all evidence to the contrary, Mick remains certain that if he can give me enough money, I’ll cut the crap and leave him alone.*

***“I gave up on money,”** I say, trying to transmit my memories into his mind. He feels completely baffled.*

“God. You must be so miserable,”** he says, as the heat of the boundary line singes his feet, backing him further into the corner. **“You must just be some kind of psycho, who gets off going inside of people’s heads and torturing them like this.”

I feel his own resolve weaken and, with one intense push, I force myself outwards. In a brilliant explosion of color and light, I feel myself bursting out of his head, carrying his consciousness along with me.

He looks around him with dread, and screams as he enters my mind. Falling down an endless tunnel into the heart of my brain, he flails for the walls. Now in full control, I try to release memories, hints of past crimes, hints of the damage he's done to other people.

I try to force him to feel something. Anything. He only continues to shriek more and more desperate profanities, falling deeper and deeper, consumed with no greater thought than the idea that I have bested him.

It isn't working. Trying a new approach, I wrap my mind around his consciousness and drag him into a place I retrieve from his memories. His office.

He lifts his head slowly from an ornate desk made of shifting fractal shapes. Certain, suddenly, that it is a dream, he rubs his forehead in neurotic circles, until the color palette shifts in the room and the bookcase stops screaming.

*Surrounding him as an omniscient force in the dreamworld, I make his phone ring—although I call up the wrong “ring” and it instead sounds like a church bell. He picks it up, heart still pounding from the awful nightmare. **“Hello, this is Mickey Parker from Sacred Mercy Federal Credit Union. How can I help you?”***

***“Hey Mick. This is Miranda,”** replies a watery, falsetto voice.*

“Miranda? What are you—what are you calling me for?”

“Look, Gavin and I are heading to town. We just talked to Dad. He wants to make things right with Gavin. We're going to have a family meeting.”

*Mick freezes. This means that not only will Gavin be added to the will, but probably Miranda too. **“What do you mean, a ‘family meeting’? Gavin turned into a pervert, and you enabled him. I'm—”***

“Please, Mick. Don't make this difficult.”

“Don't make this difficult?! I—”** A knock comes at his door. **“Just a minute,”** he says, breathing heavily and switching his voice to a whisper. **“Listen Miranda, I don't know what the hell you're trying to—”

*The knock comes again, louder this time. **“Just a goddamn minute! I'm on the phone,”** he shouts. **“Miranda. I've been here, bending over backwards trying to take care of Dad, while you've been out there with your co—”***

***“Oh really, Mick? Really. You've been bending over backwards, huh? Then why did Dad tell me you keep forgetting to bring him the right food?”** she asks. **“I just talked to him. You know, you'll be lucky to stay on the will at this rate.”** Mick's heart begins pounding, and he hyperventilates, enraged.*

***“San Antonio Police! Open up,”** a voice behind the door says.*

“Goddammit. I need to go. Call me in fifteen minutes.”

The room seems to stretch as he approaches the door. He feels like he might be going crazy. A million thoughts race through his mind at once, so many that he can't keep track of them.

Trembling, he reaches for the doorknob, made of perfectly smooth marble, and turns it with an eerie creak, opening the door to see two police officers, along with a crowd of the workers at his office, intermixed with people he's tried to destroy. His intern stands in front, crying.

***“Mickey Byron Parker. You are being arrested for sexual harassment, securities fraud, embezzlement, and tax evasion. Your intern here told us everything.”** His eyes go*

wide, as the crowd of people before him boo, their faces warped, and the police read him his rights.

Two cold steel handcuffs lock around his arms, as they lead him outside. His wife and another mistress solemnly watch him march towards the police car.

Gasping, he wakes up, pulling himself out of bed in a motel room. It was only a dream. His heart still pounds. He still trembles, and feels a strange, empty feeling in his stomach.

I speak to him, closing in on him from all sides. **"You're dead, Mickey,"** I whisper. His eyes dart back and forth.

"Who are you?!" he demands.

"You know who I am," I say, his mind filling in the gaps. **"You're dead."**

"Hub—how?"

"Your wife found out what you'd done. She found out you were cheating on her with another woman. The two of them worked together."

"No—no—this can't be—"

"If you don't believe me, why don't you go take a look at yourself?"

Unsteady, he gets out of bed, looking in a shattered mirror to see no reflection staring back. A bloodstain spreads out over the mattress's blankets. He cautiously moves towards the bathroom, at which point a wretched and putrid stench overtakes his nostrils and makes him almost gag.

"Go in," I urge him. **"See it for yourself."**

His heart pounding, and his mind overcome with dread, he slowly opens up the door to the bathroom. Inside the tub, a corpse, riddled with stab wounds, a plastic bag over its head, reclined.

"I wouldn't look in the toilet. They cut off your—well. You can imagine."

He runs out of the bathroom, screaming, and heads for the door. **"You can't leave. You're a ghost now. And every day, you'll relive the way you died. It's 3 p.m. right now. You have two hours."**

"Let me out! Let me out!" he screams, pulling on the door.

"This is a dream!" he says. **"I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming."**

"Then what does that make me? You don't mean to say you feel guilty?"

He looks around, suddenly cognizant of the hallucinogenic nature of his surroundings. Everything melts. He stands alone in a pale, grassy field inside of my mind.

He remembers the dreams, and knows that I have him trapped. I approach him, cautiously, grimly aware that little has changed within him. He points at me.

"You—you're a monster!" he bellows, running towards me with a knife in his hand. Terrified, I release him. A great wind pushes him skyward and rips him into the night sky. He catapults out of my head and into his own, in a flurry of red shapes.

Unwittingly, I find myself pulled along. I struggle against his gravity and try to reach back for my own head. The two of us are strung out between one another's eyes like tangled yarn, both of us bordering on convulsion as we fight for control over our bodies.

I catch the rim of my skull to pry myself back into my head, gripping the edges of my eye socket and pulling with all my might back into myself. Something gives way behind me—what feels like a knot suddenly coming untied—and I shoot through a tunnel of blinding fractal light until I reach the center of my consciousness, where I gradually gain control of my body.

All over my skin, what felt like infinitesimal shards of burning hot glass shredded through my arms and legs and chest in searing waves of pain. I forced my way against the paralysis, the sounds of screaming filling my senses on all levels.

Overwhelmed, I drift above my body—completely dissociated—and the pain subsides. I

watch my physical form convulse underneath my glowing astral form. I am a galaxy of cosmic light—the world around me teeters between hideous and beautiful, painful and ecstatic—waves of color and sound shimmer in the air around me.

I observe Mick slowly come to his senses. Falling to his knees, he grits his teeth and clenches his fists. His stomach sinks with god-awful nausea. His breathing is labored. His heart pounds. Behind his bloodshot eyes, an animalistic and primal rage looms.

“Honey?” called Cassandra from the house, seeing that the two of us both had suddenly collapsed. *She is nervous but, on another level, is almost glad to think of Mick suffering.*

Eager to awaken myself to try to cover up what has happened, I drift downwards to my body, settling on my skull and pressing inwards. I begin to draw into myself, before something pushes me out. I try again. This time, an even greater resistance.

Pushing up on its arms, my body began to stand, its knees shaking. *I rise up in my astral form, looking down on the scenario, and trying to understand what has happened.*

A thin, barely perceptible red line swings between Mick’s head and my own. I peer through Mick’s mind—it is overwhelmed with a wordless rage, a viciousness even more savage than before. My own mind, on the other hand, coos with inchoate words, pleasantries: “Hmm—babadada—madabada—Good neighbors—say, isn’t that wonderful—ha! Imagine that!—No—weaker—”

Coming to its feet, my body stared down at Mick. “Me. Me. That is me.” It helped Mick up. He breathed heavily, thirsty for blood. Their eyes locked—*Mick recognizes what it sees behind them. A piece of himself, inside of another body.*

“Honey, are you OK?” Cassandra called out.

Mick roared, flipping her off. “Go to hell!” My own body stared solemnly at Mick as he did so. Cassandra had never seen this part of her husband. It terrified her.

“Did you hurt yourself?”

Mick picked up a stone from the ground and threw it at her. She squealed, scurrying out of the way before it could hit her. Instead, it bounced through the door and hit the leg of the table.

One of the children inside screamed. “Mick! What the hell are you doing?” she yelled, red in the face. Mick charged towards her. Gerry, uncertainly, peeked out the window, as Cassandra dove inside.

“Call the police! Something’s wrong with him,” she said. *I watch helplessly as my own body grabbed Mick by the arm. Mick glared at himself in my body, before leaning back to punch my body in the face. Foreseeing his move, my body, controlled by some other part of Mick’s mind now detached from his brain, stepped back and kicked Mick in the shin, catching him off balance.*

“Stay away from her!” said my body. Panting, Mick stared up at my body’s eyes with hatred. *I float in between them. No discernable thoughts can be found coming through Mick’s head. On the deepest level, it is only a thirst for blood, for violence, for power.*

Within my own body, there now lives something Mick had only once pretended to be, an amalgamation of acceptable behaviors and deceptions now blessed with a physical shell. Inside of my brain, the fragment of Mick’s consciousness has found ample ground in which it can live. The two are still connected by that tiny red line, sharing memories but now with entirely separate identities.

They hate each other. A suddenly animate persona, staring at a wild, unrestrained subconscious. The persona thinks Mick is a monster. Mick thinks the persona is pathetic, weak. From the ground, Mick shot up, diving for the persona in my body, which dodged out of the

way and bolted for the house.

Mick reached into his back pocket for a knife, and followed. As the door locked behind the persona, Mick pounded against the door with his knife. “Let me in, you stupid bitch!” he shouted, foaming at the mouth. “Let me in!”

Inside the house, Cassandra’s sense of compassion gave way to panic. *Her whole world begins to crumble, her sense of security and trust in her own senses.* Mick’s persona looked at her through my eyes with deep concern—*I seem more friendly than I’d let on, she thinks, and maybe I had seen something in Mick.*

But she bites back against this thought. “He’s from the Devil!” she thinks. “That’s who sent him! Lucifer!” Looking close, she sees the demons in my eyes.

My body, Mick’s persona thinks, is younger and healthier than he expected. He thinks he perceives lust in Cassandra’s eyes, but despite longing for her, knows he cannot touch her. He helped the children take cover in the room. “What’s happening to Daddy?” asked Peter.

“I am—not sure. Maybe your daddy—bumped his head,” she said to her children. “Grandpa’s trying to talk to, to talk to them.” *Her heart pounds as she studies my possessed body up and down, catching sight with wariness of its longing and trembling dark eyes, radiating demonic energy.*

The full range of power now available to the persona comes rushing forward in a flood of images and uncontrollable thoughts, quickly overwhelming the persona’s cognitive ability. Every flailing grasp the persona tries to make to gain control over the racing energy only worsens the situation.

The thoughts of others rush into his mind in their raw form—not as coherent sentences but as muffled words, impressions, and images—understanding the feelings of others, empathy, cannot be pretended into existence—it is a skill that needs to be developed.

From the outside looking in, I can see that, without an awareness of feeling, an ability to understand others, the power, could rip a mind in two. The persona curls into the fetal position as the strength of the power began to take hold.

Shutting its eyes, it sees swirls of colors and fractals that seem unequivocally horrifying, the same images which had, in my memory, brought me a sense of wonder and peace. I am comfortable with mystery, comfortable with myself, wanting to bring peace to others—that is the essence of who I am.

He is a new soul in a new body, wanting to exist—to escape his original self. And so the same forces that had helped hold me together began to, violently and inexorably, tear him apart.

In the house, Gerry found his shotgun and grabbed a fistful of bird shot shells. His son didn’t seem to be showing symptoms of a stroke, but Gerry figured he needed some talking down. He didn’t want to call the police.

But, of course, he also doesn’t want to hurt his son. He wants to calm him down, so he can get him an ambulance. Gerry gives me the benefit of the doubt in some way. But he also fears that I did something terrible to Mick and feels ashamed about not having been forthright with himself.

Cognizance of his son’s cruel nature has been normalized to the extent that it blends in with the rest of the unconscious milieu. His wife, he thinks, would have known how to handle this. Whenever Mick used to get into trouble as a kid, she’d always sit him down and give him a talking-to.

Gerry thought for a long time that something might have been wrong with Mick. But his wife never thought he was quite right in thinking that. Accidentally, Gerry imagined, I’d uncovered

the truth—vindicating him in a sense—but also unleashing a monster which for 38 years had rested dormant inside of his son.

ii.

I float downwards, closer and closer to Mick. I have no notion of how to handle him—the fullest extent of my ability has only made matters worse, separating him from even the illusion of a conscience. He kicked at the door. Gerry urged the children, along with Cassandra and my body, to take shelter in one of the rooms while he walked out cautiously with his gun in ready position.

“Friend of the Old One. We perceive you are in a great amount of distress,” *I hear the voice of the Mushrooms call out to me.*

Relieved, I tell them, “The man pounding on the door with the knife has locked me from my body! He wants to kill the old man, and slaughter all the kind buffalo. You must help me to stop him.”

“The bald monkey with the knife once communed with us, the Lords of the Field, and we found him to be arrogant and dull,” *the Mushrooms say. “The Kind Buffalo do not like him, either, nor his partner, nor his spawn. We shall teach him.”*

Moved into action, the Mushrooms begin to glow, sending shimmers of light dancing around the field in a brilliant aurora. All at once, the cows lifted their heads from the grass and moved, slowly, towards the porch, mooing ferociously.

Mick backed up against the door, his eyes darting back and forth. Enraged, he lashed out with the knife, stabbing one of the cows in the eye. The cow screamed in pain, and the Mushrooms become enraged, darkening the skies and sending bright purple lighting shooting across the pasture.

Mick yanked the knife out, and slashed another cow across the face. The herd circled away, forming a line and running around the house, kicking up a cloud of dust. The injured cows joined them.

Mick no longer needs to be taught. He needs to be punished. It is not ordinary for the Mushrooms to punish a human, to interfere in their affairs. It is punishment enough, they suppose, to not be able to commune with them, and when a human angers them, they will at times refuse to protect them from the Beyond and other interdimensional enemies.

But they will go to great lengths to protect their flocks. Such senseless violence and anger requires deep retribution, especially when it comes from one who had, in the past, communed with the Mushrooms and let their lessons lie fallow. Feverishly, I hear the Mushrooms begin to chant, reaching into the deepest depths of their ancient magic, calling up a long-forgotten rite of the first Bald Monkeys to commune with the Mushrooms in order to conjure an accursed fire.

A rift appears in the sky—tiny blue flames peer out of it. The sky above, to those not privy to the ways of the Mushrooms, only began to grow slightly more cloudy. I feel my own form, as a consciousness free of a body, flicker like a candle. I struggle to take cover.

Mick feels his own mind begin to be sucked into the vortex, hypnotized by the swirling colors of the circular stampede. Mick stepped out into the field and roared. The Mushrooms fire at him with their bright purple lightning, which amplifies his senses, sending shoots of blinding light and crippling pain every few seconds, and making his anger grow.

Just then, Meagan pulled up in front of the house and parked her car at the foot of the driveway. She watched the strange parade of cows, and the man holding a knife in front of the house, screaming at them.

The fact that I'm nowhere to be found leads her to conclude she must be going insane, and is having an absurdly life-like hallucination. The dream last night, and the horrific feeling of drowning that she had felt when she woke up, and now this, whatever it is, all leads her to that dismal conclusion.

"I'm losing grip," she thinks to herself. "Goddammit. What did I do? Was it all the weed? Was it the mushrooms? The acid?"

Faced with the looming death of her grandmother, many of her high school friends overdosing on heroin, and the breakdown of her family, she'd searched the ends of the earth looking to understand what would happen when she died. It had turned her, for a while, into a bit of a psychonaut, before she'd concluded, last year, that it was not for her.

Now, she is convinced that everything from all those years has finally led to her complete and total insanity. I watch with sorrow as a tear rolls down her cheek, and she carefully takes the tourmaline crystal down from the rear view mirror.

To be continued in Cenacle | 115 | April 2021



Tom Sheehan


Downwind in December

I tuck you in, wooled,
 last stray of sardines
 into Norwegian tinning,
 housed and harbored
 for one more night,
 your eyelashes never
 longer than this hour,
 or cheeks so berried.

Single corner streetlight,
 less dazzle than gleam,
 warm as a cup of honey,
 pales ingots on your face
 and struggles for corners.
 It falls short of hockey
 gloves at more drying out,
 mitts dead tired of winter
 and the long, still nights
 loosing clutter of high days,
 sounding their hard language
 where daily debris comes due.

I marvel at these memories
 shared with sovereign night;
 eighty years ago, squinting
 at my father's squinting at me,
 found soft moon of his face
 leaping on woolen landscape;
 his breath heavy, warm, ripe,
 crock full of home-made beer,
 his hands clumsy at adjusting
 the thinnest of my shrouds.

I often thought he let me know,
 by such ruse, he attended darkness.
 I should tug at you but I won't.
 I'll accept the moon and silence,
 your lying like a submarine,
 bottomed, mere dreams inside.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Secret Joy Amongst These Times: The History of Scriptor Press, 1995 to the Present

*“Think for yourself
& question authority.”*
—Dr. Timothy Leary

Chapter Eighteen
continued from
The Cenacle | 109 | October 2019

Read the full History at: http://scriptorpress.com/history_of_scriptor_press.pdf

Funny sorta parallel: back in 2011, I had planned to publish Chapter Sixteen of this *History*, covering 2009, in the December issue of *The Cenacle*, #80. There was no December issue in 2011. Last year, though there was a December 2019 issue, my plan to complete this current chapter did not occur. Tis a year later, no New Britain, Connecticut old-school peramble happening during the current pandemic, but still going to finally have a go at finishing this chapter I’ve been at for at least 5 years.

Why so long to finish it? Several reasons but the only one that matters is that my dear friend Jim Burke III suddenly died December 1, 2011. That’s it, pretty much. Nearly nine years later, & writing about this remaining stretch of the year, from October on, is a fucking hard thing to do.

But the thing to do now. So here goes a full-on try at finishing.

By the afternoon of October 29, 2011, Kassi & I had finished making & printing *Cenacle 79*. Thrilled, happy it would be ready in time for the night’s Jellicle Guild meeting. I wrote in my Thoughts Pad notebook:

*C79 is done, JG approaches—
new job too—
It’s a good moment to end this volume, in the mix, making the long loved good things happen
anew—*

These good feelings felt earned. I was recently employed again, doing the technical writing which is my profession, on a contract, like often is true with this kind of work. Done the needed paperwork, took the piss cup drug test, waited the secure laptop & all the needed passwords, & required permissions. Had a good colleague with whom I was doing the work collaboratively & well.

I was edging into finding ways to support the newly arisen Occupy movement, begun on September 17 in Zucotti Park in lower Manhattan, come soon thereafter to towns & cities across the US, including to Dewey Square in Boston on September 30. The country’s financial meltdown in 2007, with millions losing homes & jobs by it (I lost two jobs myself), & the federal government’s preference in 2008 to save big banks & companies, had unloosed waves of anger & protests & Occupy-like events all year.

I devoted the *News Hour* of SpiritPlants Radio to Occupy news for many months, especially content from *Democracy Now!* with Amy Goodman. I made my way down to Dewey Square to witness & support OB's happenings. I devoted pages in *Cenacle 79* to what I experienced. More on this below.

I'd worked on *Cenacle 79* itself for months leading up to October 29. I was proud of the issue I had made with Kassi & a near-dozen contributors. Eager to share it with those contributors & friends coming to our apartment in Arlington, Massachusetts that night. Before chronicling that difficult night & the even worse to follow, I want to give some good attention to this issue.

A week before the 10/29/2011 JG meeting, Kassi traveling down to North Carolina to visit a school friend, I had a weekend to myself. That morning I DJ'd my "Within's Within" radio show, live as most Saturdays. Featured albums by The Waterboys & Country Joe & the Fish, great bands. Mixed into show audio from Occupy Boston & Occupy San Francisco.

Frustrated by ongoing problems streaming SPR, I switched to Museter.com in Vermont (still with them, 9 years later). Problem solved. My show went on, & I set the rest of the schedule to going without worry.

My path then by bus & train to Dewey Square in Boston, near the South Station bus & train terminal. Near the Financial District's great edifices too.

I took my Saturday elixir & my pens & notebooks, & Polly iPod, & Gumbee my little phone (for pictures). Walking stretches where no other transit. In Harvard Square, a homeless kid noticed my black John Lennon shirt emblazoned "Imagine," & gave me a coin for luck.

From my scribblings along the way emerged the *C79's From Soulard's Notebooks* piece, my fifth annual letter to President Barack Obama. The heart of my letter to him in the form of a challenge:

If you indeed have renewed stomach for the fight ahead, knowing now better than you did in 2008, your task hereon is to wrack in word & deed against those who would deny some their right to occupy. Your early missteps, your slow realization of the scale & scope & seriousness of those who oppose you, might be forgotten by at least some who come to feel that you are maturing & seeing what the rest of us see: that these entrenched bastards will simply wait you out unless you ally yourself, like King & Kennedy before you, with as many millions of every kind & place as you can. You did this in 2008. It's why you are in the White House.

Waiting in Harvard Square for trains to resume running, I wrote at my favorite table at my beloved Au Bon Pain cafe courtyard:

*Someone gave me a coin—
we occupy
buses broke down
same music, same move of hips
we occupy
same hard questions
we occupy
same night theaters
we occupy—*

Finally made it to Dewey Square & wrote about it after:



Wow—groovy—wow—walked through campsites to an open area for general assembly where a sort of resolution-amendment-commentary-block thing was going on—then into

the library where donated 12 Samplers, that was cool, discussed “Occupy” w/this woman Emily while cameras rolled—Johnny & Alvaro—we talked a long time—they were up from Occupy Wall Street—sounds more organized there—

Eventually train back to Cambridge, to Harvard Square, & a bus partway back to Arlington. Too high & excited to return home, KD off traveling, I instead got off bus at Gourmet Market, beloved all-night market I would often write at. Rendered my letter to President Obama from my traveling notes. Bout 3 to 4 a.m. for this work. Concluded it thus:

I cannot but hope that you will try with all of your might, act like people not elections matter, & still realize, this far along, the potential we all felt you possessed three years ago. We can & will Occupy despite the bastards in D.C. & elsewhere. We would much rather you yourself found a collaborative place in our ranks. The time is now, my friend. There’s so much work to do.



& decorated it in C79 with pictures from Dewey Square.

Occupy Boston was evicted on December 10. Occupy Wall Street on November 15. Other Occupy locations were around somewhat longer. As a movement, Occupy was both energized & handicapped by its fully horizontal structure. No leaders, every voice equal. No explicit set of principles or demands. No answers to, “Who are you?” & “What do you stand for?” What Occupy did well was effectively & very publicly critique the great economic disparity existent in the US & around the world. One percent of the population owning 99% of the wealth. *Now everybody knows this.*

By welcoming all to its encampments, feeding them, housing them, offering them support & resources, all for free, Occupy pointed toward an entirely better way for humans to dwell among each other, perceive & treat each other. *Occupy together. Live together. Love one, love all.*

But Occupy was not built to survive in its original form. Eschewing formal structure, willingness to affiliate itself, to plan, to compromise sometimes, Occupy was meant to *affect* what would come from it. Those who experienced Occupy, or even just witnessed it on TV, were changed. Many for the better.

It wasn’t enough to elect Barack Obama as the first African American US president. This was a huge boost to a country damned near exhausted by 2008 from years of wars & financial collapse. But it wasn’t enough. We in the progressive movement had to push the entrenched establishment *harder*. So, in 2011, we Occupied.

Occupy was crushed, for the most part, in a few months, yet its particles changed the human social bloodstream ever after.

Cenacle 79 contained a lot of great poetry. A desire to travel loose among them, & see what flows between.

Ric Amante’s “Benediction” begins this praising music:

*May your path become more vibrant,
and the prayers to enhance
your precision and grace
take hold with the morning light.
May your service refine and multiply,
and the smallest act in the hardest hour
brim with gratitude and peace.*

Round a curve & Judih Haggai's fine, sometimes
quietly bemused poetry comes into view:

*optimism morn
with one sip, i shall prevail
fly begone*

Sometimes a bit melancholy:

*circles become spirals
there are no straight lines
i'm getting older*

Sometimes as still as words can be:

*stop and listen
between songs in my head
quiet hush of daylight*

Now maybe up a hill with Martina Newberry, a gorgeous view of the night, spasming with
wonder:

*All of this has been asked
and answered before. We will be
christened and we will have to reply.
Our hearts will be kearned across time*

*and our reasons will be pin holes
in the night sky—distant, brilliant—
like stars.*

Come back home to its light & heavy memories, one sung by Tom Sheehan:

*When a surgeon sawed my father's leg off,
he handed it to my nurse wife;
a hard touch repeating
when she nestles me.*

*She put his leg into a bag
in a hospital basket. It fell with a thud.
Now and then, I know, she collects that
sound again when a door closes in the night.*



Charlie Beyer's harrowing & hilarious "A Travel to Belize" journal continues in this issue. Charlie & his girlfriend Kim & their various small animals are travelling by truck, with a hovercraft on a trailer hauled along behind them, down through the real & imagined wilds of Mexico. Their terrors are constant & innumerable. Encounters with cops & others with big guns. Insane drivers & traffic. Bad roads even worse at night. A sense of constant alienation from everything in their passing environment. The following passage sums for the whole:

Finally, a gas station. A Mexican state-owned Permex. Light. Flat. Sanctuary. I pull in and around to the back. Without the roar of the road, it is plainly obvious iron is dragging on the road. In the back, where the gas station is still under construction, I stop. Get out and look at what's going on back there. The tire on one side is gone. We have been driving on the rim for the last ten miles. The rim is mashed into an octagonal shape, not a trace of rubber anywhere. The weight and loss of tire elevation has dropped the front of the trailer to the ground. It is worn away in a wedge shape, along with the bottom three inches of trailer jack. A spare tire used to be bolted under the trailer, but it too is gone. Ripped away from the frame by the great road dragging. Only its holding bolt remains. To the casual observer, the trailer is destroyed.

This piece is fever dream obsessed & a compulsive reading experience.

The Burning Man Book content featured this issue is Ralph Waldo Emerson's classic 1842 essay, "The Transcendentalist." The opening of this piece deftly sums its all, & reminds me of my dear friend Jim Burke III's oft-spake comment that "all is not as it seems." Emerson's text reads:

The first thing we have to say respecting what are called new views here in New England, at the present time, is, that they are not new, but the very oldest of thoughts cast into the mold of these new times. The light is always identical in its composition, but it falls on a great variety of objects, and by so falling is first revealed to us, not in its own form, for it is formless, but in theirs; in like manner, thought only appears in the objects it classifies. What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us, is Idealism; Idealism as it appears in 1842. As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final, and say, the senses give us representations of things, but what are the things themselves, they cannot tell. The materialist insists on facts, on history, on the force of circumstances, and the animal wants of man; the idealist on the power of Thought and of Will, on inspiration, on miracle, on individual culture. These two modes of thinking are both natural, but the idealist contends that his way of thinking is in higher nature. He concedes all that the other affirms, admits the impressions of sense, admits their coherency, their use and beauty, and then asks the materialist for his grounds of assurance that things are as his senses represent them. But I, he says, affirm facts not affected by the illusions of sense, facts which are of the same nature as the faculty which reports them, and not liable to doubt; facts which in their first appearance to us assume a native superiority to material facts, degrading these into a language by which the first are to be spoken; facts which it only needs a retirement from the senses to discern. Every materialist will be an idealist; but an idealist can never go backward to be a materialist. The idealist, in speaking of events, sees them as spirits. He does not deny the sensuous fact: by no means; but he will not see that alone. He does not deny the presence of this table, this chair, and the walls of this room, but he looks at these things as the reverse side of the tapestry, as the other end, each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him. This manner of looking at things, transfers

every object in nature from an independent and anomalous position without there, into the consciousness. Even the materialist Condillac, perhaps the most logical expounder of materialism, was constrained to say, "Though we should soar into the heavens, though we should sink into the abyss, we never go out of ourselves; it is always our own thought that we perceive." What more could an idealist say?

Over a century later in composition, 2009-2010 to be precise, there is an excerpt in this issue from Mark Christensen's book *Acid Christ: Ken Kesey, LSD, & the Politics of Ecstasy*. There are strange echoes of Emerson's broadminded fanaticism in these lines:

Long before being resurrected as a progressive savior from a metaphysical time gone by, Kesey had, like Ernest Hemingway before him, promoted himself from literature to fame. Hemingway had hot-rod'd nihilism, understatement, "life style," and celebrity to achieve, with his safari suit iconography, brand name recognition. By the 1950s, Hemingway was as recognizable as a stop sign. Writer promoted to product. But unlike that legendary literary lion, Kesey saw a much larger life than Letters. For like his sometime mentor Tim Leary, Kesey understood what America wanted in 1965 was a magic sacrament to enfranchise a new religion—acid had told him so, and all you had to do was take one look around the psychedelic Neverland that was Kesey's Stanford digs at Perry Lane to see that young America was ready for a new divinity. A religion not of God, but of the self.

My "Notes from New England" piece this time is called "There Lingers My Soul: Love for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts," detailing a pair of trips I took to my favorite museum just before returning to work in early October, & the half-dozen or so poems I wrote there, inspired by paintings by Renoir, Monet, Degas, & others. My favorite of the bunch was inspired by Monet's "Grainstack (Sunset)," 1891, oil on canvas:

*Nomads live behind those wheat stacks,
the kind that dance at dusk, who kidnap
little scrawny gypsy girls & raise them up
for sleek dancing wives. With their wives
& pipes & strings, their tents & hand-made
rock knives, they live behind those wheat stacks
the weeks or months before snow fall,
sing hungry songs of jiving asses & dangling stars,
pluck toe-less sprites from deep cattle dung
to squeeze & fire their dreaming brew,
rest lidless atop those wheat stacks & laugh
at the cosmos' descent in sparkles & stones,
disappear with or before the snows, leaving
only the tokens of the scarves of the gypsy
girls mature enough by new year to wed & bed.*

I was away from Boston & the MFA for 7 years while out west in Seattle & Portland, & one perpetual treat of being back is being just a transit (or walk, or bike's ride) from this beautiful place I have known so many years.

A longer piece of mine are the 15 new poems from *Many Musics, Seventh Series*. These poems continue along with developing dream materials, as well as digging into work by long-time favorite

poets like Rilke, Rumi, Ginsberg, Eliot. I still like these poems, feel in them a renewal & pushing energy. There are no solid rules or real guide-posts in pursuing one's Art. No guarantees on the one hand, but no true impediments on the other. It's a matter of working it, & working it, & working it, till a spark, two sparks, a flame, & go with it long as it bides. When it smokes out, time to catch a new spark, figure up a new way how.

The last 3 of the 15 poems go a little bit further. They form a kind of trilogy that tells the story of a place called "Iconic Square." There is a fountain at Iconic Square, whose waters the narrator of the three poems learns is dosed, "lightly, like brushing the drums of many minds, not pounding them awake." We learn of his best friend in dreams & the strange cassette-letters the friend sends him, & of a girl he meets one day at the Square, & of the romance they share.

The poems weave in & amongst each other, each complete yet amplified by the others.

There are lines from each that I still linger with & like. From the first of the three, "Song of Ragged Claws," these surreal lines:

*You'd given me a device in that first dream,
it would attach to your strange cassettes so
I could play & listen. Then began the new songs.
Imagine wordless crooning begins, low as ground,
one quiet thing among many, but rises, yes,
at some point rises & is now for attention,
still wordless, but yes, you were recalling
the dream to me, the one of desolation, yes,
& now there were words I remembered,*

"Ragged claws, ragged claws, a mind sliced
away & revealed, ragged claws, ragged claws,
those walls aren't high enough to protect
the world from me, my music is bark
& root, I'll travel by the soil, sup on the starlight.
Ragged claws, a mind sliced & revealed."

From "That Sensual Music," the blindly romantic closing stanza:

*There is no higher & there is no ground,
drink the fountain spray before we kiss.
Across the abyss you can see what I've seen
all along, the nothing of cum sprayed
in your friends' faces. Drink the spray,
& you are mine once more. Now, eventually,
you see me as I was that day, & always
been, your eyes closing, you see me
underneath, now smiling, your lips
moist with spray, your ruining kiss,
yes, receiving back & back into you,
back & back, no higher, no ground,
kiss, across the abyss & I am yours once more.*

And from "Iconic Square," these lines my try at rendering a first acid trip into poetic narrative:

*When had I stopped looking up? What day,
which hour? Whose word had made me
look down & never quite so up again, was
it hers, yours, my cum still on your lips,
saying you loved me & goodbye, still nude
with me on the floor, still taut for fucking?
“I’m not fucking her, you fucking dreamed her!”*

*Was it him, you, that letter you wrote far
from me, coward, about your disease &
your decision? Your cassette labeled
Last Songs that I listened to the night
you passed from me & the last of our hungry
hours arguing if God’s best final proof
is music, oak trees, or fine young ass?*

*There were other reasons & many excuses
& every last one fell unnoticed from me
as I watched the sky into its inexplicable
dusk, into its crying passion told each night as
stars, I passed through seeing up & was up,
became up, finally up, swinging high, oh so
high from the strands above the stars
that dangle down so low———*

*Dirty, broken, remade, smiling, I swung
until the dawn, finding myself where
I’d ended & begun in a new way, unexpected,
fine, & I knew enough to trace a path
back to that fountain, those few splashes
of sweet drink, & I returned to marvel.*

These poems pushed me wider, deeper in my vista, urged me tell an even bigger story. One that gathered up my various kinds of writing projects into one great myth. I was still pushing toward this in 2011, but it was coming.

My *Labyrinthine* takes up nearly a third of this issue, 43 of its 147 pages, & I was mulling how to review it here meaningfully, while not at chapter-length. In reviewing its pages, I was reminded of an old concept of mine for trying to account for & organize my aesthetic & philosophical obsessions.

An acronym for this: “PENMAD”:

- *Psychodelia*: mindworlds within worlds
- *Eros*: sex, complex, so *complex*, want
- *Nature*: the great green!
- *Magick*: occurrence beyond ordinary explain
- *Art*: countless hungers to make
- *Dreams*: worlds within mindworlds

Using these as guide for examples, this review bears more chance of a roof, walls, floor, stars above, Great Tree below.

Bowie the spy with one green eye & one mushroom eye, sits in a chicken shack at the edge of

a small desert town in New Mexico:

Thing is, it is a fucking chicken shack. Is, isn't. Both, each, yes, no. The world is many things simultaneously. Many worlds. That's the trick to things. One stuff, many stuffs. One kind, many kinds. One motive, many motives.

Bowie loves his old partner, Preacher. Several women: Gretta, Christa, an unnamed fellow spy. He travels in love & wonder & mystery, & tries to do good by the world from a deeply sad heart. The shrooms seem kind of allies to him in all this. Powerful, little understood by human ways of assessment. Yet they like him. That's hopeful.

Bobbie is a teenage girl who has gone with her friend Lizzie into the Noah Hotel, NoTell for short, to find their friend Jasmine. They all become separated, & Bobbie ends up nude in a bed with a man. By her slow waking, she confuses this man, a cop come to rescue her, with another man she saw once, never spoke to, long ago:

The sound of . . . ocean? Wait a minute. Listen! Listen . . . that grinding. A music of power. Oh listen. Here is a place to bring all grievings.

Bobbie listens. She finds she's been listening for a long time. There was a time, previous to this, a long ago, when she heard the pink noise—

The . . . pink noise? She keeps listening, tunes down into the sea, there is something in this. Old grievings. Grievings impossibly old.

That moment on the beach. Terrifying, breathless, a possession in a glance? How possible? And where is this? Too much, too many things, she listens.

He saw & there was a motion to him that was knowing, oh she did & didn't know how to bear it—

I'm reminded of Stanley Kubrick's 1999 erotic masterpiece film *Eyes Wide Shut*: of Nicole Kidman's story of a man she saw only once, yet the Beast in her roared the world aside for want of him. *Fucking* is an act. *Sex* is a state of being. *Want* is part of the deep engine of the world.

Global Wall, now a kind of traveling orator, travels with three girls who are what remain of his savage underground cosmic sex empire. He loves these three; the youngest in particular possesses him, especially in dreams of a White Bunny (or two):

They see two white bunnies flash by—& she smiles at him—her blonde hair is only touched by a few blooms—she wears a long light blue skirt & one bracelet for jewelry—& sandals—this is so simple—he watches her—waiting for the bad word—half hears it unspoken—something in this—does he notice—does he feel the flinch in his heart—the girl she possesses—there is no subterfuge in her—Global understood this later—this dream has a sad tinge that echoes back from future better understanding—

“let's follow” he startles her—this is new—this hadn't happened before—& it had been one bunny every other time—he catches her hand before thinking about it—then she holds on when he shies—they run—they follow the white bunnies into the woods—deep into the white white woods—

The White Woods is a place where Global Wall once built a kind of safety against men, a vast prison laboratory by which he tried to free himself of his life's perpetual anguish. It didn't work. Things change, they don't undo. But he seems bound for returning to them, with his beloved trio, whose love for him & want for him is salve & thorn alike. Perhaps the White Woods has some deeper, kinder

medicine still.

There seems to be more than one Preacher in *Labyrinthine*. Iterates? Maybe. One of them/him has long been followed by Genny, who seemed to lose him for awhile. She tries to find her long-unseen brother Sean, but ends up instead recovering her childhood's doll, Tweety Bird. Tweety now can sometimes talk. They reunite with Preacher at Luna T's Cafe, & he leads her to the Ampitheater in back, bringing her to the place where long ago he despaired & died, deep in the Woods, likely White, under a full moon, dancing in a field where a bonfire roared & drummers beat.

Preacher points down the hill they stand on to his younger self dancing, urging Genny to go talk to him for greater understanding. Then older Preacher is gone. In exchange, Genny finds a tape player with a tape she had long ago recorded of one of his preaching events:

“What rises with the light, crosses the moon, what sings shores empty of men tonight”—your voice half buried in hiss, in the coughs, the other sounds of a listening crowd moving around in their seats—your voice is beautiful—I listen as I watch you swing your flashlight around like a scimitar, down there at your wake or funeral or whatever it is—“Call it imaginal space.”

I call this the “magick” portion of PENMAD here because I was where young Preacher is, but long ago, dancing deep in those White Woods, full moon, a night when I too danced & died—disappeared into the beat—born anew by sunrise—have returned to this night many times in my fiction, a well ever deep, its waters ever various in their inspiration.

RemoteLand shows nights after midnight in the Nada Theater. Self & Ralph are two acid-loving boys who have moved into the theater to be there for each showing. It's like they are now living inside the film. A film like Lynch's *Inland Empire*, come to life.

A struggling old painter named Charlie Pigeonfoot ends up on their couch, & they tend him. On the night the White Bunny(s) appear in the theater, Charlie encounters again in a dream a painter he knew only in dream:

She begins slowly. “I was a girl the first time I came here. I was pretty & foolish but I had something. I came here again & again. Always wore my yellow swimsuit. It left little unexposed. I liked it. I felt the hungry stares, their intensities, some kind, sweet, some dark, violent. I absorbed them for a long time, thinking I'd learn & then know desire.”

This painter is a kind of dream-mentor to Charlie, yet in other pages she has her own story & loves. Maybe she once dreamed her mentor too, & now passes on the kind favor.

Finally, Jack has a problem. He cannot figure out who is Penelope & who is Christina. One his longtime love, the other who tempted him away. His sort-of friend Benny Big Dreams offers sort-of help in dreams.

A classroom, & she's in the front row as he walks in:

One glance & no more. This is not the first class, I can tell by the braid in her hair, how her skirt is short but swishy & pink tights.

Dreamland is a place, a *state* of mind. Powerful, strange, a tool, a way. Like P, E, N, M, & A, it is a major aspect of *Lx*, & all I write. Must be appreciated, & accounted for.

So this is a summary of *Cenacle* 79 | October 2011 that Kassi & I readied, & printed copies of, for the JG meeting on 10/29/2011 at our apartment. We were proud of it. *Fucking* proud.

I was proud about having a job, a wonderful wife & partner, dear friends coming to visit & share Art with me.

I could not imagine that that night would be the last night I would see my friend Jim Burke alive. That its events would push my friends Ralph H. Emerson & Ric Amante from me, for different reasons.

I've been coming to this night in this *History* for nearly 9 years now. It is October 2020. Jim has been gone near all of those 9 years. I have not seen Ric nor Ralph in years. The former lives about a 15 minute walk from the home in which I sit. The latter maybe in California. I don't know. His parents long passed, family house long sold, himself seeming to have decided our friendship among the things he would not take into his new life.

Loss of Ric & Ralph are scars. Loss of Jim is a wound. The heart decides the difference in these matters.

It was 4/28/2012, a day short of 6 months later, that KD & I finally held the next JG meeting. That night began with our best effort to reconstruct that October night. I have some photos too, taken before the power went out, & the recording of the meeting lost. So tonight, 10/21/2020, will partner with both those dates to do as right by it as I can.

It was Halloween weekend, & the Northeast U.S. got hit by its first major snowstorm of the winter. A "nor'easter," really bad one. My friend Jeremy Kilar, down in New Jersey, who had driven up with JBIII the previous year, was unable to make it in person, & so recorded & sent along two videos of him singing & playing his guitar instead. Lovely.

The nor'easter also prevented our planned afternoon visit to Walden Pond, Jim's beloved spiritual home.



Compounding these problems was Jim & Ralph both getting sick. Jim was laid out on our green couch (oddly—fuck—I just realized that I am sitting on this green couch now, although in the Bungalow Cee we did not buy till 2013, & so a place he never saw). I have only a couple of pictures of him on this couch, only his arm visible. Last pictures I have of him.

To be plain, I would often at meetings share my elixir with Jim, what we called "shocktails" &, every other time, veteran cosmic rocker that he was, Jim flew high & higher, played guitar happy, delighted in all.

Ralph I had not planned on sharing with. He knew nothing of such things, spare that these

were important to me.

And here he was, arrived up from Connecticut early afternoon with Jim, traveled the nor'easter safely. But looking really poorly. Unbathed, unshaven, starving, apparently (though not poor), as he wolfed down a lot of the pizza we got from the joint around the corner.

And asking for his share of the elixir. I did not want to reject him. His family unit, parents & him, so tightly bound for so long, had fallen apart by death & disbandment. The old farmhouse they three had so long lived in up for sale. Ralph staying with a friend.

Maybe if it had been just him & Jim & KD & me that night, taking it slow, talking it through. Making sure he was clean & well-rested. Maybe.

Maybe if Ric had not assumed that sharing elixir with novice Ralph was the plan all along, & himself not told.

Maybe if Ralph hadn't reacted so badly to elixir & pizza, both hitting a likely empty stomach too quick.

Maybe if the power had not gone out, & the recording not been lost.

Maybe if it hadn't fucking snowed.

For all of that, what of Jim, laid out all night on the couch? And gone in less than five weeks, at 58 years old? His parents both lived well into their 80s.

Maybe he was just exhausted from joblessness, stress, worry for his family, long-standing medical ailments, like his woeful knees, that he could not afford the time or money to tend to, to get healthy, lose weight, return to better form. The elixir gave him rest that night. While Ralph retched in our bathroom for hours, Jim slept. Next morning, storm over, he was smiling & strumming the guitar he'd brought & not played. Giving Ralph a ride home, keeping him safe till Ralph's friend's house's power returned. Jim tending others, no matter his own struggles. It was his 100th, & last, JG meeting.

So once Ric & Melissa arrived, I think we ordered pizza. I think I then offered Jim some elixir, which we had long enjoyed sharing, & Ralph asked to join in.

I read my letter to President Obama in *Cenacle* 79, & it was not long before the problems occurred. The elixir hit Jim wrong. I don't know why save that he half-slept through the meeting, seemed fine the next day, & was gone in 5 weeks. I know, I'm repeating. Keep it rolling.

So, while Jim rested quietly on the couch, Ralph rushed to bathroom. I accompanied him there; for seeming hours he threw up. It was pizza. It was purgation, for his life's long & recent troubles & sufferings & privations & doubts. It was horrible to see this dear friend, one I'd known near 30 years, since high school, retching his guts out. Eventually, he was empty. Rejoined meeting a little bit.

Far gone into the night, meeting long over, I sat up with him til dawn, sitting him. It was harrowing. All his demons came out. I kept talking him down from far ledges in his mind.

While Jim slept & Ralph retched, & I companioned his retch, KD kept the meeting going best she could. Ric read "Brotherhood" from *Cenacle* 79. Melissa read some satirical writings on opera. I'm sure KD showed photos from that trip she'd recently taken down to North Carolina, to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Eventually, the meeting included me & Ralph again. I read some *Many Musics* from *Cenacle* 79. Even Ralph read something, a hand written poem called "Madagascar." We watched videos of Judih Haggai in Israel & Martina Newberry in California reading their *Cenacle* 79 poetry. Judih also toured us around some of her kibbutz in Israel.

And Jeremy, in the power outage of his New Jersey home, with his iPhone recording on limited juice, played a bunch of his delightful songs. Beautiful soul. I have not known where he is for a few years. No quarrel. Just elsewhere. One of his songs was for a recently passed beloved Aunt, "Don't Go Yet."

The power went out, near midnight. The nor'easter that had fucked our afternoon plans came back to have a go at our evening ones. I don't blame nature for being nature, but I reserve the very human right to be pissed off about the bad fuck anyway.

Said goodbye to Ric & Melissa, unknowing the bitter resentment they already held against me. Near 20 years of friendship with Ric begun to die that night. We seemed to clear the air between us, took meeting up near a year later, but we never really got good again.

Survived the frenzied night with Ralph. Jim woke his chipper self, they packed & drove back to Connecticut. Six weeks later, having missed a chance at Thanksgiving to see him, KD was sick, I was on a Greyhound bus traveling down to Connecticut, writing my eulogy for him. I know, *keep it rolling*.

My 4/28/2012 reconstruction audio notes, by way of conclusion, that it was a messy night but there was some good Art shared. Too too too high a cost.

Monday following the JG debacle, I went back to work. Mostly from the couch at home, or rode my bike (got it fixed, always a good thing, when needed) to the Jam'n Java coffee house in Arlington Center. Or the library near it. Or further along to my beloved Harvard Square. Let the metro be my office. Technical writing simply requires a laptop, an Internet connection, & content to work on. On contract, hoping for a full-time commitment; that never came, just an extension to June 2012. Kept working, kept cashing the paychecks.

KD daily took transit to her work in Boston. We ate dinner together, watched TV. On Saturdays, we went into Boston or Cambridge to see movies (*Paranormal Activity 3* & *Melancholia* were good ones that November) & ride the elixir with books & notebooks & pens & parks & coffee houses.

I was trying to reclaim my balance by these long familiar daily activities, yet that meeting clouded me over. Hardly two weeks after it occurred, I decided to cancel the December JG meeting. It was a hard decision, but things felt out of sorts, & I needed time to figure out *how* to sort them again.

SpiritPlants Radio work continued on. 2011 marked its 8th anniversary as a station, & third since KD & I took it over. We celebrated by purchasing the spiritplantsradio.com domain name. A lot of migration work needed to sort out this change & the move to Museter streaming platform, but good work. Evolving work.

On my "Within's Within" radio show in November, I always play LPs by Harry Chapin or Billy Joel, wonderful singer-songwriters who salvaged my rough teen years. Played Chapin's 1975 *Portrait Gallery* on the 11/12/2011 show.

Later that Saturday, at a Starbucks in Boston, I lamented the 30th anniversary of a party given by the girl I'd loved back then, & how on that night, for the first time, she wondered aloud to me about the possibility of us dating. By the following Monday, she'd changed her mind, chosen another to give her heart to (he was a dear friend of Ralph's at the time, funny thing). Wrote her, Jenny Lehman, a poem for remembrance:

*The bloom I'd lay at your breast tonight
is & is not the one I held those hours,
touch, & there's still a tune. But if you don't,
as you did not then, there's still a tune.
Your young cheek, yes a bloom for you. My music,
no, I earned that for my own romances.*

The following weekend I made a second trip, this time with KD, to Dewey Square in Boston, to visit the Occupy Boston encampment there. Brought more *Scriptor Press Samplers* for their library, & messages I'd solicited from all sorts of friends. I didn't know that Jim's message would be the last words of his I'd have the pleasure of distributing while he yet lived:

The whole "occupy" movement is just the beginning because as the Republican Party continues to block economic progress, more and more people will join. It will become difficult if not impossible for the local leaders to dream up quasi-petty excuses when attempting to "clear"

the areas being occupied, be it Wall St. or wherever. My biggest fear is that thousands of people will tend to fight back, more police riots will ensue and the movement will splinter into violent factions much like the anarchist groups of the sixties. Hopefully, the masses will refuse to move and overload the system through repeated non-violent actions. How many people can the system process? This question was also answered in the sixties. People would go right back to their arrest site and be processed over and over until the police gave up. Some people were arrested several times in one night.

The occupy site in Hartford, on the corner of Broad St. and Farmington Ave., has been going strong and the Hartford Police Department has no intention of removing them at this point (as reported today in the Hartford Courant). There are a couple of dozen tents and other residences. Signs are abundant but the overall level of interaction with the public seems slow. Perhaps it is for the best.

Finally, to paraphrase Thoreau, screw the government until there ain't one anymore!

Which all brings me to December 1, 2011. Like November 14, 1981, & a few other ecstatic or tragic dates along the way, this one changed me down deep. We all have these dates. They accumulate in number through our years. They are like our version of tree trunks' rings.

December 1, 2011 was a Thursday. A workday for me. Up at 6:45, kissed KD out the door to work. Sat awhile before work mulling Scriptor Press projects. 20 *Scriptor Press Samplers* ready to distribute. 19 copies of *Cenacle* 79 nearly ready.

No JG for December, but I'd mulled all of November still doing a new *Cenacle* issue. Now was thinking C80-81 | Winter 2012. Thinking maybe there would be six issues in 2012, & a *Sampler*, & two RaiBooks, & 36 SPR weekends, & weekly *ElectroLounge* updates, & six *TAB* (*TransArtBooks*, planned sequel project to *Burning Man Books*), & four JG meetings. And I would write & write & write.

Worked on SPR for coming weekend, this along with pay job. Ate lunch, picked up apartment, rode to Jam'n Java for more work. Come back home 5:15. KD & I had dinner, watched *Burn Notice*, beloved TV show. Worked on radio some more, football game on TV. 9:30 finished the night, to bed.

James Michael Burke III died of a heart attack that evening. 58 years old. I learned of this the next morning, by an email from his eldest daughter Belinda.

I went into the shock I think most people go into in this situation. I pushed aside *why?* for the moment & hard calibrated on *what* to do. I ate cereal & watched *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* like every Friday back then. I kissed KD off to work. Told my team at our virtual meeting. Lost much of the day.

Then cohered, dressed, took the bus to a shopping plaza in Cambridge to meet KD for our weekly date. Wrote this on the bus:

It confounds me to write this but my friend & brother Jim Burke is dead of a heart attack last night at 58. I knew his health wasn't great but his bigger worry was his parents, last we spoke—weird he was on my mind this week but I can't say he wasn't always.

I don't have anything worth saying. That fucked up JG last time I saw him, laid up all night. He strummed softly the next morning. Last I would hear & I was fucking focussed on Ralph's crisis.

Nothing I say or do or write will return him. I hope that there is a something next for him.

This is worse for me personally than any previous loss. I can only function now because there is no other option—

I wish he had played & me read at last JG & that I'd gotten him to Walden one more time—I'm glad I brought his words to Occupy—

Last time I saw him he was tending Ralph—taking him in from nor'easter—giving him shelter—reminding me of the JG spent in his car—

Time moved, but I did not seem to move with it. Nice restaurant. Bookstore after. Ice cream.

Next morning, we drove to get groceries as usual, then I readied & did my radio show. Audio recording of it fucked up. Like the JG. Tried to go out to movies. Got outside to bus stop & a call with Belinda, how she was, plan for funeral. Couldn't. *Just . . . fucking . . . couldn't.* We returned home. Day abandoned. Safer at home.

Watched football on Sunday, nothing more. My Dallas Cowboys lost, shitty mistakes. Same of KD's New York Giants.

By Monday, no better, still moving. Kissing KD out door to work. Attending to my own job. Re-recorded lost audio from my radio show, the parts where I read or speak on microphone. KD came home, we ate dinner, watched *Walking Dead*, another favorite. Tuesday, work & an uncomfortable call with Gerry Dillon down in Connecticut, once a dear friend of Jim's & mine. Jim's roommate for years. Mine too for one year, as I mentioned in a previous chapter of this *History*. Back in 2002-2003, me limping back from the West Coast, broke & broken-hearted. Took me in without hesitation. Brilliant writer. JG core member. *Cenacle* too. All this now years before 2011.

Worked on last new SPR weekend of the year. Wednesday, mailed out copies of *C79* to those not at that disastrous meeting. *Such a good issue. Such a disastrous meeting.*

Thursday, December 9. Up at 6:45, took my pills, wrote in my dream journal, et breakfast, kissed KD off to work, her wishing me a safe trip.

Worked on radio, pay job, washed dishes, made bed, picked up house, lost hours toward the needed trip prep, cleaned up, packed my book bag & old beat up blue suitcase, bus & train to South Station to catch the familiar Greyhound bus down to Hartford, to be met by Jim's daughters Belinda & Natalie, in lieu of himself all so many previous years.

Had along *Cenacles* 47 | December 2002 & on up to the present, every issue that had one of Jim's letters in it. Eleven in all. Read them on bus down, then wrote my eulogy for him.

Arrived, ready, met by Jim's beautiful daughters & their friends. That night, at the apartment in Hartford he had shared with them so many years, & where he had died, in the kitchen, at dinner, we held a kind of an Irish wake for the man we all adored.

Lotta ganja. Chinese food. Telling stories. Laughing as mourners often best do. Watched *Pulp Fiction* & *Beavis & Butthead* for fun.

The Chinese food reminded me of a night, maybe 20 years earlier, when Jim'd come over the apartment I had at the time down there. Brought Chinese food. His marriage had ended that night. Saddest night of Chinese food I'd ever experienced. Here was another. Different kind of loss. Pain is pain.

I'd often slept on their couch in that apartment, come down for JG meetings & other visits. That night, though, I slept in Jim's bedroom. They did not object. Took pictures. A 3 a.m. poem too.

*Later today, we will say our words &
bury your ashes. A dozen & a dozen faces
will gather who hadn't before, & you are gone
& you remain. Now it's 3 a.m. & cold in your room.*

*I lie in your one pillow bed, looking toward
the door you saw every morning for years.
Out there, your cherished ones. Beyond that,
the world. It's 3:02 a.m. & I weary.*

*Your guitars, your books, not a picture
on your walls. No curtains on the windows.
The light stirred you, woke you. Light &
some car swooshing past. You are gone,
those guitars now silent, this bed empty
but me passing through. It's 3:05 a.m. & one last.*

*Does a room keep its departed occupant
awhile? This building old, you weren't the first.
Did it try to warn you the morning of your
last day, or say goodbye, in a room's way,
bunching its air at the doorway, bursting
you through, slowing your scattered eye, your heaving breath?*

Such a simple room. Humble. Guitars. Shelf of books. *Walden* of course. Lotta *Cenacles*. Box of music cassettes I'd been making him for years of new & old LPs. We called it the "JBIII Rock-n-Roll Survival Kit." Started it after his divorce. Dark days. A kind of vigil, after the wake, before the funeral.

I was one of the four who gave a eulogy at his funeral. His daughters. His sister. Read straight from my notebook. A passage reads:

Jim was a wonderfully good musician, inheriting this gift from his mother, & pursuing it obsessively on his own. He could play a light funny song or dive so deep that spittle, guitar picks, and strings would fly (we called it getting "art-stoned"). He wrote: "I play the guitar & make the music & then realize I am the music." He described himself simply as being "a musician who enjoys the challenges of being a father," & I think this summed things up for him. For those of us who were lucky enough to hear Jim sing & play, the gift he offered was to allow us witness to a mortal being merging with the eternal, become for a little time a confirmation of open passage between the two, that the mortal & the eternal are, in essence, connected parts of the whole.

Jim also imparted to others his profound love of Nature. From Nature he derived evidence of truths that most of us at best intuit consciously in rare, shining, inexplicable moments. Nature is what "should be," he wrote, continuing: "the twigs on the tree and life from them remind me of infinity. Their language is a mystery until you stop listening—perpetuation is the key, Freedom is obtained through non-action & least resistance. And, after all, what is a tree, without a twig?"

Good acoustics in that church. St. John's Church. Church of his grieving parents. Jim was kind of a Buddhist.

Jim was an Artist. The purest one I've ever known. The Christian funeral was for others. Yet I doubt Jim would have objected to this salve to their woes.

He was cremated (hence my poem about ash). I seem to recall his urn buried in the church courtyard somewhere.

After, a dinner at a Chinese place nearby. There I saw Ralph Emerson. Gerry Dillon. John

Barton. Mark Shorette. Much of the old JG brotherhood.

I was furious at all of them. None had kept in touch with him (save Ralph, for the rare ride to JG meetings in Arlington). Jim's poor health was not just physical. *He was lonely*. I was far, only able to visit occasionally. These nearer friends, & others like Mark Bergeron & Jack Heitner, had drifted elsewhere.

And none of them, including Ralph, were doing well. Back then we had lived in each other's pockets & it mattered. *Friends matter*. Tending others.

None of my feelings were rational. I honestly would have traded any of them for him. My despair was not kind, & it had no bottom.

But I had loved all these brothers. I wish that night we had gone somewhere safe, & gotten blind drunk together, held a wake to rival the one the night before. Had left my boozing years behind many years before. Would have that night.

Death of a loved one can turn memories of that loved one into a tomb for awhile. I think that day my memories of Jim entered that tomb & stayed for a long long time. Because I could not, or they could not, or we could not enter it together, comfort one another, find our way through together. I take my share of responsibility for that. What I could do with his daughters, mourn, openly, freely, even laughing, I could not do with these long-estranged friends.

Ralph drove me back to the Greyhound station, unaware I was angry how he distracted me on that last JG night, how he shared an additional day with Jim on their return to Connecticut. Maybe he sensed it. I don't know.

The whole of them mattered less to me. They'd grown old, & boring. Jim hadn't, & he was the one who was gone. These are not kind thoughts, but they are true. I doubt I live so kindly in their hearts either.

But Jim had been the heart of those 1988-2001 JG glory days. Believed in it all more than the rest. *Believed in me*.

Could I have saved him? I don't know. Looking back from now, if I could leap back, I'd simply say to him: "You are not as strong as you think you are, as you used to be. You have to do something drastic to change your path."

I could not have done it for him. But I wish I had recognized how vulnerable he was. He took a lot of medicines, for his heart, thyroid, and other ailments. It just wasn't enough. I miss him every day.

On bus back to Boston, I worked on radio, relieved the event was over, wrote. I met Kassi near South Station, not far from Dewey Square. Occupy Boston was being evicted.

Next morning, got up & did my radio show, last of year. We later saw a movie, Scorsese's delightful *Hugo*. Stayed up all night, as often on Saturday nights, KD & elixir both salving me, nudging me forward.

No *Cenacle* 80-81. No December JG. Radio done for the year too. I turned in a few other directions for a stretch.

Back to work the following Monday. We saw the wonderful Gillian Welch & David Rawlings in concert that night, brilliant Americana. More salve to sad.

12/16/2011 journal entry:

It was two weeks ago that I found out Jim died. Last Friday I was among his loved ones & others burying him. And another week has now passed. Two in all. He's gone, he's not. He's gone, I don't get to sit with him or talk to him on phone. He's not, I have his words on paper, his music recorded & in my head. I'm trying to be creative & honest with my sadness. It's not easy because I don't know my own heart fully. If anyone does. But I don't know mine. I had his friendship 21 years, 22 maybe. So much during that time that I can't dismiss it all. I wish he hadn't been doing poorly, that he had made it to better days.

News from the tomb. Yet I can say now, 9 years later, I am readying to leave the tomb sometime soon.

I've got a half-made book of his letters been pushing along the prep of during these pandemic months at home. A little light in the distance now.

I involved more in Occupy Boston, evicted as an encampment but alive in a myriad of local activism projects. Racial justice, voting rights, a newspaper, & a radio station. Occupy Boston Radio.

I found myself going into Boston to teach classes on how to record & assemble a radio show. Using all the tricks & knowledge I'd culled up through SPR. It was exciting to be visiting OB's offices & seeing so much activity. Hopeful. Giving & getting, the best kind of dance.

Another new project I jumped into was reviewing all of my *Bags End News* notebooks, from 1985 on, 15 of them, & reading from them on my radio show. Until our return to Boston in 2010, these had been in storage for years.

It was time to revivify this lingering project, find its new music. Going forward meant first a long thorough review. Many days found me on various trains & buses around metro-Boston, bound somewhere to work, or to an OBR meeting, reading these notebooks.

Reading them as Kassi & I were on train to Maine, taxi to hotel in Old Orchard Beach, to spend the holiday weekend celebrating our 6th wedding anniversary by the beautiful winter seaside.

Last night of 2011, writing *Labyrinthine*, *Many Musics*, & *Bags End News* while KD warmed from our hike that day & read.

Come to the beach again at midnight to watch fireworks welcoming in 2012.

For years now, I've been carrying around & keeping around a whole pile of materials for this chapter. I began writing it in 2016 (I think), & published sections of it in *Cenacle* 104 | June 2018, *Cenacle* 109 | October 2019, & now *Cenacle* 114. Had it been written & finished in 2012, it would have been in *Cenacle* 80 or C81.

It owned me because I did not want to write it. Then I would push to do it, get some done, call it enough.

Now it's done, written, soon to be typed up for publication.

Maybe, even more than publishing a book of Jim's letters, to have finished this chapter is to be leaving my tomb of memories about him. Maybe the rest of whatever that is, is now possible.

This chapter, as much as any poem or fixtional rendition of you, Jim, is my song of love & respect for you. I am different for knowing you. Different for losing you. Both matter. Both valid voices in this thankful song.

Ⓜ 10/22/2020



* * * * *



Bubblewrap, rap, raw, p.

I had just lit the fire, but it was only smouldering. It was nearly 8 am. Still dark. I heard a knock on the glass door, as if a bird had flown against it. I went to look. There was a misshapen package there, roughly rugby-ball shaped, wrapped in brown tape. I took it inside. Upon closer inspection I saw some writing, in black permanent marker, upon the tape. It said, “Please prepare yourself properly, this parcel contains poetry, yours, ashen fur.” Weird. Fun. At that exact moment the paper caught beneath the sticks, and the flames licked, sounding like fabric blowing in the wind. A tattered wizard gown. *Open it.*

As I took my orange pen-knife and started to slit the packet open from the end, a thought stopped me. I had not done anything to prepare my self. *Fuck it*, I thought, *I got out of bed this morning, I dressed my self, that's preparation enough for poetry.* I chuckled to myself and carried on opening the package. The tape was stuck directly to the bubblewrap, and in the middle was something hard and dark. I realized the bubblewrap was in layers. I found a slip of paper under the first, the size of a fortune from a cookie. *Like pass the parcel*, I thought, *except no one around to pass to.* I read the message, written in a hand that had had to trace and retrace the words, a pen that was running out, slightly frantic capitals: **WHAT HAS BEGUN, MUSTEND.** Weird how there was no space there, but that's how it was. I carried on through the layers, after loading the fire with some intermediate logs. The next one said:

I HAVE NOT BEEN HERE BEFORE, YETI ALLWAYZZZ WEARIAM. Haha, that one struck me as funny. I had already had one thought, by the way. That there was a stone in the middle. A stone shaped a bit like a head, slightly greened—at first I thought from algae—then that maybe the stone was jade. *Jaded?* I wondered if I was telling myself I had become jaded? Let me look that word up to check: Hmmmm. So I hadn't really considered that the boredom of jadedness was connected to having had too much of something. I don't really feel I've had too much of anything. Unless it means life, haha. There is an interesting usage arc—it peaks sometime after the 1850s, then falls, and has been rising again recently. Not just me then. I look at the etymology, but can't concentrate. OK, I guess I need to write where I last saw this stone head, what it makes me think of—because the features on it are not clear—some people would just call it a lump, I reckon.

It was in my belly. My sister was doing some healing on me. She had been working over the top of my torso and I had encountered a being who made me laugh, which made her laugh, and then she asked why I laughed—I thought this was nice, to ask—I thought most healers might have just accepted it as a reaction, like a burp or something, but I felt she was genuinely curious and I was pleased with her in that moment—the way she asked was just completely natural—I didn't feel like I would be giving anything away by telling her, just sharing. But it wasn't this being that the jade head brought to mind. It was down lower, in the twists of my intestines. She was working down there and I saw this thing, just an amorphous blob really, a lump. This is what I think is in the parcel. Haha, now I'm scared of opening it—*maybe I should have prepared myself properly?* Had a shower. Or meditated. Or prayed. I tell myself it doesn't matter, and that maybe this is only about the layers. *It is* about the layers more. I just need to keep cutting through them now. I still can't see the hard dark thing any better, it is still rather formless, but I find the next slip of paper:

WHY QUESTION WHATNOT PRETENCE. This one perplexes me. I repeat it in my head a few times, realizing I am frowning. I need to look up *pretence*—hmmm—I heard it then as *pre-tense*—so I must also consider a state that is before tension? Oh, hang on! I needed to say about **JADE** first! So, weirdly enough it is related to **COLIC**. “When a baby cries a lot but there’s no obvious cause.” Wow, I’m sorry am I just being a saddy? Haha. Well. I am sorry actually. This unwrapping is difficult. I didn’t want to mention babies. I thought of colic as just a pure intestinal thing, actually, like indigestion. Ah yes, when I refine my search to adult colic that is what I find. It is in the area where I met the jade head. A pain that comes and goes and eventually eases. Eases, eventually. The root of the word, *colic*, is in squeezing, turning, revolving. My sister’s hands were digging into my stomach, as if trying to get at something, it was very uncomfortable, it made me a little angry. **JADE** used to be a term of abuse for women, too. Like whore, or mare—related to the idea of a worn-out horse. Cart horse. Also mean or worthless men to begin with, but then just women. I did karate when I was young. I hated it a lot of the time but my dad pushed me to keep on with it. Now I say I’m glad he did this. I was weak, I needed it. I was proud of how tense I could make my stomach. No one could hurt me. *Go on, punch me there.* I can feel my dad poking me there, quite hard. The karate teacher is standing on my stomach, like I am a board. He is nice actually, he mostly just steps over me, but I have super-tensed just in case.

Hmmm. The fire was roaring. I wanted to chuck another log on before the big one burnt out, but when I did the fresh log kept rolling out. My face was hot from the flames. I shouted **RAH** and chucked it in again. This time it stayed. I felt like an angry, sulky, child. Pretence. The putting forth of a claim. So, whatnot, which is a thingymajig—claims nothing—so why question it? Or does it mean, somehow, that something only claims not to be something. Something only claims to be ill-defined. And this thing is the “why question.” The pure why? Or must the why always be about something? What is a why . . . nothing? Why . . . ? Question? My head feels foggy. I don’t want to go down another layer until I have unfrowned. My head sings, you too? “Yeah I still—haven’t frowned—what I’m looking for.” Haha. The frown is gone. Maybe the Why Question thing is like a joke? I’m going to try to resist asking what a joke is. Haha. That would really betray my machine nature. Another layer. It is light outside. Light blue grey.

I went out to see if old Bobby wanted breakfast. Four horses watching me. One I can’t see. The moon shrinking toward half full, high above the barn. Bobby is the one I can’t see. He is at the back of the stable. The door is blocked by the young (well, younger) stallion, Quixote. I can’t be arsed to wait for Bobby to pluck up the courage to push past him. I fart loudly and go back inside. The log falls against the glass door of the stove. I push it back in with the giant iron tweezers. Chuck another one on top. I imagine my hand is fire proof, but I was just making a quick small adjustment, in and out. When I have to hold my hand in front the fire a moment, it begins to cook. Burn. I take a breath. *Thank you for sending me this, strange friends, whoever you are and wherever you be.* I think there is only a layer or two left. This one says:

WELLEVEREVOLUTION. I’m just going to take that at face value. Which means that I have to keep turning to keep growing well. That getting better continues forever. But for me personally it means that every step towards my eventual death is somehow progress. Haha. So death will be my great achievement. But I shouldn’t laugh at that. It’s true. How one dies, how one manages one’s own death, is, I want to say, a litmus test. A litmus test? Decisive. I hope I die like I heard Blake did. Singing new songs from heaven on his death-bed. But the sadness in me reminds me it is not just about singing, it is about caring for the people who will have to deal with my body when I am gone, making sure I have made clear what I need done with it. And I have to be reasonable. Realistic. Time has gone where they might lay me in the great cave. Play divination games with my old skull. But honestly. Hmmm I don’t know—I was going to say I want to feed the animals—but that’s more like something some part of me

thinks I should want—maybe because I eat them sometimes. Really I want to be fire. Smoke. Just float away into everything. Actually that happens sometimes too. I wish I could be less scared of it. Why I am scared is because, like I said, **EVERYTHING**. Float away into everything, not nothing. Wow, the morning sun is beautiful upon the barn. I struggle to believe in nothing. Wow, the last layer:

BELIEVIN THARIS NONUTTIN. Haha, so the last little piece of paper was blank but I wrote that on there, chuckling as I did so, how the words came out joined funny and trying to say other things, as if I was fighting myself from just saying it straight. If that happened it was because somehow “Believing” was “believe in” for me—that the source of belief, or, and, the “thing” to believe in, was in. Inside, in me, in you, in us. I know this. But I got freaked out by how if you want to write belief you have to go through a lie, or put a lie in it. I thought I must’ve been spelling it wrong. But I after E except after C. Oh, so I guess that rule is bullshit? Or only just good enough? There’s a name for rules like that—they’re the best ones in fact. One law for the lion and the ox is oppression. But you know it struck me as a secret code meaning “be polite.” If I speak it with the ancestral twang of the west country, which is a bit of me, it sounds like, I (me) after ’ee (he)—like I’m holding the door open for you, anyone, he or she we’d all be ’ee in this sense—except after see? See what? Or who?

(EDIT! Oh no wait! I got it wrong, the rule is not so polite after all, it is I *before* E, me first. I’m glad there are exceptions. Like science. “Some authorities deprecate the rule as having too many exceptions to be worth learning.”)

You aren’t just a lump, by the way, though you *are* made of jade. Smooth, polished by the hands you have passed through. Not like sand, sandpaper. Not like sand through fingers, or the pinched waist of the hourglass. Like something that became more one with every pass, and yet already was. Something that shined more, became more beautiful. Not because shiny is beautiful. Although if there is a dragon in you, it might be a kind of magpie. A wise crow dragon inside the egg. A two-headed raven. No, one, no-one.

Bobby, old bob, really should have his breakfast. I can’t get too distracted by this hard shiny thing. I have duties. I stand out front and say his name and wait. Quixote is standing out in the yard so Bobby has nothing to fear now. I see him stirring in the shadows behind Dreki. Her and Gulli looking out the stable door at me. Dreki moves to let Bobby out. They both come towards me as I carry the bucket down the path. Dreki stops, being well-behaved, and lets Bobby come forward. He puts his nose in the bucket and I put the string behind him. I touch Dreki’s nose affectionately, pleased that she has behaved kindly, but her affection for me is harder to see. She wants sugar really. I get everyone a lump of sugar each. Their beings are a bit like sugar to me. Their bodies. Their faces. The way they stand there quiet and aware and dignified. I don’t mind loving them even being unsure of what it is that comes back. I just love them. I think how “no-one” could be the only name that “everyone” could have, if it were possible or desirable to give everyone one name. I come back inside.

The room is warm now. I take my smooth jade egg to the flames. It is warm already. The shine it has is soft. I open the stove and put it among the glowing coals. I lay it down gently without feeling the urgency of burning. I sit back on the sofa and watch it a while. The egg glows gradually. It becomes the orange of the low sun, whitening towards the centre. As I watch this centre my visual field becomes more electric, swims, brightens—the egg is bleeding into me, I am inside the egg. The egg is who-knows-how-big. It is an edgeless egg. But with differences. I feel we are together. That I am together with more than me, and we are looking in, all, looking in. And the sweet black-violet eyelid does not open, maybe is still fused, with the organ safe behind it, developing. And the great head is not that of a baby, but not not either. It is cute, but it will grow past cuteness. We can already see how fierce it can be.

All creatures of flesh would melt before it. Become elements. But we know it now, we know it young, we know it forever. It will always be this thing for us, no matter how it changes. It will not always need us, but it did once, and this will make it permeable to our will. Only insofar as it is love, I believe, only insofar as it is not our will. This is an egg who sits in the fire. She is a creature who will never hatch. He is an eye that does not need to look. They are a show that we share in, are sharing.

I take the egg out the fire, knowing it will only be warm. I find it is malleable. I do what I wish, which is to make it smaller, more portable. I squeeze it gently and wonder how my strange hands have this egg inside them. I mean it is as if it was not trees that shaped my monkey fingers. It was this egg. The many beings we are, all know this egg, all have stroked, all have shaped it. I make it smaller again. I will keep it in a pouch next to my heart all day. When I send it on, the feeling will remain, I will find myself feeling that gentle weight against my chest, and I will take a deep breath, and I will deal. I will make it a good deal. Let us make it a good deal. The materials are golden. Raw golden everyone. Sweet body of no-one. The change in exchange, the still in change. The angel even. The angel odd.

May this work for us, our work to do. I think of all those I cannot think of. I conjure no-one. I step out as myself into the day of us. I try to remember ordinary language. In case there are creatures I need to greet who don't want to see I am night. We are together inside. I am clothes. Layers. Here. There. The simple blessing of hello, of space stared into, of one's quiet response between moments.

09:55.





Taoism, Aboriginal Dreamtime, & Other Non-Western Views of Reality

i.

Zuni religion stipulates that every person is a brother or sister because the Earth is her mother and the Sun is her father. This can be seen in the fact that everyone is born of the same Earth, depends on it for living, and returns to it in death. So this brother/sister-hood exists not only in spirit, but also in matter. Most Native American tribes feel the two are really one. This is a crucial idea, given that the implicate order underlies the explicate projections which inhere in both matter and mind. For the Zuni, spirit and matter are two complementary sides of a single coin.

Like the Taoists, Native Americans would never conceptualize reality as composed of independent “particles,” but rather see all nature as a series of vibrations. This is epitomized in their language structures: they place virtually no emphasis on nouns. Indeed, nouns in their languages are only used as modifications of other verbs. It is said that a Native American can go an entire day without using a noun-structure at all! Of course, for those of us who are Westerners, our sentence syntax is *subject > verb > object*. This is totally alien to the Native American. So it is no wonder that Westerners has been trying to reduce reality to a fundamental particle. They are searching for the smallest noun!

But this principle of vibration and verb-oriented ontology seems much closer to the reality modern physics is uncovering. The quantum potential, which is inherently a pure flow, is very close to the Native American concept of spirit. At a fine level, the dynamics of this potential are very similar to the language-dynamics used to describe spirit in Native American culture. And, indeed, Native American language and culture are not based on objects interacting, but rather on forces and relationships. This is clearly closer to what physics has found.

Native Americans even have a rather explicit cultural belief reflecting the implicate order hypothesis. According to it, there is a force in Nature that underlies and holds everything together, that transcends perception, belief, and language, indeed any familiar phenomenon, and it does this independently of any wish, prejudice, or whim on the part of people. In other words, this implicate order exists independently of any human activity, but enables that human activity to take place. This is, of course, in contradistinction to the explicate order, which Native Americans place in counterpoise as ordinary happenings, such as the smell of baking bread or a ladder falling over. Native Americans have always had a concept of the motion behind the motion.

It is rather sobering to note that, while Western science has engaged such ideas for less than a hundred years, Native American tribes have had essentially precise cultural correlates of these ideas for thousands of years. The same point is often made about Eastern cultures. Our coming to an understanding of these conceptions would be a very good thing, and let us hope these can replace the chauvinism in the West that has it that we are unquestionably the superior culture in world history. Even a cursory examination of anthropology would show this to be a dubious premise.

ii.

Australian Aborigines believe that the *Dreamtime* originated eons ago, at the very beginning of existence, but they also believe that it was uncreated. The land and people were created by powerful spiritual beings, who went on to make rivers, mountains, tools, weapons, all life, and so on—everything we find

on Earth. In the unfathomably distant beginning of time, the *Dreamtime* originated—but also, perhaps paradoxically, has always existed.

These ancestor spirits created all of the culture that the Aborigines all over early Australia came to embody: ritual, ceremony, religion, accepted behaviors, hunting practices, and so on. The Aborigines regarded the *Dreamtime's* origin as a beginning that never ended—a continuum of past, present, and future that is eternal. They believed that the land they occupied did not always exist, that there was a time before the world that was primeval and void. The spirit beings imparted this knowledge, which was fully respected as correct and never doubted. Spirits of the dead were given special ceremonies so that they could successfully travel to their spirit-place.

After their initial period of contact, the spirit beings retreated to hidden realms, disappearing from the realm of mortals, but continuing to be revered, though not worshipped. The *Dreamtime* they helped shape was considered to be a “time out of time” or “everywhen.” These spirits very crucially were not gods controlling the lower realm, but rather beings who would shape and maintain the human realm, but would leave it to the stewardship of humans and the continuous evolution of Nature.

In his seminal 1956 essay, “The Dreaming,” Australian anthropologist William Stanner argues that the best way for non-Aboriginals to conceptualize the nature of the Dreamtime is to think of it as a “complex of meanings.” Western biases are clearly not helpful in relating to its subtleties.

The *Dreamtime* and its flow through Nature is thought of as a vast network of relationships which is both dynamic in some sense, and unchanging in another. This could perhaps be analogized to the eternal evolution of the implicate order.

For the Eastern mystic, all phenomena perceived by the senses and processed by the nervous system are interrelated, connected together in an indivisible unity that arises in an undifferentiated, whole, and single reality. For this mystic, the inner and outer worlds are not distinct but one, and so when we consider external reality, and the internal perception of that reality, we are ultimately talking about one interpenetrating process. All too commonly, the ego, which is usually regarded as distinct from the world, and from others, splinters itself into separation from this basic reality. This is, in truth, an illusion born of ignorance of the nature of things, and creates a disturbance in the mind and in the person.

iii.

In reality, the universe is one whole, each part in unity and unison with all others, and it is the aim of Taoism and other Eastern schools to have their pupils and adherents become aware of this, to sense the interconnectedness and holism of all of Nature, transcending the illusion of a separate self.

Unfortunately, the modern world does not facilitate such an awareness and, sadly, most people do not have the time or even the inclination to explore themselves, and thus to gain insight into the constitution of their true natures. 'Twas ever thus, it would seem, but until the fragmentation of the self is addressed, the fragmentation of society, and its institutions and ideologies, indeed its entire culture, can never be ameliorated. Implicate orders both of the physical universe, and of the social collective, are thoroughly relevant here.

Taoists see flow and change as the primary movements of Nature, and posit that there are subtle patterns in these changes, the discernment of which is essential. There is a cyclic nature to this unceasing series of transformations, in which there is constant balance, harmony, and interpenetration of all phenomena in one whole. So, in some sense, we have an emphasis, in the positing of cycles, on *being*, and then we also have the emphasis on pattern and constant flow and evolution suggesting also an awareness of *becoming*.

For the Taoists, there is a complementary relationship between *being* and *becoming*. For with becoming, eventually one returns to the place where one started (and potentially was there the whole time). Being without becoming is simply unrealistic, and becoming without being has no substance, no foundation. In the Tao, these two fundamental bases are in perfect, mutual balance. In the implicate order, we have a dual principle, in the most literal sense, of an infinite being, and a cosmic becoming, in mutual harmony throughout the universe. Undoubtedly, the ancient Taoists were keenly aware of its nature.

Taoism is deeply rooted in the phenomena, not of “either-or” thinking common in the Aristotelian

tradition of the West, but rather of a *spectral* nature. In Taoist thinking, all opposites are connected, are part of a single unity, the perspective of which is attainable by going above or beyond this linear dialectical formulation into a more “relativistic” arena in which we can comprehend the relative nature of all phenomena. Various categories present themselves in terms of opposites but are, at a more fundamental level, seen to be alternate perspectives on a single truth. This is to see two poles as belonging to the entire spectrum, which is a fundamental principle in modern physics, and especially in the nascent field of quantum computing. In order to compute using “qubits,” we must process variables using not just ones and zeroes, but ones, zeroes, ones and zeroes, neither ones nor zeroes, and so on. Essentially, this means that we are not living at the poles, but rather using the *entire spectrum* to process information. This is just the sort of thing a Taoist master might do in his own mind.

This, of course, is symbolized in the interplay between *yin* and *yang*. Another, perhaps more fundamental way to think of the famous symbol is to suppose that both *subject* and *object* are interpenetrating, or complementary. Therefore, we cannot have an object without some subjective qualities, and we cannot have a subject that does not correspond with some objective reality. This is just what the Taoists suppose.

This is entirely identical with the fundamental nature of the implicate order. On the one hand, we cannot have *either* mind *or* matter; rather, mind and matter are complementary processes that arise from the implicate ground of reality. And the two vary by degrees. A rock would be more “matter-like” than a giraffe, for example, both of which are more matter-like than the dynamics of a chess tournament. Indeed, with a little careful thought, it can be seen that there is no way in principle to divorce subject from object, or object from subject, in the implicate order hypothesis.

iv.

Taoists and other Eastern mystics have spoken of being aware of the interpenetration of space and time at a macroscopic level, and more than that, that space and time are perceptual or emergent constructs that do not have a fundamental role. That is, these mystics are aware of the interchange between the implicate and explicate orders, but they do not need to perform quantum experiments to have these insights.

It is particularly interesting that this phenomenon occurs to properly equipped seekers, as it implies that what are normally conceived as effects only extant in the quantum realm are rather magnified upward into the macroscopic perceptions of meditators, yogis, psychonauts, and so on. If properly appreciated, this could be a real missing link in connecting the quantum and classical realms but, of course, at this stage of history, this is perhaps too abstract to expect a serious and effective scientific treatment. Still, it is not something to be ignored.

Unlike their Western counterparts, Easterners, including and, perhaps especially, Taoists, are not concerned with reducing existence to some fundamental “elementary” particle, as in point of fact they do not regard substance as a basically important variable. Taoists rather regard phenomena as a set of transitory stages or events, and are more concerned with their contexts and interconnections than reducing them to some fundamental substance or particle. The Western paradigm seems more interested in finding reality in a fundamental irreducible substance or independent piece, which might lead to a “theory of everything,” whereas the Eastern paradigm has always tended to emphasize dynamic relationships, interweavings of phenomena, fundamental change, and evolving events. Material substance has for it no ultimate meaning, and indeed is seen as illusory.

Clearly, the implicate order hypothesis has a greater resonance with a more Eastern style of thinking than that of the Aristotelian West, but it would seem that the East has always been a bit more sophisticated in its thinking about space, time, and psychology, so perhaps this is unsurprising.

It must be stressed that Tao is not conceptualized as having to do with deities, or anything like the concept of the sacred in Western religions, which exists on a vertical or hierarchical continuum, from beggars to priests to angels to God. Tao is more implicit, conceived more as a kind of immanence and an essence that underlies and even drives all natural phenomena. Tao, in a sense, harkens back to the animism of old, in that reality seemingly “blazes” with an inherent spiritual energy that is in no way separate from humanity, or from anything at all. Everything from human consciousness to the blooming of an orchid to

the migrations of birds is a manifestation of the Tao, and there is nowhere to put a mental separation that would have any objective meaning. Clearly, this has prime relevance for the present subject.

v.

It is a crucial point in Taoism, which is primarily concerned with *flow*, that this flow cannot be corralled or stopped in any meaningful or beneficial way. The flow of air or water is stopped when they are trapped or contained. The Tao itself cannot be controlled or even manipulated by any physical means—as the Tao is what gives rise to physical means in the first place! This of course has an essentially exact parallel with the implicate order, and trying to detect it or make sense of it in quantum experiments. When we have this method that says a quantum system is evolving and flowing, and we make a measurement and this flow stops in a sharp discontinuity, is this really a reading of nature, or some arbitrary cross-section of a much wider reality?

Perhaps measuring the velocity of an electron is like plucking an apple off an apple tree—do we expect the apple to tell us everything about the tree, the soil, the water and sunlight that go into it? The apple is fascinating, but it's far from the whole story. This is an example of trying to trap the flow in the broader movement of a natural system, and it gives us a very incomplete picture. Thus, the Tao cannot be cut into pieces or arbitrarily analyzed while maintaining the true picture of the whole. This clearly has far-reaching implications.

vi.

In Taoism, there is an emphasis on simplicity and the traditions of the past. A true Taoist would have an uncomplicated life in a basic, small home without distraction, and without undue burden. This burden can take many forms and, clearly, in the modern age, things have grown much more complex than a Taoist might like. The principal one of these complexities is technology itself, and of course we are all aware of the mighty proliferation of gadgets and devices that are becoming more and more ubiquitous, not only in the West, but throughout the world. Traditional Taoists, most of whom presumably live in the East, would find this abhorrent. Indeed, they typically distinguish the natural from the man-made, and throw most of the latter out.

This has relevance because there is a sharp distinction to be made between living systems and man-made artifacts and machines. The human body is a phenomenally subtle organism that cannot really be analyzed into separate pieces in a way that has precise meaning. Nor does it exist in the way that a machine does. Each piece needs every other in subtle relationship, for the most part, for the organism to function and have health, and no part by itself has any real utility. The same is true of all organisms, and we do not here differentiate between mind and body, which really form an indivisible whole in all animals, including man.

This goes back to the fundamental notion that systems of any kind, whether they be quantum systems, the human body and brain, culture, planets, galaxies, and so, cannot be analyzed into separate pieces in a way in which the whole can truly be understood in its totality. These systems can only be considered as mechanistic as an abstraction; they are clearly not truly so. We indeed are faced with unbroken wholeness being the primary aspect of nature—something a Taoist would strongly affirm.

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“You’d have to ask a Taoist”:

Author Jimmy Heffernan

Interview by Cenacle Editor Raymond Soulard, Jr.

Editor’s Note: The essay “Taoism, Aboriginal Dreamtime, & Other Non-Western Views of Reality” in this issue of *The Cenacle* is derived from Jimmy’s new book, *Unfolding Nature: Being in the Implicate Order* (BookBaby, October 2020). The following is the second part of our interview.

Editor: You write: “Native Americans even have a rather explicit cultural belief reflecting the implicate order hypothesis. According to it, there is a force in Nature that underlies and holds everything together, that transcends perception, belief, and language, indeed any familiar phenomenon, and it does this independently of any wish, prejudice, or whim on the part of people. In other words, this implicate order exists independently of any human activity, but enables that human activity to take place.”

Does this not describe the Judeo-Christian God, at least to a degree, as well? The idea that God created all of the world / universe, & is essentially unknowable for reasons & purposes? Jews do not speak the name of their god, nor depict this god. Christians seem to rely on Jesus as a kind of go-between for humans & God, & yet still many will say, in times of joy & crisis, “God works in mysterious ways.” Are these ideas not somewhat kin to the belief in a “force in Nature”?

Jimmy Heffernan: No, I don’t think this force, which I am equating with the implicate order, has anything to do with God at all. I can’t speak for the religious beliefs of all the various Indian tribes *today*, but of course historically Christianity is a new development for Native Americans. I don’t think the thinking here, at least originally, had anything to do with any concept of a deity. Nature is autonomous, and natural forces themselves are perfectly adequate to underlie these phenomena. Analogously, there is no reason to invoke God when dealing with the implicate order hypothesis.

Editor: You write: “In reality, the universe is one whole, each part in unity and unison with all others, and it is the aim of Taoism and other Eastern schools to have their pupils and adherents become aware of this, to sense the interconnectedness and holism of all of Nature, transcending the illusion of a separate self.”

Many in the West have reached this “sense of unity” through ecstatic prayer, through use of psychedelics, through the mystical delights of really good sex, through intense communing with Nature. Are the ideas themselves powerful indicators of truth not bound to time nor place, or do they simply stand in opposition to the more selfish & materialistic drives of market-driven societies?

Jimmy Heffernan: Oh I think these are deep truths, whether they exist in opposition to materialistic forces or not. Of course, for those of us raised in the West, the novelty of transcendent experience might be more powerful than it would for a youngster in India or Tibet, for example.

Editor: Why, even more simply put, is there variety in the world? Mortality? Why is one beast driven to devour another to stay alive? Why do men disagree &, in some lucky moments, revel in this disagreement? Why does an old woman pass by a colorful circus & remember sadly the one she saw when young, when her family was about her?

Jimmy Heffernan: I think that's too wide and difficult a question to answer. As far as having a complex world, the implicate order hypothesis mandates an increase in coherence and complexity as the universe evolves. That we have a very complex, diverse world here jibes with that. What I really wonder about is why there has to be such a powerful dimension of suffering in life, and I still have no idea. There's no natural principle mandating it.

Editor: Why does the “the Eastern paradigm [that] has always tended to emphasize dynamic relationships, interweavings of phenomena, fundamental change, and evolving events” no more answer the many big & small questions of daily life than the “theory of everything”?

Jimmy Heffernan: Well I don't think science or philosophy have come around to fully answering too many big questions. I think perhaps that when we get to a point that we no longer feel such a compulsion to ask so many questions we may find an internal peace, and perhaps this is the object of various philosophies.

Editor: If “[m]aterial substance has . . . no ultimate meaning, and indeed is seen as illusory,” why is there is there material substance at all? Why did Van Gogh wander the south of France obsessively painting the landscapes, the peasants, the stars? Why did Beethoven compose music even after he went deaf & could no longer hear it? Why did teenage girls scream at Beatles concerts? Why hold hands with a new love or an old one? Why visit a grave marker of a loved one passed?

Jimmy Heffernan: Per the implicate order hypothesis, all material substance is a manifestation of the explicate order, the manifest order of our three-dimensional reality. Now, one could call this both real and illusory, because the implicate order behind it is what gives rise to its existence. If we could see reality from the point of view of the implicate order—which is a goal of visionary mysticism—reality would look very different. There is no reason to denigrate material reality, but to have it in perspective we must realize that it is a surface manifestation, and not a fundamental actuality.

Editor: You write: “things have grown much more complex than a Taoist might like. The principal one of these complexities is technology itself, and of course we are all aware of the mighty proliferation of gadgets and devices that are becoming more and more ubiquitous, not only in the West, but throughout the world. Traditional Taoists, most of whom presumably live in the East, would find this abhorrent. Indeed, they typically distinguish the natural from the man-made, and throw most of the latter out.”

Why do we create tools? Why do we build wildly various dwellings? Why do we clear forests for growing corn? Why do we develop medicines for cruel maladies that once killed many so young? Why do we look up at the stars & wish to visit? Why do we have ideas of what the world

is summed in words like “Taoism” & “Dreamtime” & “Jesus”? Why do we tend strangers, feed stray cats, study sunsets till they melt into our souls? How are we not as natural as any rock or toad or tree or bug or sandy shore? Do we each & every one of us, Taoist, Christian, Jew, atheist, Artist, Capitalist, Communist, racist, etc etc etc, each & every one of us, not return to the earth after some few or many mortal decades? Are the six billion of us & counting really better off living in “small home[s] without distraction”?

Jimmy Heffernan: Well, I guess you’d have to ask a Taoist.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Twelfth Series

*"I tell you, there are more worlds,
and more doors to them,
than you will think of in many years!"
— George MacDonald, Lilith, 1895.*

vii. Gate-Keeper

He was called the Gate-Keeper, no longer
quite a man. A film-maker with his tripod,
a traveler through many worlds. Tall & crooked,
like a windblown tree. A low-drooping hat long-furred
his head, the rags & cloths & pockets tattooed
down his torso, arrive to ancient boots of
vines & stones, feather-quiet to stalk, clatter-wild
to scare away.

Creatures drawn to his *hmmmming* but not for aid.
He *hmmm'd* as he filmed the One Woods,
& they neared in shadows to sniff & watch.
His tripod could bend low as a graceful leg,
reach high, like on wings. Creatures neared,
so curious, so he laughed, like an echo's
echo, & invited them with an open hand
to join his game.

Sometimes he folded his tripod like
an ancient walking stick of White Birch,
& travelled near endless these ancient
One Woods. Now sleeping in clearings,
many Creatures clustered close. Knee-high
Giraffes & Bears, Pups & Kits, many others.
They would travel on in Dreamland, him looking,
ever looking, for the *way down*.



He filmed the White Tiger. He filmed the tan Fox.
 He filmed the grey Hedgedyhog, & his White Bunny companion.
 He filmed many, echo's echoes, till one day
 he drew near an Imp. She echoed his laugh,
 & more of her own. The calm skies shuddered
 to play, the air braided close, she skittered far,
 & he chased.

Chased her *down deep*, chased her *way down*.
 Down stone steps, now an endless Beach.
 His rags of many worlds flew from him,
 he chased with but low-drooping hat, tripod,
 boots of vines & stones.

To film. To learn. To know.

The Ancient Sea Turtle seeming mile high before him.
 A Gate-Keeper, too, what his ken yearned to know.

* * * * *

viii. The Great Filled

The Gate-Keeper speaks:

“It was the *buzz* I knew in my
 home world, one I left hardly more than
 a boy, something to lure me away & out,
 always *away & out*.

“I barely knew what to know then,
 but fear, hunger, anguished movement.
 I was less a unique boy than
another hungry mouth.

“But the *buzz* meant to lure me away
 & out to the White Woods, one I knew
 as a boy, told *never* to venture them
 alone. *Enemies, worse*, within them.

“As I grew, I realized how little I had,
 how little I *was*, but a burden in
 a hard time. What could enemies
 do to me? What take from my empty hands?

“I left the encampment before
 dawn, took nothing but the clothes on me
 & the old hat on my head. Followed
 the *buzz* freely *out & away*.

“Once in the White Woods, free
of all that, the *buzz* became
a *hmmm* to me. I heard it clearly
among the trees, lower too, somehow.

“I heard it in myself & followed it
with wonder, no hunger, no fear, no guilt
for needing because small, followed
it wondering & humble.

“It brought me, like a kind hand to
a needful soul, to a great, vast
Filld, with many more chances now
to choose *out* & *away* myself.

“Then began my travels, ever wondering
& humble, following the *hmmm*,
unknowing if any could hear
what I heard or if, somehow,
I was Gate-Keeper for these
beautiful magicks I found that day
in that great, vast Filld.”

* * * * *

ix. Refugee

The Gate-Keeper continues:

“I became a refugee, a traveler, by many braided paths,
to many braided worlds, letting the *hmmm*
lure *on* & *in*, & *out* & *away*. My own people
were refugees too, the spaceship half-buried
in their ground what I knew
of history & origins.

“But I carried with me something of my own,
something the *buzz*, then the *hmmm* had found in me.
Maybe just fertile ground, but with it a will
to know,
to endure,
to prosper.

“I was a boy still, curious to trouble, light-footed to flee.

By frequent hunger became a thief in the many camps
 I traveled through. By thievery collected bruises
 & beatings more often than bread.
I needed a plan.

“One village I traveled was famed afar for
 its Ancienne Coffeehouse. A place friendly to
 travelers, refugees, both of which I was by choice.
 Penniless, I pushed through its massive,
 ancient door of White Birch.

“The *hmmm* had led me here, me now wanting more
 than just the freedom of escape. I wanted to *arrive*,
 not so much to a place as to *myself*.
 Sat in an old armchair, in a deep corner,
 sunk in & waited.

“The air was close in there, warm, comforting,
 a contrast to the winter’s icy snarl outside.
 Thick with conversation in many kinds of tongues.
Safe. A safe place for traveling refugees,
 like me.

“Closed my eyes, began to *hmmm*
 my question, feeling along for the pattern,
 maybe for the narrative.
 My words now to sum my
what now to do? gropings then.

“By answer, another *hmmm* joined me & mine.”



To be continued in Cenacle | 115 | April 2021



Ekponoimo Iphyok



Memoir of a Boyhood in Cameroon and Nigeria

*“The masquerade that would dance well,
begins from the shrine.”*
—Oroko proverb

Chapter 2: The First Time I Saw a White Man

i.

Mamma’s business expanded. She began a bilateral trade between Cameroon and Nigeria, buying bales of used clothes, locally called *okrika*, and household items, and selling them in the local market. Eager customers came often to our house to check for her return, so that they’d have the opportunity of making good selections before the clothes were taken to the market. She also traded on footwear for both sexes.

During her business hours, she’d wobble the bell she took to the market, dance like an elated masquerade, and sing songs that lacked rhythm: “One-one hundred francs, one-one hundred francs, pick one, pick two, mother of all children is here.”

She’d take a break when she felt uninspired, and then rouse up again her business flame with more songs. This new path became so engaging to her that she completely immersed in it.

Sometimes Mamma traveled and didn’t return for months so that, gradually, she became a shadow in my mind. I was scared that something was not right. Otherwise, why would Grandma be crying in the dead of night?

ii.

My younger brother Sakanitua and I often went to school without eating, and Grandma would pull me by my ear and sternly remind me to come with Sakanitua after school to her at Grandpa’s farm in the forest. She said our food would be ready before we reached the farm.

We returned home from school one day during lunch break and there was no food. We were hungry. I decided to light a fire under the rack to boil some cocoyam (a root vegetable) to eat with palm oil. All my attempts to put on the fire were futile. Sakanitua began to cry. I sat close to him and we cried together, changing gear after gear, with varying pitch, and finally subdued like a drone.

I stood up, took him by the hand, and we began trekking to Grandma’s farm. The road passed through the grounds of the Roman Catholic Church, where there were fruit trees of all sorts, and a statue of a woman holding a child in front of the church.

I didn’t understand why everyone who wanted to enter into the church paused before her first, chanted something to her (inaudible to my ears), and performed a certain hand gesture to their faces and chests. There was also a statue of a nearly naked man nailed on a tree.

“Come, let us go and stone down mangoes and apples,” I said to Sakanitua. He followed behind

me as we passed through sweet fragrant flowers into the orchard. Chirping birds flirted tunefully on the trees.

I tossed stones at the ripe fruits while Sakanitua waited anxiously to pick any that would fall, but my weak hand failed to budge my targets. Nonetheless, I kept on trying.

“Look there!” Sakanitua suddenly cried to me.

A white figure, dressed in a white cassock and wearing small finely fitted transparent eyeglasses, stood before a building a little distance from us. He beckoned us to come to him.

“*Ruuuuuuun!*” I shouted to Sakanitua, while bolting away down the steep toward the football field, owned by the mission school.

When I reached the main road, I remembered I was with my brother. I heard his voice back from where I’d run, crying and calling on me to come and take him.

I knew I was done. “Grandma will kill me today, Oh, I am finished!” I began to weep.

iii.

I gallivanted nervously around the football field until it was almost nightfall. Farmers were returning from their labors along the main road. I was certain that my brother had been given to dogs to eat. I wanted to die but lacked the courage to do so.

Lost in my worries and frustration, I suddenly heard footsteps behind me that made me writhe in paroxysm.

I turned and saw it was Sakanitua and the White Man, holding hands like friends do, and walking towards me.

“I didn’t pluck any mango! I didn’t!” I pleaded in my great panic.

He kept walking towards me with an assuring smile on his face. He offered me his hand to shake. I nervously took it.

He asked me some questions I couldn’t understand because it seemed the words were falling from his nose. I couldn’t make out a thing. But I grew confident that he was friendly.

He took us back to his house and the cook brought me rice and stew with a big slice of chicken on it. My brother refused to eat with me because he was already overfed. I ate and drank an absolutely chilled water, such I had never drunk before.

He brought out his car, opened the doors, and told us to get in. He drove us home while I showed him the way. When we reached our compound and alighted, he got out too. Suddenly the compound was crowded with children and adults.

Children were chanting: “White Man, I want to enter into your motor too! Come and carry me!” When he turned to look at them, they all ran away.

iv.

He followed us to the backyard where Grandma was sitting. When she saw him, she stood up and brought him a chair to sit. Grandma told him that her husband was a house-boy to the Whites at Victoria, Cameroon (renamed Limbe in 1982). She said that she and her husband had served them for more than twenty years, until they returned to their own country.

It was the first time I heard all this. I began to wonder about why we didn’t have chickens and fruit trees, and beautiful houses like the White Man? About why Grandpa always went to farm with torn and dirty clothes? Did the White Man not give him decent clothes? I now had many unanswered questions.

That night when we sat by the fireside, with Grandma roasting corn, I asked, “What did the White Man give you and Grandpa?”

“Where do you think that the wall clock with the big knob, that rings everyday in the parlor, came from?” she responded.

Judith Haggai



out from my snail shell
tiny peek beyond blankets
no sound of weather!

* * *

what problems?
have bed, roof, shower, coffee
life is generous

* * *

during pandemics
mind reaches out to voices
time space no matter

* * *

a plum tree
from the fertile soil
jewels in the garden

* * *

flap of wings
formations of bird art
on blue canvas

* * *

layers of moments
gathered into clumps of years
change without change

* * *

art instead of life
dreams suggest this solution
as i paint the night

* * *

night continues day
borders blur as mind loosens
sun flows into moon

* * *

bird sings to cricket
all the patience in the world
no answer needed

* * * * *

Baas End News
 No. 306, September 21, 2013
 Editor: Algeaaron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig

Three Mith of the Litel Cultured Books!

Az mah deer needs no
 Princess Crissy kahid-Imapeana,
 or Crisy in much friendlier tong,
 iz wurst mah dearest friends
 Bumber pers, upp theer, with Sheila
 Bunnig & Low & Ally, pepid & even
 much sily vampire bruthr Aleksandra
 Ah I hat ino's sake.
 An I think mah frekwent
 travils too visit Crisy at her
 palas inn Imapeana tu wee told.
 But wat iz ee strang about
 this mater was wen I went too
 visit Crissy recentley & found
 her causang on bizness
 I shud up in mah vizzell waye

Baas End News
 No. 307, September 28, 2013
 Editor: Algeaaron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Three Mith of thee Travelers

Looke kwikiee, deer i geers,
 & yu kan seee mee. Invited to
 st foolish kuming on throo thee
 idor of Shielas Thron Ruum with
 mah nuw apprenpis reporter Boop
 Ah, follow me at fr mee.
 Seey me thinking o so foolish
 thatt Sheila Bunnig & Princess Crissy
 will well kum me omn ion too
 knowed thee misteries of theer bizness
 inn spand ipog ion pote & allot
 of cultured litel booby containin
 a mith. Old storey, stini around
 thatt quid, I seee.
 Crissy saw mee deer
 smilin o princess, qari shee iz
 a Boop too, & mee lookd lik shoo

Baas End News
 No. 308, October 5, 2013
 Editor: Algeaaron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Too Three Speechin Comon, With the Nigh Kwestyun!

Yer old pall Algeaaron Beagle
 iz wan bedaddeye reporter
 whoo chases his storie awll
 thee waye. Spintims this
 kan bee heeully too mah deape
 demiz & oaks a moor, gott
 the jest, wat I seee. Nottevery
 quitz lucky enott too nowa
 Julius newspaper too mak.
 I food hatt complain
 thee chasest kiss tm around
 thee. Befrapz mah quiz & troo
 bootrend, Princeps Crissy of
 Imapeana ngadididid & a stamp
 timbrown cofe inn wen ut hat

Baas End News
 No. 309, October 12, 2013
 Editor: Algeaaron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Miths Maye Meene Menee Thingz

Yer old pall Algeaaron hee terd
 menee thingz for thee yearz. Meez eye,
 I think thatt havins quid friends
 iz ee important ez havins a quid
 job too doo. I am, wuky both an
 troo & mebee thatt iz why I luv
 ritine mah newspaper about Baasend
 so much.
 Enuwaye, enuff of thee mishes
 shuld be into thee ore. I was in
 Shielas inn on Roome with Sheila
 & Princess Crissy mah quid lead
 & Boop whoe iz Crissy's hat friend
 butt iz nott a ferrel butt iz it
 seemz strang too say mah newspapers
 agentiss. In nott no bad cofe.



Bags End Book #17: The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers! Part 1

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at:

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.

* * * * *

What are the Little Colored Books?

As mah Dear Readers know, Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna, or Crissy in much friendlier tongue, is one of mah dearest friends. I number her up there with mah adopted sisters Sheila & Lori Bunny, & Allie Leopard, & even mah silly bumping brother Alexander Puppy, if I have to say.

And I think mah frequent travels to visit Crissy at her Castle in Imagianna are oft-told in mah beloved newspaper.

But what was different about all of this recently was when I went to visit Crissy & found her away on business.

I found the green & gold door from Bags End to Imagianna in its usual hallway. Walked on through, & then climbed up the golden-tinged green grassy hill to her Castle. Like always, I knocked 3 times, like the old song

says.

The door opened & there was Boop, Crissy's servant & bestus buddy, who looks like a turtle but isn't.

"Hiya, Boop!" I said in mah friendly Algernon way.

Boop nodded & bowed & I guessed was in a mood 4or all kinds of 4ormalities & protocols. Sure, why not?

"Can you announce me to Princess Crissy?" I asked politely.

"The Princess is away," he said.

"Away where?" I asked suspiciously.

"On business," he said shortly. Hmm.

Well, I am short but Boop is not much taller so I muscled up to him almost eye to eye & said, "What business, Boop?"

He backed off when he saw I was in no mood 4or words that just decorated the air. Or something.

"Well, it's strange you came here to ask, Algernon. She left to visit your King Sheila on business."

"Sheila? Business with Sheila?" Hmm again. She is no King, by the way. Mayor 4or true, King 4or wish.

Boop nodded. He really didn't know any more. So I stopped being mad or annoyed or whatever I was. Boop is a good guy.

"Would you like to come back to Bags End with me to find out about this?" I asked, friendly anew.

Boop got almost puppy dog excited saying "yes!" Then he calmed down quick, like catching a sneeze halfway.

"Would it be alright?" he asked.

"Listen, pal, if they got business then me as a good Beagleboy journalist needs to be there, writing it down," I declared.

"And me?" he asked hopefully.

I eyed him almost grumpy. Then changed mah mind & tried eyeing him thoughtfully. That worked better.

"You can be mah Apprentice Reporter," I said, half making it up.

Well, I guess maybe it was his secretest wish, but suddenly Boop was as plainly & noisily happy as I had ever seen him. He practically shouted, "O! Boy!"

I nodded OK more to me than him. I didn't know what business I'd be walking in on with Crissy & Sheila, but now I had an Apprentice Reporter to follow in mah own dubious pawsteps.

Ah, well, life of a Beagleboy journalist. "Let's go, Apprentice! Lock up the Castle first so it don't get looted!" I cried merrily.

I had never seen Boop lock up Crissy's Castle be4ore but he had this large key he kept on a necklace under his turtle-neck sweater. Not a turtle though.

He nodded smiling when he was done & then together we walked back down the hill to the waiting door to Bags End.

We found ourselves back in the familiar hallway when I started wondering if Boop had ever been to Bags End, the way he kinda cuddled so close to me, not like he liked me so much or just needed cuddling.

"Boop, have you been to Bags End be4ore?"

He shook his head.

"O, OK. Well, let me show you mah Milne's Porch anyways be4ore we go to see Sheila & Crissy." He liked that idear. I did too because it gave me some more time to wonder if I wanted to interrupt Sheila & Crissy on their business. With an eager Apprentice, no less.

So we detoured to the Bunny Family apartment where there is the

bedroom I share with mah brother Alex, & through whose window is Milne's Porch. Pant pant.

Anyway, we climbed through the window & onto Milne's Porch. I invited Boop to join me in mah comfy armchair. He still cuddly did not hesitate.

I was now stopped so I thinked a moment. Then another. Some more too.

"What else did Crissy say about this business trip?" I asked.

Boop thinked too. "She didn't say much. Just put on that long old coat with all the little colored books &--"

"Wait! Wait! What long old coat? What little colored books?"

Boop looked at me like I was crazed, then remembered I'm not & why.

"O. Well, she found the old coat in the Castle. She wears it a lot even though it does not fit her properly. Almost drags on the floor."

Well, I thinked he was gonna keep saying more & more words & I was gonna need them less & less.

"Boop, are the little colored books why she is going to see Sheila? What's in them?"

He thinked. "A myth, I think."

"A myth?"

"Yes, a story. That's what a myth is, Algernon. Like an old story, or maybe a group of them, that is still remembered & kept around."

"O. So she had readed this myth in these little colored books & decided to go see Sheila about them?"

"Well, she just walked around the Castle in the old coat 4or awhile. She said she wasn't sure she hadn't known this coat some other time. And she would sit in the hallways reading the little colored books. All times day & night too. No proper bedtime."

I interrupted again. "So she told you she was going to see Sheila about them?"

He nodded. "She wore the old coat too. Would not take it off for anything."

I nodded. OK. Thinked a thought. Then nodded again.

"Let's go, Apprentice," I ordered, without thinking too much about how funny me-as-boss-of-anybody sounded in out loud words.

But Boop amiably followed me & we made our way down ramps & along a certain hallway to Sheila's Throne Room. It's the door with the crown & carrot picture on it. O! Yuk!

I walked in first, in case Sheila decided a pounding was in order for those that interrupted. I'd teach mah Apprentice how to take those, & better yet how to avoid them, another time.

Walked on through the door, & there was Crissy in her long old coat on the floor, & there was Sheila next to her, & they were both just totally surrounded by lots of little colored books!

* * * * *

The Myth of the 4 Famous Travellers!

Look quickly, Dear Readers, & you can see me bright-eyed & o so foolish coming on through the door of Sheila's Throne Room with mah new Apprentice Reporter Boop (huh?) following after me!

See me thinking o so foolish that Sheila Bunny & Princess Crissy will both welcome me on in to reveal the mysteries of their business in regards to a long old coat & a lot of little colored books containing a myth. Old story, still around. That is good, I guess.

Crissy saw me, dear smiling Princess girl she is, & Boop too, & she looked like she had so many smiling hugs to give out. In her long old coat & all.

Sheila did not look like she was also full of hugs to give.

"Out, beagle! Out now!" she ordered.

"Wait, but!" I said, incompletely 4or a sentence but enough to complain.

Crissy got in between Sheila & her angry fighting paws & me their targeted goal.

"Let me have one pound, Crissy!" Sheila cried. "Just one!"

"No, Sheila. Let him &, um, Boop? sit in Algernon's corner quietly," Crissy said in her sweet way nobody could resist. And Sheila didn't resist either, though she dirty-look-blamed me 4or it.

"Boop is mah Apprentice Reporter," I explained.

"Too much to misspell 4or even you, beagle?" Sheila grumped, & then laughed meanly at her own grump. Then she remembered how I interrupted her & got annoyed at me all over. But I just kept to mah corner with Boop like Crissy said so. Lucky I have a matt there 4or just such need.

She started talking to Sheila but I could tell she was kind of explaining 4or me & Boop too.

"I found this coat in my Castle. In the closet of one of those rooms I don't see very often."

Sheila nodded. She knowed all this already, was mah guess, but ah well. Strangely tolerant 4or her.

"And it seemed familiar to me, just the coat. Then I found all of these little colored books inside."

I tooked a chance. "What's the myth about?"

"Travelers, beagle," Sheila said. "There are these 4 Famous Travellers to strange places, & the adventures they have, & who they meet on their way." She finished with a look that told me that was enough 4or mah lowly sort.

I nodded though. Glad to have that much.

That's when mah Apprentice Reporter Boop piped up. Hoo boy.

"Miss Bunny, if I may. This is Boop from Bags End News, if you will."

"I wish I didn't have to," she grouched, but I could tell that Boop amused her with his manners. And Crissy loves him. And she loves Crissy. So, by cousins, she let him talk.

"How many books are there in all? Do they have an order to them? Is there a first & last one?"

Crissy smiled, liking these questions, but what shocked me is that Sheila did too.

"We don't know yet but maybe." She motioned Boop over! I slunk over too, wondering how things somehow always went this way, in variation. But I do like Boop, so whatever. On with the show.

There were sure a lot of these little colored books! I looked in wonder from one to the next.

"Algernon," Crissy said. She was still willing to talk to me which amazed me. "I wonder if I should write out this myth in some new way?"

"New way?"

"Well, it seems like these little books are more like notes so the myth gets remembered. But it's not like a big story!" Her pretty bloo eyes were all excited as she does.

"So a storybook?"

"Yes. Or a Grand Production, like the Creatures do. I don't know. Maybe both."

I nodded. Good idears. "Who are the 4 Famous Travelers?" I asked.

"Where do they travel?"

Crissy sorted among the little colored books till she found a red one, which she opened up to the beginning.

"One is a girl whose name is Marie. She has red hair & bare feet. She sometimes travels with Faeries & maybe a White Bunny too."

Hmm. "She sounds familiar, Crissy."

"Really? How?" Crissy & even Sheila both looked interested.

Instead of explaining with words, I led them all, including mah overachieving Apprentice Reporter, to the level where there was a picture of the red-haired girl & her Faeries.

"This picture is how we get to the Creature Common!"

Crissy looked back & forth from the little red book in her hand to the picture, & she was amazed.

"This is Marie the teacher who begins her travels because she loses her mountain."

"Loses?"

"She sees it in the water of the pond near her house, when she is sitting nearby at the fishin' hole, but when she looks up to where it should be, it isn't there!"

Wow. Me & Boop were impressed.

"That sounds like a good start to a myth," I said.

Sheila bullied her short way among us. Bad idear to ever misplace her whereabouts. "What do you know about myths, beagle?" she demanded.

"Nothing except they are old stories that folks still don't forget!" I said with mah only defense.

Sheila paused in her intended poundings of me. Pre-pound, as it were. I stood, un-pounded still, & thus hopeful.

"OK. You know one thing," she admitted. Almost too not grumpy enough. So to speak.

I thinked quickly some more. "Maybe mah good friend Larry the Spider can help us."

"You think he would, Algernon?" asked Crissy all bloo-eyed & nice. Truly she junks mah heart-bone.

I nodded. "I will go to the Creature Common & ask. It might help us figger it all out."

"Shall I come too?" asked mah briefly forgotten Apprentice Reporter Boop.

O yah. Him. Hmm. I thinked fast.

"No, Apprentice. This is a job for a veteran news hound. I mean, beagle."

"O," he looked sad. And Crissy looked sad too. And Sheila's look was now like "it's your turn to deal with this like I always do."

I thinked fast again & tried to talk before I knowed I had no good idears. "I need you to stick with these 2 as they unearth this strange myth."

Boop & Crissy looked delighted. Sheila looked annoyed.

"Like glue?" Boop asked.

"Crazy!" I said, trying to wink, & failing.

Now I was suddenly bound for the Creature Common with a question I didn't know I had any time ago!

* * * * *

To the Creature Common, With Mah Question!

"Hurry up, beagle!" said Sheila impatiently. She was practically shoving me through the Marie picture whose travels the little colored books somehow tolded.

Crissy calmed Sheila down, or at least kept her from trying to push me through the picture with her fighting paws.

"OK. OK! I usually go through this picture to visit there when I am in Dreamland Bags End," I said. I looked at Crissy for help & she smiled one of those tricky Crissy smiles I never resist, & so it was easy to forget to remember whatever & climb on through.

I usually land in the Creature Common on this big bed & there is Dorris, a sorta Lead Pillow, & her friendly Partners. I find them sometimes on top of a kind of bunch of Pillows & blankets. Not Bunny Pillows, I'm pretty sure.

"Algernon!" she said all soft & finer then fine. "Climb my Heap! Have a visit!"

So I did. I climbed up over the lower Pillows & a purple & a blue blanket with yellow Duckees on it, until I made it up to the top of the Heap. Haha. And Dorris likes me visiting close nearby to her with no bullying ways like Betsy Bunny Pillow does. Or maybe used to.

Very soft. As in, ahhh. For a little while, I forgot my mission in my enjoyings of all this softness. But then I remembered.

Dorris don't got no more face than Betsy does, though much friendlier. So I just sorta talked around.

"Dorris, do you know about a bunch of little colored books that tell the myth of Marie the teacher & her fellow 4 Famous Travelers?"

She laughed, kindly. "Of course I do. They are famous! We hear about their adventures many nights."

O. Hmm. "You means somebody reads the stories to you guys to hear?"

"Well, first they get told & later they get written down, I think."

O. Hmm again. "Does this telling have to do with Marie's picture?"

"Yes, it does. And the others."

Well, now I was just confused.

Dorris laughed again, kindly, & tried a different way to explain.

She sort of bounced us down her Heap & we kept going along in some kind of roll together even though I was never rolled under at all.

Off the bed, onto the floor, & left the room we'd been in.

Now we were out in a sort of open area, not a room no more. I was safe in Dorris's softness still.

"Now look up!" Dorris said, nearly cackled.

On the wall was the picture of Marie with her Faeries! I looked some more on the other walls & there was a picture of a guy riding his bike near a tree in a little people-folks kind of town.

And another one was a picture of a pond with a mountain reflected in it, but there was no mountain to see. O, yah, Marie's pond! Her story & how it began.

Still another one was of a giant sign that had houses painted on it along this narrow road. There were strange & shadowy figures on the road too.

I looked & looked at all these pictures like I was in some kind of museum where all the pictures are neck-craning tall.

Finally, I humbly talked. "I don't know what all this means, Dorris."

Dorris laughed her charming kindly laugh. "It means there it more

than you know to all this!"

I nodded humbly. "There usually is."

Just then came walking into our company none other than mah good friend Larry the Spider! All black & orange with sparkly eyes too.

"Algernon!"

"Larry!"

Well, Larry climbed on into Dorris's softness too, which she liked. I guess such softness is best shared with friends when you can.

"I see Dorris is showing you the story pictures," Larry said.

"Wait! You mean the little colored books are stories about all of these pictures, not just the Marie one there?" I asked.

Dorris laughed again & Larry nodded.

O. Hmm.

"Sounds like a really big myth!" I said finally.

"Well, like Bags End is," said Larry.

I thought on this. Bags End a myth? "I suppose so." Then a new idear jumped in me. "Does one storyteller tell all these stories or a bunch?"

"Just one," said Larry. "He tells it most nights moving from picture to picture in turn."

"Well, since nobody else bothers to tell the Bags End, um, myth, him & me have that in common."

I tried to think of more to ask but I could not. So I did mah best to hug smaller than me Larry & soft Dorris, & they said, "Come visit again soon!" It was easy enough to fall asleep & wake up back in Bags End in mah bed like usual.

I hurried back to Sheila's Throne Room to see how things were going, & tell what I had learned.

And there was mah new Apprentice Reporter Boop with Sheila & Crissy, & he was organizing their work with the little colored books. Crissy looked amused. Sheila liked the organizing too, I guess.

"Sir, Sir," said Boop, to someone while looking at me. "We have so much to tell you about these little colored books!"

I started to tell about what I had learned when Boop said, "We think that there are 4 stories that combine to make the myth. Did you find 4 pictures in Creature Common?"

I nodded & almost said yes when he said, "Now that we know that, & are organized here, we can study these books & really figger this myth out!"

Boop looked so happy & Crissy smiled at me too, so I guessed he had done good work.

"Good job, rookie," I said, gruff but charming.

"Thanks, boss! What do we do now?" Boop looked all eager.

I thought & thought.

"Let's go visit the Trash Heap!" I cried. Well, nobody laughed but I still thought it was funny.

* * * * *

Myths May Mean Many Things

Boop then explained more about the little colored books. "We counted 8 of them in all. The challenge is that there are parts not in English."

Hmm. I nodded. "Do you know what language?"

Crissy smiled at me. "I am not positive but I have an idea. But first we should check with your friend Allie Leopard."

"That means go fetch him now, beagle!" Sheila ordered. Me having an Apprentice & being all involved in this story undid her preference 4or big-guys-only-in-charge.

Ah well. I hanged on best as I could. "Come along, Apprentice!" I said to Boop, friendly enough but ready 4or him to laugh loud in mah face. He just nodded & said, "You got it, Boss!"

Then Crissy caught mah attention & said almost shy, "Can I come too?" I was almost 4orgetting she is no traditional big guy.

I nodded & looked at Sheila who had gotten into her Throne with a carrot. O! Yuk!

"Time 4or a little nap," she grumbled.

Fine. We left the Throne Room & made our way up levels to where Allie Leopard often is, at the Bags End Liberry. He is always reading about words & languages & stuff there.

He was in a far corner of the Liberry at a table he likes because it is near a window that shows different places, just like they were right outside. He told me sometimes he thinks about what he has learned & looks out that window when he's doing this. Not so different from me in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch.

Allie looked up from the many books on his table & smiled at all of us. Then someone else sat down at his table too. It was Leona that nice grr girl lion!

There were greetings & kisses & hugs all around, especially 4or Boop & Crissy, who were visitors to Bags End.

"What are you guys reading about?" asked curious Crissy.

"We were looking up Leona's native tongue, Grrr," said Allie, with his green eyes shining. He loves all sorts of strange languages. Even Bump, sad to say.

"What did you find?" asked Boop.

Leona's pretty brown eyes looked all thinking. "It's not so much like words as it is like singing."

Hmm. "So when you grr, it's like you are singing a song?" I asked.

Leona nodded.

Now I explained why we'd come. "I think we got an even harder language than Grr 4or you to figger out, Allie."

Allie & Leona both looked very interested.

I nodded to Crissy, who told them about the little colored books she'd found in the long old coat in one of her Castle's occasional rooms.

"So it's in English but only sometimes?" asked Allie.

Crissy nodded & she tolded more. "What's really strange is that what words are in English & what words aren't keeps changing. I didn't notice it at first, until I was looking back over pages I had looked at already, trying to figger out the story better. And I could not see a pattern to all this."

"Like a funny game?" asked Leona.

Crissy nodded & smiled.

Well, Allie didn't need to be told twice to want to solve a language puzzle game, so he & Leona returned with us to Sheila's Throne Room. Sheila waked up & particularly glared at me 4or the fault. I nodded in mah mind, figgers.

But she was glad to see Leona, & especially glad to see Allie Leopard, who she hurried right among the little colored books to begin his sleuthing.

Now when Allie gets to figgering, he goes slowly & studies each detail of the mystery. He had his little notebook with him, that Miss Chris gaved him 4or a present. She drawed Sheila, Betsy, Alex, & even your old pal

Algernon on its cover. O shucks!

Anyway, he was using his green like his eyes pencil to make notes as he would read one little colored book after the next. Then it seemed like he was studying more than one of them at a time, & still making notes. And he was muttering to himself all the while in a tongue all his own, almost like a mongrel one with pieces from the many languages he knows. It was crazy to watch, but he usually figgers out language puzzle games good.

The rest of us watched & waited & took naps along the way.

Finally, he stopped. "I think I have figgered a few things out about these little colored books," he said. "But you're going to find it very strange."

We gathered around Allie to listen our best.

"Well, it is like someone is playing a game," he said slowly.

"A game?" we all said together, like a singing group.

He nodded. Then he opened up the little red book & showed us. "The words that change, change from English to a very old language. I don't even know any older ones."

Be4ore any of us talked more, he held up his paw. "Listen!" Then he readed from the little red book, making these strange sounds that were like, I guess, click-clicks & noise-noises.

"What's this language called, Allie?" asked Crissy.

Allie thinked a moment. "It doesn't have a really good name. Sometimes it's called by a lot of numbers. But I just call it G-Natter."

Hmm. I had the maybe-est of a bright idear, but I decided not to say something yet. Why volunteer to look dum?

"So someone who speaks G-Natter language is playing a game with these little colored books?" asked Sheila. She was too interested to be annoyed.

Allie nodded. "I think so."

"But how?" askd that nice Leona.

"I don't know. But, Algernon, I think you can help."

"Me? I do mah best just with English, pal," I said. "No offense," I added, just in case.

Allie smiled. "No, I think you need to go to the Creature Common to find some more things out."

"O. OK." I wondered if mah hardly an idear would find its way along by going there.

* * * * *

To the Creature Common With Another Question!

Even though I have knowed it awhile, & been an invited visiting guest, I must say the Creature Common is still a strange new place to me.

Its fellows have been around a long time, I think, tho they don't look like old guys, like mah aged & annoying relative Doctor Horatio Algernon does.

Also, they seem a lot lot nicer & working together than is usually true in Bags End. I don't hold against niceness, of course, in this too often mean & tricky world, but I guess I look 4or the catch. Niceness 4or a trick or a trap? Niceness to lure into a crazy scheme?

Well, no. Creatures don't seem to hold a trick behind their backs, like some in Bags End sometimes do.

But all this to explain your old pal Algernon's jitters at going back to the Creature Common again 4or answers. I had to remember they like me sincerely & mah newspaper even.

Baga End News
 No. 370 (October 13, 2013)
 Editor: Agemnon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creator: Threshold People
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Too Free, Cipechun Comen
 With Another Question

Even tho I hav naved itt awil
 & beens a invitaz izing guest,
 I must saye thee d
 iz still a strong ru
 mee

Itz felloe hav bin
 langg tim, I think, th
 looke in ~~the~~ old 3/2
~~the~~ apid d ~~the~~
 wikt for Harashad
 Aliso thas seem
 nise & wendable ~~the~~
 iz puzel, thas in
 I don't hold ~~the~~ against r

Baga End News
 No. 371 (October 26, 2013)
 Editor: Agemnon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creator: Threshold People
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Moonlite Showz thee Waye!

Well, itt had taken mee awil
 too ~~much~~ awil thas spt with thee
 misteres of thee itel Karend booke
 thatt nat fall Princess
 in a long cote in won
 exazhment rooms.

Mah reeserches had
 to time too thee, each
 weep mah friend very the
 fierliu akiontans Yori
 Kinsalata wtop thee lass
 Toid mee tolett thee Map
 mee witten thee thee list
 I hav too adant the
 wantz mad mer sers at

Baga End News
 No. 372 (November 29, 2013)
 Editor: Agemnon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creator: Threshold People
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Reading the Sektret Books!

This isoo findz vor old
 part Agemnon in the midel
 of describin a party, seen
 I was with my friends Sheila
 & any wifriced Cassy
 Boop mah resent appentiss
 repair in the midel of
 a green snare, tip finely see,
 goe, too thee thee libel cyord
 booke, Cassy had ra with the
 pokke's of an old brown cote
 in won of her Cassy's occazhment
 rooms.

But what is I fear d mai self!

And anyway it seemed like they knowed & were waiting 4or me. Which was nice. Through the Marie picture, by Dreamland Bags End like usual this time, & I found mahself again with ma good friend Larry the Spider & that quite soft & kindly Dorris Pillow. It was in the night there too.

"Hi Algernon!" they said, all friendly.

"Hi, Larry & Dorris," I said, probably even more friendly somehow 4or all the no-tricks-friendliness here.

So we sat on this comfy bed near to Dorris's piled up high Heap. I jumped right into mah talkings.

"It's about those little colored books again," I said.

Larry nodded & his smart eyes glittered. "We figgered."

So I explained how it seemed like someone who knows G-Natter language was playing a game in these books.

"And you have an idea, don't you?" asked Dorris.

"Well, yes, but I figgered I had better come here checking it out be4ore I go pointing mah paw."

They waited 4or me. OK. I took a breath & said, "Well, that little Pandy Bear Imp cackles & makes her many funny noises, & I think they sometimes sounds like what Allie Leopard told us G-Natter is like." I paused, thought. "And she likes games too."

They laughed. "It's how she teaches."

"By cackling & funny noises & s tricky games?" I asked.

Then I stopped & thought. Slowly, like Allie & his language puzzle games. Hmm. I nodded.

"But what is she teaching?"

"Sometimes she doesn't know be4ore. Sometimes even during. Sometimes even after!" said Larry.

"Sometimes never!" laughed Doris.

"Is it OK 4or me to ask? Mah friends in Bags End would like to know. Maybe we can find out the rules of the game or how to win."

Doris & Larry laughed but still not at me.

"Her games are too tricky 4or all that?"

"You have to figger them out by how they are," said Larry. "I know that sounds hard."

I nodded. "Say, can I go talk to her? Maybe she will give me a clue 4or extra efforts."

They laughed but did not object. Larry nudged me to look toward the room's big window. "Sometimes you can find her on that window sill over there."

I nodded & thanked them a lot. Nice guys. Smart too.

The bed was pretty high down to the floor, but I risked life & noze-bone & took mah tumble. Ow! But not really too much.

I crossed a long way, on a rug I think, & then come to where more Creatures were. I think this whole room is like their Bag or something.

But they were all very friendly. I liked it, all this friendliness, tho I guess only some things can be travelled with, back to one's own grouchier, if still beloved, homeland.

It was still in the night, so I am not sure which Creatures helped me to climb up to the window sill. I do know that I got patted nicely & friendly encouraging words said.

Someone whispered, "Her name is Rosa!ita, Algernon. Don't 4orget."

I thought I knowed that already but I like a good reminder.

Anyway, I made it rough & tumble up levels of dozing Creatures to the window sill. Looked around. No Rosa!ita the Pandy Bear Imp.

Hmm. I seed this very old guy though, with a long robe & a long beard, & leaning on a cane. He was looking out the window up to the big Moon over people-folks' houses & hills.

"Hello, Sir," I said politely. Old guys always get a Sir, I knowed from all the polite lessons I have gived to grumpy Bags End guys.

He stroked his chin but did not talk. Maybe listening. I took a chance.

"I am looking 4or a little Pandy Bear Imp named Rosalita. I think I have some questions 4or her."

He kept stroking his beard but I heard a noise somewhere. A sort of cackle. I looked up & saw Rosa!ita sitting up high on this old guy's shoulders!

"O! Hi! Hi there. Pandy Bear Imp! Rosa!ita, I mean to say. This is Algernon Beagle down below here. We have met be4ore."

Well, she sorta looked down & maybe smiled. I don't know.

"Do you know about some little colored books?" I asked.

She cackled then. And G-Nattered too a bit. I wished I had Allie Leopard with me to translate!

"Listen, guy. I know you like your games to play. And I have to say that you are really good at them, from what I can tell."

She was listening. I did not think that would last too long.

I thinked faster than I could & talked be4ore that. "We just want to read the stories in the myth of the 4 Famous Travellers. And you are playing in the pages. Like. Um."

I stopped & looked hard at her crazy smiling face, & thinked hard. "Like there's more to it somehow?"

Well, this was the very edge of mah cogitating, honest to goodness I say, & I hoped some of these words were coming out right.

She now was pointing out the window with her tiny little paw finger. To the Moon. Not a word, not a G-Natter, not even a cackle. Just pointing to the Moon.

"I don't get it!" I cried, frustrated. "Do I have to go to the Moon?"

"No," she said, in the softest, sweetest voice. "Let the Moon come to you! And then read."

O. Um. Uh? "OK! Thanks!" I said unsure. And I nodded politely to her & to her old guy friend too, & then made mah slow way back down.

Of course all those other Creatures helped me along mah way, & soon I was back in Bags End. I hurried to Sheila's Throne Room & burst in! They were all sort of clustered napping in Sheila's Throne.

"I think I know what to do. I just don't know why!" I said to the waking & smiling Crissy, & curious Boop, & even Sheila was looking at me like mah words meant something.

* * * * *

Moonlight Shows the Way!

"Let the Moon come to you," Sheila said, thinking fast & slow about Rosalita's words to me. She looked up at the ceiling, one purple eye closed, like she always does when she is thinking hard.

Boop thinked hard too, & then talked. "Well, the Moon seems to come when it gets full?"

Crissy was thinking hard too. "There is this tall hill in Imagianna which is good 4or watching the Moon."

"But does it come to you?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, unsure.

Well, this seemed like a puzzle I was not sure how to solve, but I told mah friends I needed to go to Milne's Porch & think it over. I said I would come back later with any bright or sorta bright idears.

I guess I looked so pensive that nobody even Sheila objected. So I took mah way down levels to the Bunny Family apartment, & inside to the bedroom I share with Alex, & through the window next to mah bed onto Milne's Porch. Ahh, arrival.

Nice comfy armchair. A big view of sky, always changing colors to watch.

Let the Moon come to me, then read. I thinked those words 4orward & then backwards & then mixed them up to see if I could shake out their answer that I would understand.

I guess I started to doze because now I was looking at the big full Moon & it had a face like the crazy smiling Pandy Bear Imp!

I took mah chance. "Hey, cackling Moon fella! What do your words mean?" I waited like the full answer would thus come unto me.

Yah, right. Instead, she made her funny G-Natter click-clicks & noise-noises, which weren't even like cackles that are at least a weird sort of laughing.

But at the same time, this Pandy Bear Imp Moon was coming toward me closer & closer! Bigger & brighter all the time until I found mahself awake but maybe a bright idear.

So I galloped back to Sheila's Throne Room. Really hurried back on mah short paws, truth to tell.

Once again, I burst in with news. The 3 of them were listening to some jazzy music on Sheila's phonograph. Probably Trane or Miles or Dizzy or Bird. One of those guys with the crazy names & fun music.

Sheila's dirty look told me she me she preferred her jazz records to mah repeated & sudden bright idears. But I persisted.

"Crissy, remember how you talked about that tall hill in Imagianna that is good 4or watching the Moon?"

She smiled her sunny sunny smile at me, & nodded.

"We need to go there. But we need to do it in Dreamland."

While they looked like question marks, I told them about mah dream on Milne's Porch. Then I said, "So, in Dreamland, we bring the little colored books to that tall hill under the full Moon. Then we can read."

Sheila was impressed, but still said, "You get weirder with the passing times, beagle." I nodded.

So it was that Sheila Bunny & Princess Crissy & Boop her bestus buddy (looks like a turtle but isn't one) & Allie Leopard (had to fetch him along the way) & your old pal Algernon Beagle gathered together in Imagianna & trekked from Crissy's Castle to the tall hill she told us about.

And it was a big full Moon up in the sky, but that was sure not enough to solve this language puzzle game. Crissy had brung the little colored books with us, in her old long coat, & Boop had brung some blankets that we made up into a sort of nest.

Allie Leopard brung his little green notebook & pencil too. We were quite prepared.

The trick was to bring all of us & all the little colored books & go to the Dreamland of this tall hill. And then let the Moon come to us, & then read.

I still wasn't sure about the whole thing when Crissy seed mah doubts plain on mah face & gave me a nice hug, & talked.

"When we get to Dreamland, we may not all be together like this. But I

have plan 4or that."

"What is it, Crissy?" I asked, & we all gathered close to know.

"Well, I have something called a hekk," she said. "I mean, I can borrow from someone. It's kind of like a dream wand because it will help me to gather us together here for our purposes."

"Borrow it from who?" asked Sheila.

Crissy smiled a little strangely. "O. Benny Big Dreams."

Ahh, him. Benny Big Dreams is a strange sorta tricky nice guy who seems to live in Dreamland somehow. Mah experiences with him made me doubt, but Sheila seemed to like him OK enough that she only said, "Well, I hope it works."

So we all got comfy close together among the blankets on the tall hill under the full Moon. 4or a long time, the light kept me awake & watching it, but then I guess I slept cuz I raised mah head to look around, & nobody else was there!

Hmm. OK. So now it was up to Crissy & her hekk stick from Benny Big Dreams to get us all back together so we could finally read those pesky little colored books.

I just sat waiting 4or awhile when I heard a noise behind me. I looked around, but nothing. Then I looked up at the Moon & it did seem closer! Hmm. What good would it be if it came to me like Rosa!ita said & I had no little colored books or friends to read them?

Then another noise & I looked around again, & nothing, & then up, & sure enough, the Moon was coming toward me! But what were those noises?

A third one & I was getting a little panicky. What would I do if it came all the way & crash landed on me & Dreamland?

I decided it was a good time to yell 4or help. "Help! Help! The Moon is coming somehow! Help! Sheila! Crissy! Allie! Even Benny Big Dreams!"

* * * * *

Reading the Secret Books!

I kept yelling & yelling 4or help till I noticed that the Moon seemed to slow my & Dreamland's imminent doom. I yelled at it a couple of more times, & the Moon backed off a bit more. I nodded up to the Moon & said, "Thank you!"

But no Crissy or Sheila or Allie or Boop. I decided not to annoy the Moon by stopping mah yelling, but I had to do something next. Crissy had said her hekk stick borrowed from Benny Big Dreams would help her to find all of us in Dreamland. So that was sorta reassuring still in mah uncertainty.

What to do in the meantime in Dreamland till Crissy found us all? I wasn't sure.

I mean, I guess I just wanted to understand. Someone telling a big myth story about these 4 pictures in the Creature Common, & writing it down too in these little colored books. That guy sounded kind of interesting to me.

"How do you do?" said someone next to me. He was a tall people-folks man with long red hair & wearing sorta ragamuffin clothes.

"Hi! You look a little like mah friend Ramie the Toy Tall Boy," I said, but friendly.

He nodded. "We're cousins."

"O! OK. Well, that makes sense."

"You're trying to find out about the Secret Books?"

"Is that what they are called?"

He nodded. "They tell some of the stories of a big myth."

I nodded a little too. "A myth is a story or stories everybody hasn't forgotten yet, right?"

He laughed. "I suppose so."

"So you tell the stories?"

He nodded. "It's one of my duties as Creature Coordinator."

"O. Um. Those guys need to be coordinated? They seem pretty orderly to me."

He laughed again for some reason. Then he pointed. "Your friends are coming."

I looked. There they were. "O great! Now you can meet them & we can ask you all about these Secret Books."

But I was saying mah eager & foolish words to an empty spot on the hill next to me. O rats.

But, sure enough though, here were come Crissy & Sheila & Boop. Crissy hugged me for finding, I guess.

I was gonna tell them about the Author of the Secret Books who I just met, but I stopped in mah mind before talking. Maybe he had come & gone for his own reasons, & I should hold mah peace for awhile. I did not exactly like not telling them but I didn't think it would do any harm.

Sheila eyed me curiously though. "What have you been up to, beagle?"

I shook mah head. And said, in a true if tricky way, "I was waiting for Crissy to find us all." She nodded & lost interest in me again, which was just dandy fine.

So here we were, now sitting on the tall Full Moon Hill in Dreamland Imagianna. Crissy had on the long old coat, & pulled out the little colored Secret Books, one by one, & sorta spread them out on the grass amongst us.

I told them how I had kinda shouted the Moon away before when it got too scary close. But now it was opposite from then in that friends & books were arrived & gathered & ready.

"Well, beagle?" demanded Sheila. Crissy & Boop smiled at me more encouraging than bully but still they were waiting too.

Hmm. Tricky spot. I was not sure what I was gonna do when I swear I heard that Secret Book Author guy's voice whisper inside mah ear-bone. "Sing, Algernon! Sing a nice little song to the Moon & all will be fine."

Hmm. Your old pal Algernon can't be said to have much of a croon, though I do like trying sometimes for fun.

So I nodded to mah friends & hoped some words & music would come when mah mouth opened up.

Now Now Moon!
O doncha come too late
or too soon!
Now Now Moon!
It's time to play!
It's time to shine!

OK, then, I nodded & hoped for the best on that. The Moon comed a little closer for sure, but I didn't think really close enough.

I looked at mah friends, & smiled something good, & hoped better good words were coming.

Now! Now! Moon!
 No time to shy or swoon!
 Now! Now! Moon!
 It's time to play! Now!
 It's time to shine! Now!

I felt all singed out with that, but lucky was that the Moon listened & decided to come close!

Crissy hugged me like she does when she's proud of me. Boop looked smiling like "Wow Boss!" or something. Sheila nodded & got down to work. Good idear.

"Do the words cooperate, Crissy?" I asked, excited finally.

Crissy read & read. "I think so."

Hmm. "You don't sound sure, Crissy."

She looked up, puzzled. "Some of it doesn't make sense, even in English."

I looked around to ask Allie Leopard but he wasn't there!

"Hey! Where's Allie?"

Crissy & Sheila & Boop looked around like they were surprised too.

Now your old pal Algernon is still a pretty amateur sniffer, but this seemed pretty easily to sniff strange.

"It's a myth, Algernon," said the Author guy secretly in mah ear-bone. "Myths aren't always easy to understand."

I nodded, I guess. Nobody else could hear him, which was strange too, but he didn't seem to be hurting matters.

"Maybe we should try & figure what we can understand, & then fill in the rest. Maybe Crissy can write those parts." Hey! Now that Author guy was talking words coming out of mah mouth!

But strange was that all of Crissy & Sheila & Boop were looking at me like I had a really good idear! Crissy was smiling bright as day.

I talked in mah mind. "Are you done?"

"I think so."

"OK then." I wanted to be scolding about talking other guys' mouths, but Crissy was pleased & complimented I could not.

"O, one more, Algernon."

"What?"

"You'll like it."

"OK."

So I talked again by his words. "I think we'll be OK reading the books even awake now."

I nodded inside mah head to the Author guy, thanks, & there's the door out.

So anyway, we woke up in our cluster on Full Moon Hill, & they checked, & yah, we could read the little colored Secret Books OK now by waking too. Still I say fooley. A little.

Crissy wanted to read the little colored Secret Books straight through be4ore deciding what next. She had on her old long coat again that nearly dragged on the grass. And the little colored Secret Books were all back in her coat's little inside jacket pockets.

Boop looked sort of bashful at me, waiting mah orders as his boss. I was kindly. "Apprentice, your new assignment is to go back with the Princess to Imagianna & consult with her on these books as needed. Don't let me down!"

Well, Boop practically saluted me until I paused him with a paw & said, "Now remember your boss's pacifist leanings."

Boop nodded & quickly de-saluted me. We walked with them back to their

Castle, said & hugged goodbye, & then me & Sheila returned to Bags End.

Later on, we were in Sheila's Throne Room & herself was slouched down in her Throne. Looking about ready to take a nap when she noticed me discontent on mah matt in the corner.

"What, beagle?" she asked with at least a little kindness.

"So we wait?" I asked. Yah, a dum question. Sheila answered rightly by saying nothing & getting right to her nap.

Hmm. 4or a story that had me traipsing hither & yonn both a few times, it was now suddenly kind of stopped.

And really, Dear Readers, that's where it is now. I am writing from mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, & I have tolded the whole story so far.

I'm not sure what to think of this myth business. It seems to me 4or a myth not to be 4orgetting, someone has to remember its words & keep telling it around. Course the myth had better be good & worth telling over & over like that.

If Bags End stories are like a myth, then I have to tell them the best I can 4or repeating. Straight & true, I always say.

Now I guess I don't really gotta worry that stuff too much because I always try to tell these stories with all mah stars out.

But now a new idear comes to me, even as I am writing this. Maybe Crissy could use mah help & encouragement?

"Go help her, Algernon," says that Author guy's voice in mah head. Back 4or more. I need a lock on mah mind's door.

He laughs & now he is sitting with me in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. Better, I guess.

He looks around. "It's nice here."

I nod.

"Telling the story with all your stars out is a good way to look at it."

I nod again.

"So that's why you should go help Crissy."

"But she is a good writer already, pal! She don't need me to show her how."

He nods, agreeing.

"What then?"

He sighs. "It's a strange story, that's all."

Now I was sniffing something. "Strange how?"

"It can take over all sometimes."

Hmm. "You OK, fella?"

"Yah," he said. But looked glum.

"Want the local tour, since you're here & also not in mah mind?"

"I know this place pretty well already," he smiled.

I nodded. But he was still waiting almost Boop-apprentice-eager.

I thinked. I thinked harder.

"Why aren't you helping?"

"Helping what?"

I raised mah paw very seriously. "Helping Crissy?"

He looked at me all wondering. "Helping?"

"You're the Author, right?"

"Well, I was. I mean, I told the stories as I understood them, & then I writed them down."

"But sometimes it was hard, or confusing, or you didn't writed down the best words?"

He nodded. Looked sad like maybe he was trying not to be4ore.

"OK, pal, then we're both going." I nodded twice.

He looked at me, thinking. "I do it better now. I understand & write it down better too."

I smiled at him. "It's OK, pal. I think I do too."

When we showed up together at Crissy's Castle front door, Boop was amazed.

"Hello, Apprentice Reporter," I said to his talklessness.

Lucky for us, Crissy showed up behind Boop.

"Algernon!" she said but then looked all girl shy at the Author guy. Then she led us all to her Secret Room. It's full of strange lights & pictures & soft cushions & stuff. Very Crissy-like in its colors & mysteries. Crissy sat with me close by. The Author guy kept standing for the moment. Maybe not quite sure yet.

I talked. "This is the Author guy of the little colored Secret Books. That's what he calls them."

Crissy looked speechless. The Author guy picked up her hand & shooked it.

"I know it's strange."

She nodded.

"I came to help."

She looked curious now. "Don't you know the whole story?"

The Author shook his head. "It, um, progresses as it goes along?"

"Progresses?"

"Gets bigger. That's what I didn't know when it started. How big it would get."

Crissy nodded a little.

"So now some of the early stories, I don't know." He looked sad.

But, short to tell, Crissy, being the nicest girl & Princess one could imagine, all in one, decided that she would of course help him. And me. And even Boop was gonna help! One way & another, we would figure this out together.

I don't know where it all comes out, Dear Readers, but I will surely tell you more as I do!

Read Part 2 in Cenacle | 115 | April 2021!

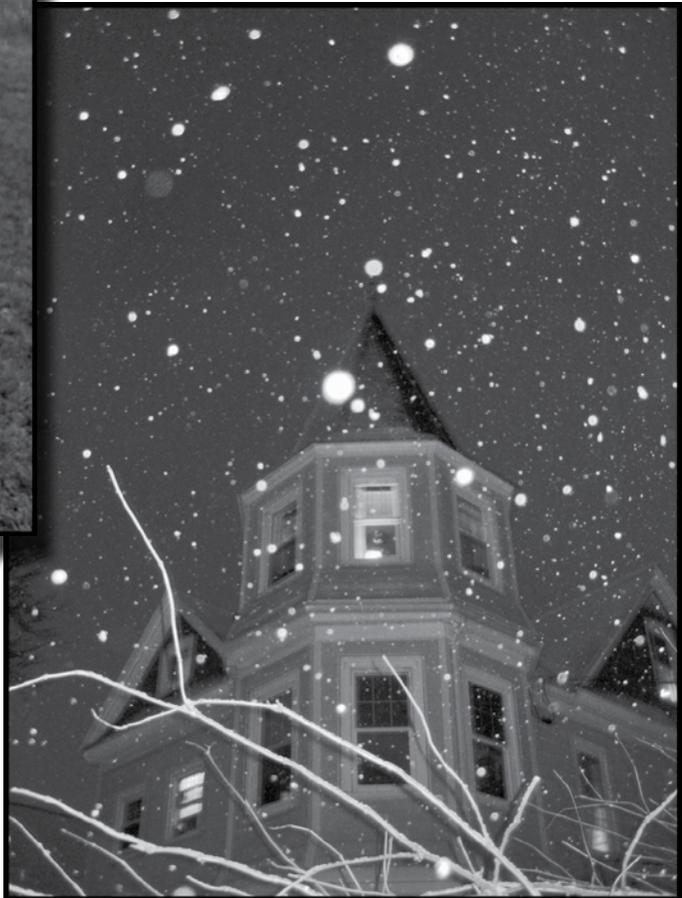


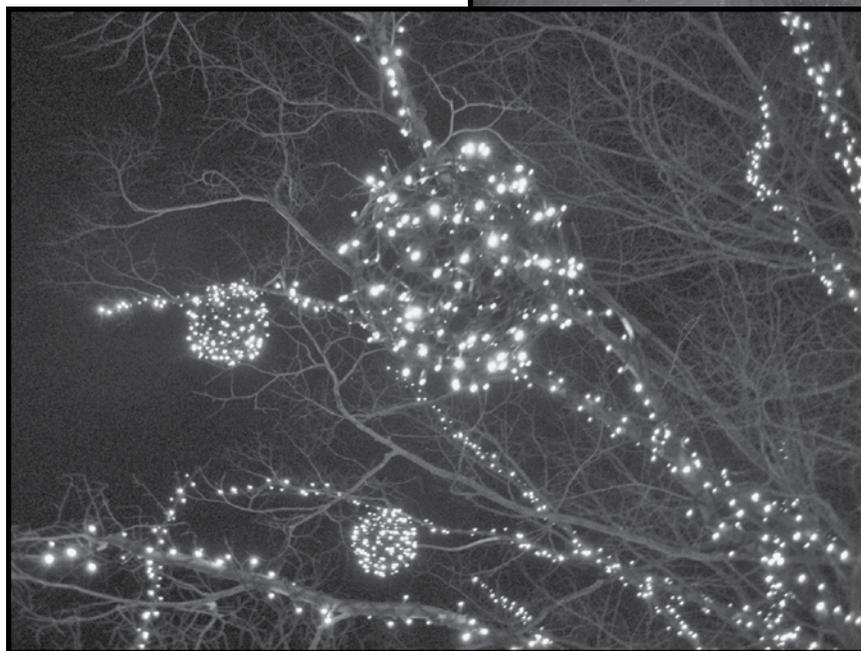
* * * * *



Winter
Gallery









Charlie Beyer

Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas from Father, Mother, Daughter, and Son!

This has been such a wonderful year for all of us, filled with events at home and the children in college. Here are a few of our highlighted events we would like to share with your family.

Son has become a young man now (and wants his parents to call him Dawg). Dawg sent Father into a spasm of rage when he leaked information through Mother that he was spending the college money (that we struggled for twenty years to get) on becoming an Art Major. Father calmly explained to Son (at knife point) (when he caught him) that the choices he made in life were his and that all his parents wanted for him was to be happy. It was made clear that being an artist meant being a selfish mentally unstable drug addict and that any marriage was doomed to failure along with a chronic inability to support one's self through life. Father gently explained that Son would be trying to leech off of his parents, and that probably wouldn't work even if they were buried.

Son continues to believe that he has talent (which he does, but his Father won't tell him so), and that he will be a famous artist. Father blames Grandpa for seeding this delusion of grandeur in his son, and resents him terribly for it. Grandpa is disgusted with the materialistic sellout of his son (who worked to provide the college fund) and will not talk to him. Son is in terror of Father's disapproval and avoids all contact. In particular, the yelling 2 AM phone calls, telling him that he is a total failure, just like Father heard from Grandpa all of his life. Family traditions are such a nice thing to carry on, especially on Christmas.

To his Mother's horror, Son moved into an apartment with two women at the beginning of the year, to live in abject sin. Just this last month though, boredom with the women has overtaken him, and he has moved out to sleep on the couch of a notorious local drug dealer. The two women screamed at him that he was the most worthless, heartless dog they had ever met, while he grabbed the VCR and ran for the door. Son cited the fact that he needed more time alone to work on his art.

Daughter, who wants her parents to call her Njori (after the Japanese soccer team thing), begins the new year in the limelight, as usual. Such an achiever! In her daily ten-hour workday in the biochemistry lab, she discovered enzymes with which cells talk when they are making breast cancer. Using a small nuclear source, she has mutated these cells to grow into small previously unknown organisms. Most of these she has managed to splatter with a hammer as they make a break for the end of the lab bench, but some have evolved a surprising speed as they are last seen sprinting down the hall. She published papers in the prodigious Cell journal and has been giving numerous seminars on campus to visiting scientists from around the world.

The Society for Biochemical Engineering gave Daughter a full scholarship for all tuition and living expenses until she attains her undergraduate degree in two years. The U.S. Army funded her mentor's research project with a few million, soon after the discovery. The Army sees this as a great benefit in uniform design, as the enzymes prevent not only breast cancer, but breast growth of any kind. Feminists are flocking to the lab for free treatments of reverse augmentation, thinking they will finally attain equality with men.

On Daughter's romantic side, she had a few rocky lesbian relationships earlier in the year, but then settled down with a nice long-haired bodybuilder. This nice young man had a Schwarzenegger athletic scholarship. Unfortunately, when Daughter would go into a dissertation on reverse transcriptase recombinant RNA, the poor fellow's jaw would drop and his cow eyes would cloud over. He doted on her, though, cooking for her, carrying her books, cleaning her apartment, and gently placing small fruit snacks in her mouth while she pored over some medical tome.

A few months ago, Daughter politely dumped him, citing acute boredom, but now uses him on a recreational basis, should some small need arise. He waits at home for her call with only the "pet" mutated organisms eating the rugs that Daughter left behind.

Mother is very proud of her but Father would like to see the college money being used constructively to get a husband, as it was intended.

Mother has had a busy year on the job. The old woman that she is caring for has continued in good health, in spite of predictions that she will age quickly and die. Mother has introduced new routines on the job, which include things such as a mental exercise game where she hides familiar things, like valuables, and reports them to be stolen by the other caregivers.

Also, new music has been filling the house, particularly a lot of heavy metal thrash rock played at high volume.

Outdoing herself, Mother has added many new spicy dishes from around the world to the menu, making meals more exciting. Mother says that the hospitalizations are not related to the curried snake or menthol lard milkshakes, but I think the doctor disagrees. Lately, the old woman has appeared to have aged a little more, but this is normal for a person of her years.

Life around the house has been just fine since Mother divorced Father last year.

Things have been under a little more control since she owns the house and all the assets. Father continues to pay all the household bills in exchange for the small downstairs room, so that helps. In the Spring, Mother demanded that Father move out after she discovered the e-mail affair, but in the fall she let him move back in after a battery of STD and AIDS tests.

Now Father pays rent on the downstairs room in addition to the bills.

Mother is looking quite sexy and smart lately, having lost a lot of weight from "relationship stress," and with all that new jewelry she's been "borrowing" from the job.

Father started this past year in court, over the arrest for the hallucinatory mushrooms. Shortly thereafter he began drug counseling "treatment" and twice weekly AA meetings. Somehow he managed to keep this from the attention of his government employers and avoided being fired because of the "zero tolerance" program. It worked out about the same anyway, because Father quit his job in May, citing personal restraint on his flamboyant personality in the "bureaucratic hell."

About this time, Father got a hovercraft building project going, that had him working around the clock, seven days a week. The hover was for an Eskimo who had a backlog of "Indigenous People"'s dollars, and a heap of broken snowmobiles in his front yard. When delivered, the Eskimo tried to cross over to Russia and smashed into an ice ridge, disabling the craft on a drifting ice flow 165 miles from the nearest land. Father continues to be involved with this project in a legal respect.

Later in the summer Father got some contract charter work, but it was rather spotty and plagued with expenses and breakdowns. Father continues to be unemployed, as he has been these last five months, and may be forced to move out of his room and back to the girlfriend's house. Father left the girlfriend in September, wheedling his way back into the house, citing the fact that she was the most uninteresting person he had ever met. Father is hoping that Mother will let him stay at the house, at least until his parole is up, before moving back into his truck. Mother thinks he's back on the 'shrooms.

The family cats are all fine, except for Willy and Sam, who Mother had euthanized for crapping all over the house. Fluff (the remaining cat) uses the kitty litter box pretty religiously now and oddly avoids Mother.

*So—we hope that Santa brings you all the wonderful things
that he has for us in these past twelve months.
We wish you a Merry Christmas and all the best in this next Happy New Year!*

The Family

Colin James

Breakthrough in the Beau-Ideal Distinction

According to my mustache,
we are running a little late.
Polytheistic like a twisting caterpillar,
we came the long way.
Should have gone over our route
beforehand, best to prepare.

Your mother will not be expecting claustrophobics.
I usually feel it in my feet first,
that indisputable sense of loss.
She will be watching from her window,
nod in the direction she supposes.

I'll bring in all the extra baggage.
We have already procrastinated
way too many times to chance it.

* * *

The Yellow Fedora of Hans Gilbranson

Grandsons soon become bored, appreciate
more than a semblance of interaction.

Now that the trucks and buses
have been adequately sorted,
we can move on comfortably
without a hint of innuendo to
the transmorphically less important.

Like carrying a sign of conformity,
this kid is going to turn out all right.
How could he not survive
the ratio of indulgence? Ask him,
I'd wager he already knows.

* * *

Some Sticklers for the Unexceptional Plausibly Posturing at a Piano Burning

Excessive heat gives me toothache.
My walkabout had already
popped a few fillings,
and I could see the iguanas
were getting really annoyed.

A map, according to actual study,
necessary. Nods to *Wikipedia*.
I now know as much as you.

The subjective is forever drifting,
like them clouds of tights pants
I should be peeling downward,
had this mahogany not agreed to.

* * * * *





The Dead

[Classic Fiction]

Published in Dubliners, 1914, Grant Richards Ltd., London

<http://www.bibliomania.com/0/0/29/63/frameset.html>

Lily, the caretaker's daughter, was literally run off her feet. Hardly had she brought one gentleman into the little pantry behind the office on the ground floor and helped him off with his overcoat, than the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again and she had to scamper along the bare hallway to let in another guest. It was well for her she had not to attend to the ladies also. But Miss Kate and Miss Julia had thought of that, and had converted the bathroom upstairs into a ladies' dressing-room. Miss Kate and Miss Julia were there, gossiping and laughing and fussing, walking after each other to the head of the stairs, peering down over the banisters and calling down to Lily to ask her who had come.

It was always a great affair, the Misses Morkan's annual dance. Everybody who knew them came to it, members of the family, old friends of the family, the members of Julia's choir, any of Kate's pupils that were grown up enough, and even some of Mary Jane's pupils too. Never once had it fallen flat. For years and years it had gone off in splendid style, as long as anyone could remember: ever since Kate and Julia, after the death of their brother Pat, had left the house in Stoney Batter and taken Mary Jane, their only niece, to live with them in the dark, gaunt house on Usher's Island, the upper part of which they had rented from Mr. Fulham, the corn-factor on the ground floor. That was a good thirty years ago if it was a day. Mary Jane, who was then a little girl in short clothes, was now the main prop of the household, for she had the organ in Haddington Road. She had been through the Academy and gave a pupils' concert every year in the upper room of the Ancient Concert Rooms. Many of her pupils belonged to the better-class families on the Kingstown and Dalkey line. Old as they were, her aunts also did their share. Julia, though she was quite grey, was still the leading soprano in Adam and Eve's, and Kate, being too feeble to go about much, gave music lessons to beginners on the old square piano in the back room. Lily, the caretaker's daughter, did housemaid's work for them. Though their life was modest, they believed in eating well; the best of everything: diamond-bone sirloins, three-shilling tea and the best bottled stout. But Lily seldom made a mistake in the orders, so that she got on well with her three mistresses. They were fussy, that was all. But the only thing they would not stand was back answers.

Of course, they had good reason to be fussy on such a night. And then it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife. Besides, they were dreadfully afraid that Freddy Malins might turn up screwed. They would not wish for worlds that any of Mary Jane's pupils should see him under the influence; and when he was like that, it was sometimes very hard to manage him. Freddy Malins always came late, but they wondered what could be keeping Gabriel: and that was what brought them every two minutes to the banisters to ask Lily had Gabriel or Freddy come.

"O, Mr. Conroy," said Lily to Gabriel when she opened the door for him, "Miss Kate and Miss Julia thought you were never coming. Good night, Mrs. Conroy."

"I'll engage they did," said Gabriel, "but they forget that my wife here takes three mortal hours to dress herself."

He stood on the mat, scraping the snow from his goloshes, while Lily led his wife to the foot of the stairs and called out:

“Miss Kate, here’s Mrs. Conroy.”

Kate and Julia came toddling down the dark stairs at once. Both of them kissed Gabriel’s wife, said she must be perished alive, and asked was Gabriel with her.

“Here I am as right as the mail, Aunt Kate! Go on up. I’ll follow,” called out Gabriel from the dark.

He continued scraping his feet vigorously while the three women went upstairs, laughing, to the ladies’ dressing-room. A light fringe of snow lay like a cape on the shoulders of his overcoat and like toecaps on the toes of his goloshes; and, as the buttons of his overcoat slipped with a squeaking noise through the snow-stiffened frieze, a cold, fragrant air from out-of-doors escaped from crevices and folds.

“Is it snowing again, Mr. Conroy?” asked Lily.

She had preceded him into the pantry to help him off with his overcoat. Gabriel smiled at the three syllables she had given his surname and glanced at her. She was a slim, growing girl, pale in complexion and with hay-coloured hair. The gas in the pantry made her look still paler. Gabriel had known her when she was a child and used to sit on the lowest step nursing a rag doll.

“Yes, Lily,” he answered, “and I think we’re in for a night of it.”

He looked up at the pantry ceiling, which was shaking with the stamping and shuffling of feet on the floor above, listened for a moment to the piano and then glanced at the girl, who was folding his overcoat carefully at the end of a shelf.

“Tell me, Lily,” he said in a friendly tone, “do you still go to school?”

“O no, sir,” she answered. “I’m done schooling this year and more.”

“O, then,” said Gabriel gaily, “I suppose we’ll be going to your wedding one of these fine days with your young man, eh?”

The girl glanced back at him over her shoulder and said with great bitterness:

“The men that is now is only all palaver and what they can get out of you.”

Gabriel coloured, as if he felt he had made a mistake, and, without looking at her, kicked off his goloshes and flicked actively with his muffler at his patent-leather shoes.

He was a stout, tallish young man. The high colour of his cheeks pushed upwards even to his forehead, where it scattered itself in a few formless patches of pale red; and on his hairless face there scintillated restlessly the polished lenses and the bright gilt rims of the glasses which screened his delicate and restless eyes. His glossy black hair was parted in the middle and brushed in a long curve behind his ears where it curled slightly beneath the groove left by his hat.

When he had flicked lustre into his shoes he stood up and pulled his waistcoat down more tightly on his plump body. Then he took a coin rapidly from his pocket.

“O Lily,” he said, thrusting it into her hands, “it’s Christmastime, isn’t it? Just . . . here’s a little . . .”

He walked rapidly towards the door.

“O no, sir!” cried the girl, following him. “Really, sir, I wouldn’t take it.”

“Christmas-time! Christmas-time!” said Gabriel, almost trotting to the stairs and waving his hand to her in deprecation.

The girl, seeing that he had gained the stairs, called out after him:

“Well, thank you, sir.”

He waited outside the drawing-room door until the waltz should finish, listening to the skirts that swept against it and to the shuffling of feet. He was still discomposed by the girl’s bitter and sudden retort. It had cast a gloom over him, which he tried to dispel by arranging his cuffs and the bows of his tie. He then took from his waistcoat pocket a little paper and glanced at the headings he

had made for his speech. He was undecided about the lines from Robert Browning, for he feared they would be above the heads of his hearers. Some quotation that they would recognize from Shakespeare or from the Melodies would be better. The indelicate clacking of the men's heels and the shuffling of their soles reminded him that their grade of culture differed from his. He would only make himself ridiculous by quoting poetry to them which they could not understand. They would think that he was airing his superior education. He would fail with them, just as he had failed with the girl in the pantry. He had taken up a wrong tone. His whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure.

Just then, his aunts and his wife came out of the ladies' dressing-room. His aunts were two small, plainly dressed old women. Aunt Julia was an inch or so the taller. Her hair, drawn low over the tops of her ears, was grey; and grey also, with darker shadows, was her large flaccid face. Though she was stout in build and stood erect, her slow eyes and parted lips gave her the appearance of a woman who did not know where she was or where she was going. Aunt Kate was more vivacious. Her face, healthier than her sister's, was all puckers and creases, like a shrivelled red apple, and her hair, braided in the same old-fashioned way, had not lost its ripe nut colour.

They both kissed Gabriel frankly. He was their favourite nephew, the son of their dead elder sister, Ellen, who had married T. J. Conroy of the Port and Docks.

"Gretta tells me you're not going to take a cab back to Monkstown tonight, Gabriel," said Aunt Kate.

"No," said Gabriel, turning to his wife, "we had quite enough of that last year, hadn't we? Don't you remember, Aunt Kate, what a cold Gretta got out of it? Cab windows rattling all the way, and the east wind blowing in after we passed Merrion. Very jolly it was. Gretta caught a dreadful cold."

Aunt Kate frowned severely and nodded her head at every word.

"Quite right, Gabriel, quite right," she said. "You can't be too careful."

"But as for Gretta there," said Gabriel, "she'd walk home in the snow if she were let."

Mrs. Conroy laughed.

"Don't mind him, Aunt Kate," she said. "He's really an awful bother, what with green shades for Tom's eyes at night and making him do the dumb-bells, and forcing Eva to eat the stirabout. The poor child! And she simply hates the sight of it! . . . O, but you'll never guess what he makes me wear now!"

She broke out into a peal of laughter and glanced at her husband, whose admiring and happy eyes had been wandering from her dress to her face and hair. The two aunts laughed heartily, too, for Gabriel's solicitude was a standing joke with them.

"Goloshes!" said Mrs. Conroy. "That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot, I must put on my goloshes. Tonight even, he wanted me to put them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit."

Gabriel laughed nervously and patted his tie reassuringly, while Aunt Kate nearly doubled herself, so heartily did she enjoy the joke. The smile soon faded from Aunt Julia's face and her mirthless eyes were directed towards her nephew's face. After a pause she asked:

"And what are goloshes, Gabriel?"

"Goloshes, Julia!" exclaimed her sister. "Goodness me, don't you know what goloshes are? You wear them over your . . . over your boots, Gretta, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Conroy. "Gutta-percha things. We both have a pair now. Gabriel says everyone wears them on the Continent."

"O, on the Continent," murmured Aunt Julia, nodding her head slowly.

Gabriel knitted his brows and said, as if he were slightly angered:

"It's nothing very wonderful, but Gretta thinks it very funny, because she says the word reminds her of Christy Minstrels."

“But tell me, Gabriel,” said Aunt Kate, with brisk tact. “Of course, you’ve seen about the room. Gretta was saying . . .”

“O, the room is all right,” replied Gabriel. “I’ve taken one in the Gresham.”

“To be sure,” said Aunt Kate, “by far the best thing to do. And the children, Gretta, you’re not anxious about them?”

“O, for one night,” said Mrs. Conroy. “Besides, Bessie will look after them.”

“To be sure,” said Aunt Kate again. “What a comfort it is to have a girl like that, one you can depend on! There’s that Lily, I’m sure I don’t know what has come over her lately. She’s not the girl she was at all.”

Gabriel was about to ask his aunt some questions on this point, but she broke off suddenly to gaze after her sister, who had wandered down the stairs and was craning her neck over the banisters.

“Now, I ask you,” she said almost testily, “where is Julia going? Julia! Julia! Where are you going?”

Julia, who had gone half-way down one flight, came back and announced blandly:

“Here’s Freddy.”

At the same moment a clapping of hands and a final flourish of the pianist told that the waltz had ended. The drawing-room door was opened from within and some couples came out. Aunt Kate drew Gabriel aside hurriedly and whispered into his ear:

“Slip down, Gabriel, like a good fellow and see if he’s all right, and don’t let him up if he’s screwed. I’m sure he’s screwed. I’m sure he is.”

Gabriel went to the stairs and listened over the banisters. He could hear two persons talking in the pantry. Then he recognized Freddy Malins’ laugh. He went down the stairs noisily.

“It’s such a relief,” said Aunt Kate to Mrs. Conroy, “that Gabriel is here. I always feel easier in my mind when he’s here . . . Julia, there’s Miss Daly, and Miss Power will take some refreshment. Thanks for your beautiful waltz, Miss Daly. It made lovely time.”

A tall wizen-faced man, with a stiff grizzled moustache and swarthy skin, who was passing out with his partner, said:

“And may we have some refreshment, too, Miss Morkan?”

“Julia,” said Aunt Kate summarily, “and here’s Mr. Browne and Miss Furlong. Take them in, Julia, with Miss Daly and Miss Power.”

“I’m the man for the ladies,” said Mr. Browne, pursing his lips until his moustache bristled, and smiling in all his wrinkles. “You know, Miss Morkan, the reason they are so fond of me is—”

He did not finish his sentence, but, seeing that Aunt Kate was out of earshot, at once led the three young ladies into the back room. The middle of the room was occupied by two square tables placed end to end, and on these Aunt Julia and the caretaker were straightening and smoothing a large cloth. On the sideboard were arrayed dishes and plates, and glasses and bundles of knives and forks and spoons. The top of the closed square piano served also as a sideboard for viands and sweets. At a smaller sideboard in one corner, two young men were standing, drinking hop-bitters.

Mr. Browne led his charges thither and invited them all, in jest, to some ladies’ punch, hot, strong, and sweet. As they said they never took anything strong, he opened three bottles of lemonade for them. Then he asked one of the young men to move aside, and, taking hold of the decanter, filled out for himself a goodly measure of whisky. The young men eyed him respectfully while he took a trial sip.

“God help me,” he said, smiling, “it’s the doctor’s order.”

His wizen face broke into a broader smile, and the three young ladies laughed in musical echo to his pleasantry, swaying their bodies to and fro, with nervous jerks of their shoulders. The boldest said:

“O, now, Mr. Browne, I’m sure the doctor never ordered anything of the kind.”

Mr. Browne took another sip of his whisky and said, with sidling mimicry:

“Well, you see, I’m like the famous Mrs. Cassidy, who is reported to have said: ‘Now, Mary Grimes, if I don’t take it, make me take it, for I feel I want it.’”

His hot face had leaned forward a little too confidentially and he had assumed a very low Dublin accent, so that the young ladies, with one instinct, received his speech in silence. Miss Furlong, who was one of Mary Jane’s pupils, asked Miss Daly what was the name of the pretty waltz she had played; and Mr. Browne, seeing that he was ignored, turned promptly to the two young men, who were more appreciative.

A red-faced young woman, dressed in pansy, came into the room, excitedly clapping her hands and crying:

“Quadrilles! Quadrilles!”

Close on her heels came Aunt Kate, crying:

“Two gentlemen and three ladies, Mary Jane!”

“O, here’s Mr. Bergin and Mr. Kerrigan,” said Mary Jane. “Mr. Kerrigan, will you take Miss Power? Miss Furlong, may I get you a partner, Mr. Bergin. O, that’ll just do now.”

“Three ladies, Mary Jane,” said Aunt Kate.

The two young gentlemen asked the ladies if they might have the pleasure, and Mary Jane turned to Miss Daly.

“O, Miss Daly, you’re really awfully good, after playing for the last two dances, but really we’re so short of ladies tonight.”

“I don’t mind in the least, Miss Morkan.”

“But I’ve a nice partner for you, Mr. Bartell D’Arcy, the tenor. I’ll get him to sing later on. All Dublin is raving about him.”

“Lovely voice, lovely voice!” said Aunt Kate.

As the piano had twice begun the prelude to the first figure, Mary Jane led her recruits quickly from the room. They had hardly gone when Aunt Julia wandered slowly into the room, looking behind her at something.

“What is the matter, Julia?” asked Aunt Kate anxiously. “Who is it?”

Julia, who was carrying in a column of table-napkins, turned to her sister and said, simply, as if the question had surprised her:

“It’s only Freddy, Kate, and Gabriel with him.”

In fact, right behind her, Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel’s size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy. He was laughing heartily in a high key at a story which he had been telling Gabriel on the stairs, and at the same time rubbing the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye.

“Good evening, Freddy,” said Aunt Julia.

Freddy Malins bade the Misses Morkan good evening in what seemed an off-hand fashion by reason of the habitual catch in his voice and then, seeing that Mr. Browne was grinning at him from the sideboard, crossed the room on rather shaky legs and began to repeat in an undertone the story he had just told to Gabriel.

“He’s not so bad, is he?” said Aunt Kate to Gabriel.

Gabriel’s brows were dark, but he raised them quickly and answered:

“O, no, hardly noticeable.”

“Now, isn’t he a terrible fellow!” she said. “And his poor mother made him take the pledge on New Year’s Eve. But come on, Gabriel, into the drawing-room.”

Before leaving the room with Gabriel she signalled to Mr. Browne by frowning and shaking her forefinger in warning to and fro. Mr. Browne nodded in answer and, when she had gone, said to Freddy Malins:

“Now, then, Teddy, I’m going to fill you out a good glass of lemonade just to buck you up.”

Freddy Malins, who was nearing the climax of his story, waved the offer aside impatiently, but Mr. Browne, having first called Freddy Malins’ attention to a disarray in his dress, filled out and handed him a full glass of lemonade. Freddy Malins’ left hand accepted the glass mechanically, his right hand being engaged in the mechanical readjustment of his dress. Mr. Browne, whose face was once more wrinkling with mirth, poured out for himself a glass of whisky, while Freddy Malins exploded, before he had well reached the climax of his story, in a kink of high-pitched bronchitic laughter and, setting down his untasted and overflowing glass, began to run the knuckles of his left fist backwards and forwards into his left eye, repeating words of his last phrase as well as his fit of laughter would allow him.

Gabriel could not listen while Mary Jane was playing her Academy piece, full of runs and difficult passages, to the hushed drawing-room. He liked music, but the piece she was playing had no melody for him and he doubted whether it had any melody for the other listeners, though they had begged Mary Jane to play something. Four young men, who had come from the refreshment-room to stand in the doorway at the sound of the piano, had gone away quietly in couples after a few minutes. The only persons who seemed to follow the music were Mary Jane herself, her hands racing along the keyboard or lifted from it at the pauses like those of a priestess in momentary imprecation, and Aunt Kate standing at her elbow to turn the page.

Gabriel’s eyes, irritated by the floor, which glittered with beeswax under the heavy chandelier, wandered to the wall above the piano. A picture of the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* hung there, and beside it was a picture of the two murdered princes in the Tower which Aunt Julia had worked in red, blue, and brown wools when she was a girl. Probably in the school they had gone to as girls that kind of work had been taught for one year. His mother had worked for him as a birthday present a waistcoat of purple tabinet, with little foxes’ heads upon it, lined with brown satin and having round mulberry buttons.

It was strange that his mother had had no musical talent, though Aunt Kate used to call her the brains carrier of the Morkan family. Both she and Julia had always seemed a little proud of their serious and matronly sister. Her photograph stood before the pier-glass. She had an open book on her knees and was pointing out something in it to Constantine who, dressed in a man-o’-war suit, lay at her feet. It was she who had chosen the names of her sons, for she was very sensible of the dignity of family life. Thanks to her, Constantine was now senior curate in Balbriggan and, thanks to her, Gabriel himself had taken his degree in the Royal University. A shadow passed over his face as he remembered her sullen opposition to his marriage. Some slighting phrases she had used still rankled in his memory; once she had spoken of Gretta as being country cute and that was not true of Gretta at all. It was Gretta who had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown.

He knew that Mary Jane must be near the end of her piece, for she was playing again the opening melody with runs of scales after every bar, and while he waited for the end the resentment died down in his heart. The piece ended with a trill of octaves in the treble and a final deep octave in the bass. Great applause greeted Mary Jane as, blushing and rolling up her music nervously, she escaped from the room. The most vigorous clapping came from the four young men in the doorway who had gone away to the refreshment-room at the beginning of the piece but had come back when the piano had stopped.

Lancers were arranged. Gabriel found himself partnered with Miss Ivors. She was a frank-mannered, talkative young lady, with a freckled face and prominent brown eyes. She did not wear a low-cut bodice, and the large brooch which was fixed in the front of her collar bore on it an Irish

device and motto.

When they had taken their places, she said abruptly:

“I have a crow to pluck with you.”

“With me?” said Gabriel.

She nodded her head gravely.

“What is it?” asked Gabriel, smiling at her solemn manner.

“Who is G.C.?” answered Miss Ivors, turning her eyes upon him.

Gabriel coloured and was about to knit his brows, as if he did not understand, when she said bluntly:

“O, innocent Amy! I have found out that you write for *The Daily Express*. Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?”

“Why should I be ashamed of myself?” asked Gabriel, blinking his eyes and trying to smile.

“Well, I'm ashamed of you,” said Miss Ivors frankly. “To say you'd write for a paper like that. I didn't think you were a West Briton.”

A look of perplexity appeared on Gabriel's face. It was true that he wrote a literary column every Wednesday in *The Daily Express*, for which he was paid fifteen shillings. But that did not make him a West Briton surely. The books he received for review were almost more welcome than the paltry cheque. He loved to feel the covers and turn over the pages of newly printed books. Nearly every day when his teaching in the college was ended, he used to wander down the quays to the second-hand booksellers, to Hickey's on Bachelor's Walk, to Webb's or Massey's on Aston's Quay, or to O'Clohissey's in the by-street. He did not know how to meet her charge. He wanted to say that literature was above politics. But they were friends of many years' standing and their careers had been parallel, first at the University and then as teachers: he could not risk a grandiose phrase with her. He continued blinking his eyes and trying to smile and murmured lamely that he saw nothing political in writing reviews of books.

When their turn to cross had come, he was still perplexed and inattentive. Miss Ivors promptly took his hand in a warm grasp and said in a soft friendly tone:

“Of course, I was only joking. Come, we cross now.”

When they were together again she spoke of the University question and Gabriel felt more at ease. A friend of hers had shown her his review of Browning's poems. That was how she had found out the secret: but she liked the review immensely.

Then she said suddenly:

“O, Mr. Conroy, will you come for an excursion to the Aran Isles this summer? We're going to stay there a whole month. It will be splendid out in the Atlantic. You ought to come. Mr. Clancy is coming, and Mr. Kilkelly and Kathleen Kearney. It would be splendid for Gretta too, if she'd come. She's from Connacht, isn't she?”

“Her people are,” said Gabriel shortly.

“But you will come, won't you?” said Miss Ivors, laying her warm hand eagerly on his arm.

“The fact is,” said Gabriel, “I have just arranged to go—”

“Go where?” asked Miss Ivors.

“Well, you know, every year I go for a cycling tour with some fellows and so—”

“But where?” asked Miss Ivors.

“Well, we usually go to France or Belgium or perhaps Germany,” said Gabriel awkwardly.

“And why do you go to France and Belgium,” said Miss Ivors, “instead of visiting your own land?”

“Well,” said Gabriel, “it's partly to keep in touch with the languages and partly for a change.”

“And haven't you your own language to keep in touch with—Irish?” asked Miss Ivors.

“Well,” said Gabriel, “if it comes to that, you know, Irish is not my language.”

Their neighbours had turned to listen to the cross-examination. Gabriel glanced right and left nervously and tried to keep his good humour under the ordeal, which was making a blush invade his forehead.

“And haven’t you your own land to visit,” continued Miss Ivors, “that you know nothing of, your own people, and your own country?”

“O, to tell you the truth,” retorted Gabriel suddenly, “I’m sick of my own country, sick of it!”

“Why?” asked Miss Ivors.

Gabriel did not answer, for his retort had heated him.

“Why?” repeated Miss Ivors.

They had to go visiting together and, as he had not answered her, Miss Ivors said warmly:

“Of course, you’ve no answer.”

Gabriel tried to cover his agitation by taking part in the dance with great energy. He avoided her eyes, for he had seen a sour expression on her face. But when they met in the long chain he was surprised to feel his hand firmly pressed. She looked at him from under her brows for a moment, quizzically, until he smiled. Then, just as the chain was about to start again, she stood on tiptoe and whispered into his ear:

“West Briton!”

When the lancers were over, Gabriel went away to a remote corner of the room where Freddy Malins’ mother was sitting. She was a stout, feeble old woman with white hair. Her voice had a catch in it like her son’s and she stuttered slightly. She had been told that Freddy had come and that he was nearly all right. Gabriel asked her whether she had had a good crossing. She lived with her married daughter in Glasgow and came to Dublin on a visit once a year. She answered placidly that she had had a beautiful crossing and that the captain had been most attentive to her. She spoke also of the beautiful house her daughter kept in Glasgow, and of all the friends they had there. While her tongue rambled on, Gabriel tried to banish from his mind all memory of the unpleasant incident with Miss Ivors. Of course the girl, or woman, or whatever she was, was an enthusiast, but there was a time for all things. Perhaps he ought not to have answered her like that. But she had no right to call him a West Briton before people, even in joke. She had tried to make him ridiculous before people, heckling him and staring at him with her rabbit’s eyes.

He saw his wife making her way towards him through the waltzing couples. When she reached him, she said into his ear:

“Gabriel, Aunt Kate wants to know won’t you carve the goose as usual. Miss Daly will carve the ham and I’ll do the pudding.”

“All right,” said Gabriel.

“She’s sending in the younger ones first, as soon as this waltz is over, so that we’ll have the table to ourselves.”

“Were you dancing?” asked Gabriel.

“Of course I was. Didn’t you see me? What row had you with Molly Ivors?”

“No row. Why? Did she say so?”

“Something like that. I’m trying to get that Mr. D’Arcy to sing. He’s full of conceit, I think.”

“There was no row,” said Gabriel moodily, “only she wanted me to go for a trip to the west of Ireland and I said I wouldn’t.”

His wife clasped her hands excitedly and gave a little jump.

“O, do go, Gabriel,” she cried. “I’d love to see Galway again.”

“You can go if you like,” said Gabriel coldly.

She looked at him for a moment, then turned to Mrs. Malins and said:

“There’s a nice husband for you, Mrs. Malins.”

While she was threading her way back across the room, Mrs. Malins, without adverting to

the interruption, went on to tell Gabriel what beautiful places there were in Scotland and beautiful scenery. Her son-in-law brought them every year to the lakes and they used to go fishing. Her son-in-law was a splendid fisher. One day he caught a beautiful big fish and the man in the hotel cooked it for their dinner.

Gabriel hardly heard what she said. Now that supper was coming near, he began to think again about his speech and about the quotation. When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother, Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure of the window. The room had already cleared and from the back room came the clatter of plates and knives. Those who still remained in the drawing-room seemed tired of dancing and were conversing quietly in little groups. Gabriel's warm, trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington Monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper-table!

To be continued in Cenacle | 115 | April 2021

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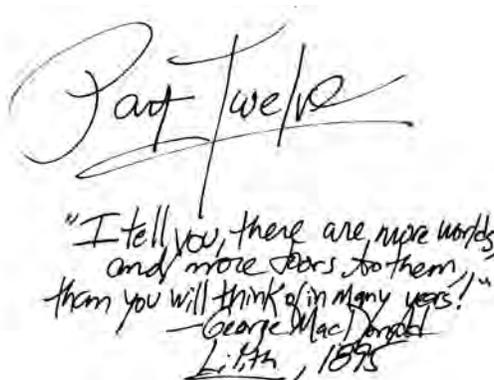


Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]



ii.

“Sing true.
the way is dis-illusion.
I disbelieve in nothing”
—*Labyrinthine*, Part One, 2006

Notes on this book before me, white-faced pink cat radio on nearby. A familiar voice of sorts telling a story I vaguely listen to.

I am sitting in a coffeehouse from long ago, tis far away from here, & no more.

I listen. Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle cries, “Calgar-it is!” & Calgary the Sea Dragon says, “You shell of a guy!” Old friends reunited on the beach by the Deeper Deeper Sea.

This place was called Bauhaus & it was in Seattle for many years at a corner on Capitol Hill, not far from the downtown. The Space Needle is distantly lovely in view from this second floor mezzanine, wide windows all around—

I listen again & there is talk of the Islanders sitting on the porch of the hut near Abe. Four of them rocking peaceably.

Why back here now? This many years & miles later? This place is long gone, as good places sometimes go too. Its tall windows & tall bookcases & punkrock graffiti'd bathrooms & mostly friendly, relatively tame staff—

I listen again. Now he's telling of where were Algernon Beagle & Princess Crissy right now.

My beloved sitting with me, of course, with her thick book. I notice the only words on the back cover of this book are: "Some Eat Others."

Algernon Beagle walks through the door from Bags End into Imagianna, & up the golden-tinged green hills to Princess Crissy's Castle.

There was one barista, a man, shaven headed, shorter, but quite friendly, one to enjoy a sincere smile & a few friendly words. I bought a Bauhuas shirt from him one time.

Crissy's bestus buddy Boop hurries Algernon to Crissy's Secret Room, Red Bag in the back, & on through to Crissy's Riting Room, resembling her old apartment in the city—

I wrote so much of *Lx* here, hundreds of its early pages, & did not know how far in time & space I would travel away from it. I wish it was still there, tonight, its beautiful coffee punk rocking self—lots of '80s pop there too, some nights—

These few pages back here, there/here, then/now, lovely thought. The mezzanine shaped like a ship's prow, I always thought.

This visit I suppose is part of this month's boot camp I've created, to review many of my previously mentioned writing projects & learn better to mix them—one none many—

Crissy types on her Rite-Typer: **"I'm so happy my friend Algernon came to visit!"** but what appears on the page is: **"They were slooped through & tossed far!"** over & over on the page. How confusing! Algernon wonders if it's a message from someone else.

The bus I'm on is wavering in & out now, waking up?

I hear Algernon suggest that Crissy type: **"And they arrived to Princess Crissy's Riting Room."**

Oh, I'm falling back to that bus, through the lightly drizzling Bags End, to that bus, but I remember something I wrote about then, something I want also to revisit—

A rosy lit room
two armchairs
thin blue vase on table

"Donna! Reach in! Grab my hand!" I pull her in & in with me—



As the wise old Mr. Owl said in that Tootsie Pop commercial, “Let’s find out!”

Lick one: Bauhaus Books & Coffee, Capitol Hill, Seattle, lives on in this book, like other gone things, is open tonight, then/now, *fixtionalized, loved, & remembered new.*

Lick two: Bags End’s drizzle has let up, become now just a sweet coolness up & down its levels, along its many hallways. A cleanse, a renew, a come & a gone.

Lick three: Asoya Donna & I sit in the rosy lit room & I read her these new lines. She listens, smiles, nods, seems to enjoy. She is kind.

“I need to help you remember some things,” I say finally, having let this thought linger for mulling.
Crunch!

She nods, smile now relieved.

I pull out every notebook in my bag. All I need are here. “This will take awhile,” I say.

“Good,” she replies, ready as can be.

I notice a small, lovely ivory hairbrush under her armchair’s legs, think it hers, lean over to pluck it up & realize too that Benny her dog isn’t with us. Not sure what this means, I wordless smiling hand it to her.

She holds it barely for a moment yet her study heavy upon it. Speaks very quietly. “I think I need your notebooks less. This talisman is my key.”

I start to pack up my notebooks then but she stills this as well. “Where are we?”

I look around at this little room. “I’m unsure. This room could be in the Ancienne Coffeehouse in the Village, or Coffee Time Coffee House in Portland, Oregon—”

“Or both?” Shade’s shade of a smile on her face. I nod.

“Are we ready to know?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What are you sure of, Raymond?”

I start, realizing we both now are sure of who I am as well as her.

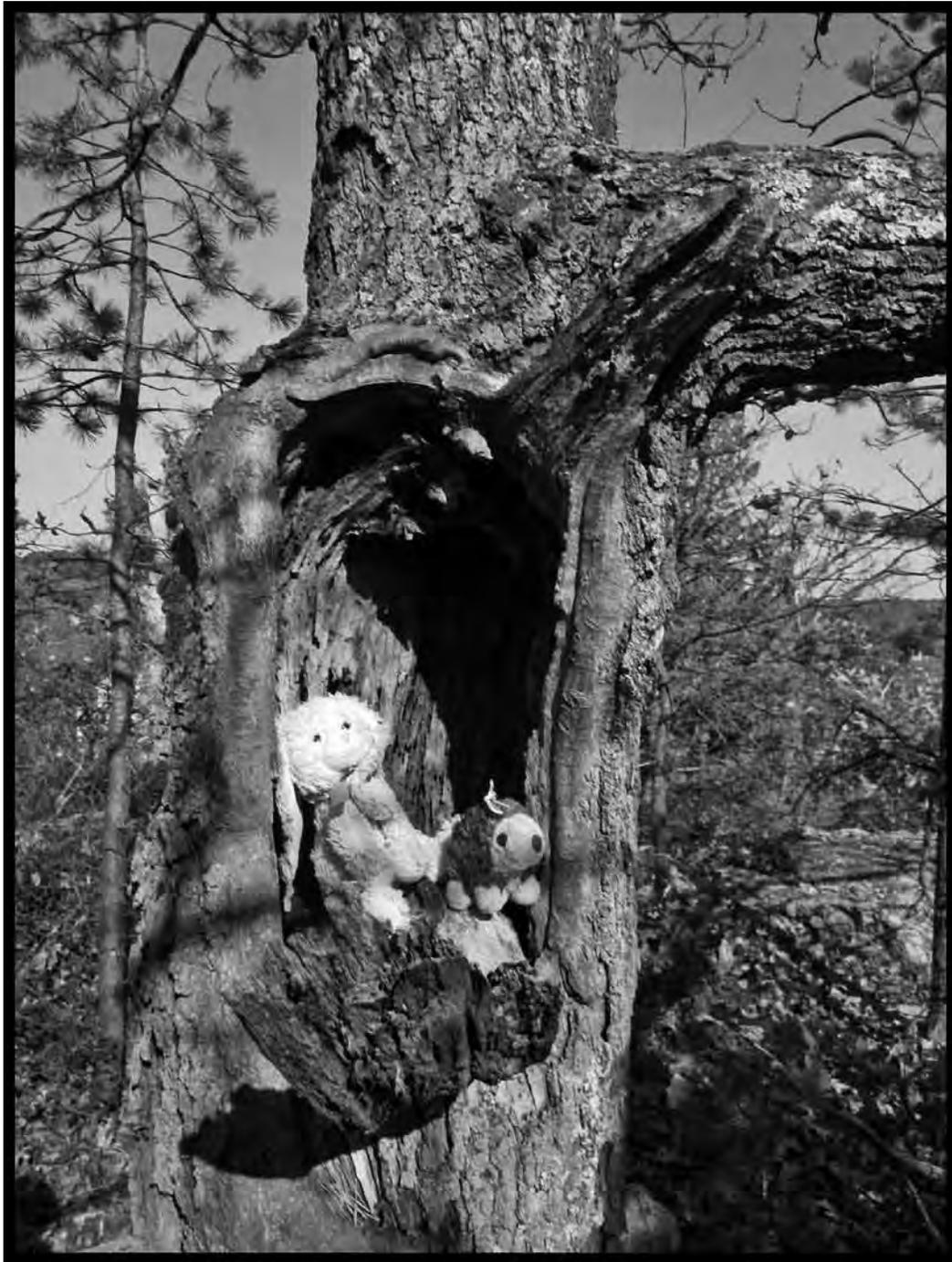
“I’m sure you & your Brothers are far apart in space & time right now, & unclear the many reasons why, yet my feeling that you will near one another again.”

She nods. “And then?”

“I don’t know. Things tend away but sometimes return.”

“In new or familiar form?”

I nod now.



She brushes her long hair then, not because unruly, but because it is helping her remember. Each stroke a face, a place, a feeling.

I sit back, close my eyes, this armchair near as comfy as Algernon Beagle's on Milne's Porch.

The roseate light seeps in me & I wonder over this, tis warm & sweet, nearly *hmmms* along my skin, I sniff like Creatures & am overwhelmed by memory—

But what? No pictures, no words—is it even my memory of something else? Something very deep that I shallowly root in? Sort of but no, I *do* root deep, *all* roots deep; yet too, I am a young fruit on the far end of those deep roots, as liable to the capriciousness of sunny days as the brilliant braided bedding of the endless *hmmming* night. Close & far, both.

Open my eyes. My notebooks unpacked. Nod at Asoyadonna, who smirks me back. The work waits.

We walk out the green door now in that wall over there, one of I think too many walls, but the one with the green door & golden door knob—

Come I'm pretty certain somewhere deep in the spaces of the Ancienne Coffeehouse. I am holding Asoyadonna's hand & it feels like we will do this thing together—I don't know what that means quite—

“Find my Brothers?”

“Yes, that is what's next, isn't it?”

We're sitting in two old armchairs & from somewhere to somewhere a tattered old gent passes us by.

“Cosmic Early?” I mutter.

“Isn't it, Raymond?”

“Yes.”

“But?”

“My friend Algernon Beagle once said to me, in his funny accent of course, ‘more isn't better. More is more. Better is better.’”

She nods at me. She's dressed somewhat tattered ragamuffin, I reckon, but a leather vest over all that, & leather boots too make contrast.

Thinks a moment. Then talks slowly.

“You're hesitating even now.”

“The game is laid out. I'm just unsure a bit.”

“Unsure of what?”

“I've never written old or cowardly. Scared, melancholy, stupidly sentimental, but not old or cowardly.”

“That's more a feel to things?”

I nod.

“Where do we go, Raymond?”

I gesture toward where the tattered gent Early went.

She nods. We stand up & go.

If my thoughts of how all is braided are to have bite in my own work, I have to trust these thoughts to lead me, lead my pen.

Asoyadonna's hand in mine as we hurry deeper into the Ancienne Coffeehouse, till now into the trees of the White Woods, ever glowing of all 7 colors & *hmmmming* low—

She leads me now, a much sharper tracker, & we hurry for a long time, till the trees thin out & we are on the golden-tinged green hills of . . .

Imagianna? Tis.

She points him out far in the distance & we hurry after him. To spy his path? To speak with him? To join him? I never know too far ahead, when pen best jacked in—

We approach closer & then Asoyadonna touches my shoulder to pause & crouch together. We watch Cosmic Early approach the Castle of Crissy & Boop, pause, seeming confused. Twirl on his heel a number of times one way, then back the other way once. Swaying but maybe satisfied, he knocks on the Castle door & is let in.

“Do we follow there too?” she asks.
I want to nod & get moving again but hesitate.
“I'm not sure.”

We now sit cross-legged on the golden-tinged green grass of this fine, fantastical place.

The *hmmm* raises in my awareness now like to insist my attention.

I take her hand & we walk tentatively up to Crissy's Castle. The door a bit ajar, as though Boop & Cosmic Early in a hurry.

Push the door in & are arrived. A tall green & golden vestibule, walls sheerly high of glass & stone, yet a sense of water, nigh like falls?

So many corridors about us. I try to *hmmm*, to sniff, to even wonder a guess.

I stop cold & look at her.
She smiles friendly.

“We want to find your Brothers.”
“Yes.”

I nod. I know this Castle's a kind of Beast-friend of Crissy's & Boop's. Sometimes agreeable to favors. Take a breath.

“Crissy's Castle!” I call, friendly but firmly. “I wish to help Asoya Donna find her long lost Brothers. Heroes all! Would you lead us part of the way?”

My words fly from me, up, & up, arc long, now down & down, & land gently far. Then silence. Now we wait.

And nothing at first, awhile, a longer while, then something, then more so something than nothing, & then a path, something of a path, & more, like a come-hither now feeling. We smile each other & follow together, down one of the many hallways & come upon—

my Saturday black book bag, big enough for many notebooks, shoulder strap long enough for my long frame—

Chock full of my notebooks. OK.

Stride on, less slow & ambling at first, then becoming faster & blurrier, faster & blurrier, the hallway falling away, & returning, falling away & returning—

Reach my hand or hands or hundreds of hands out to Asoya Donna, feel a warm grasp in the blizzard of colors about me—

Swirl deepens, heightens, the *hmmm* kisses my cheeks & cackles merrily, & I realize I have to decide—

Have to decide—

Have to decide—

Have tangled gate
to decide—

Tangled Gate—

Tangled Gate—

Arc up, arc over, arc within, arc within, arc & arrive, arc & arrive—

Tis the Tangled Gate.

Tis the Tangled Gate?

I land. I stop. I crouch low, hold my book bag deep in my arms. Hold tight.

“It’s OK, Raymond. You can open your eyes safely. I promise.”

I don’t. Not yet. Unstable book.

So she hums a little tune she found salving me as we were, um, swirling here

“You got your night shades on
and the worst days are gone
So now the band plays on
You got one life, blaze on”

Phish song. Of course. No need to fear nothin’.

Open my eyes, tis Asoyadonna’s smile, tis her kind self leaning careful over me as I sit, fallen & crouched, on the strange soft ground near the entrance to the Tangled Gate. Bookbag in my arm like I’m rescuing someone from a burning building.

She offers her hand to me, & I shift bookbag in my still tight grasp to take it, to haul me up.

“You do that near as well as my beloved.”

Smirk. “Saw that in there too.”

Alright. Standing. Tangled Gate. Whatever it is, I’ve known of it some years now.

The Gate itself is dark & massive into the sky. On its front, up high, “for those lost” writ on it—a promise, a refuge, a new path? Gate’s covered in symbols, familiar to me & not so much. Sling my bookbag on my shoulder, walk over to look.

It hmmmms. Of course it does, I know that, have written it. Hmmmms deeply. Touch with both hands, close eyes, let it hmmm me.

A small funny voice sitting upon a small funny seat singing:

“No matter trouble big or small
You have a choice in it all.”

Hm. Not Phish this time but I like it too.

Small funny voice on small funny seat is quiet now.

“Is there more?” I ask.

“Your turn!”

I try an old one, just to see:

“By what softs & shines creation
I pledge myself to you.”

The small voice in the small chair listens, nods, & smiles. Smiles twice again, drifts gone.

Asoya Donna waits me over near the Fountain. I walk over slowly, wondering if this best how all this goes.

My bookbag of notebooks slung across my shoulder. I wrote in one of them a long time ago, “My notebooks. They matter. I love them as evidence for me that I exist. Whatever to others, I exist to me.” My emphasis at end.

Asoyadonna’s smile encourages me to take a drink of the Fountain’s bubbly water. Laced with LSD, like tis said of Iconic Square? Or just beautiful water in this strange, strange place, & a calming gesture just by its familiarity?

I sit on the edge of the Fountain.

“We need to go to the Cave of the Beast to find out what happened to all of you.”

She nods, unsurprised.

“Even then, we may not fully understand why.”

Another nod.

“What would you do if you collected them all together again?”

Silence a stretch. Then: “I’m not sure I can say right now. I’d like to know they’re all alive. Somewhere safe.”

“None of you was doing well near the end.”

“No.”

“Do you know who you are without them?”
Silence. Longer. “I matter more with them. We did good to the world.”
“You could again?”
“I . . . think . . . so.”
I nod. Dip my hands in full & drink. Laced? Or just pure?
Shake my head of this. “OK.”
I stand. “Let’s go.”



To be continued in Cenacle | 115 | April 2021



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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 76 | December 2010. It is absolutely thrilling to have his work back in these pages! More of his work can be found at: <http://purigare.tumblr.com>.

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Writes he: “Nostalgia has become abhorrent in the face of a dwindling future yet to fill with wonders. Why wallow in the past?” Right on, Charlie! More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His fiction & poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His short story “Enlightenment” in this issue first appeared in *GNU Journal* in 2018. His new book of poetry is *Misadventure*, published by Cyberwit in February 2020.

John Echem lives in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, & teaches English at local schools. His memoir of his youth is regularly featured in this journal. He is also editor & publisher of *The Mushroom: African Literary Journal of Arts*, whose first issue will be appearing in early 2021.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these Forums to meet, & perhaps join, those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She recently reported: “We’ve had another few rocket attacks here, or rather just a bit north of our kibbutz, and our army hit back at an arsenal in the Gaza Strip. It’s as if we finally have vaccines being made available and, oops! back to regular business. What a nuts world!” 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 prose appears frequently in *The Cenacle*. Jimmy’s fine new book, *Unfolding Nature: Being in the Implicate Order*, was published in October 2020 by BookBaby, & is excerpted in this issue.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Book 1 of his published *Nighttime Daydreams (Gateway Mexico)* can be found at: <https://amzn.to/3jhnEWx>. Book 2 will be out in early 2021.

Ekponoimo Iphyok lives in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. His photographs last appeared in *Cenacle* | 113 | October 2020. More of his fine work can be found online at: <https://instagram.com/ginuenpixels>.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He tried to talk me into a little bet on the Cowboys-Giants game this weekend, but I am not biting! His most recent book of poetry, *The Paralytically Obscure As Beauty Crescendo*, was published by The Book Patch this month.

James Joyce was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1882, & died in Zürich, Switzerland, in 1941. He is one of the 20th century's greatest fiction writers. Scriptor Press reprinted his masterful story "The Dead," in chapbook form, as part of the 2004 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. It is a genuine pleasure to see how finely mature his poetry is becoming over time.

Sam Knot lives in rural France. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His piece in this issue was originally part of the "Bubble Wrap" game at the ElectroLounge Forums. Visit samknot.com for more of his work. Congratulations on marrying, Sam!

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her prose & poetry appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). Working hard on her memoir, getting her vaccine soon.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her most recent book of poetry, *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*, was published by Deerbrook Editions in 2019. She is staying safe with her beloved Brian. Waiting, like we all are, for the all-clear from President Biden in 2021. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinanewberry.wordpress.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry & prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book of poetry, *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, was published by Pocol Press in 2019. Continues writing with all his stars out, every night.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. She has been my be-loved, be-trothed, be-kissed, & be-Created for 15 years now, & so that is how long my luck has been its best!

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. If you are reading this sentence, you have made it to 2021. Better days ahead!

Timothy Vilgiate lives in Colorado Springs, Colorado. His *Rivers of the Mind [A Novel]* is regularly serialized in this journal. Giving away his goods as prelude to moving to Austin, Texas. Safe travels! The radio version of *Rivers of the Mind*, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at: <http://riversofthemind.libsyn.com>.





As the pattern becomes more intricate and subtle,
being swept along is no longer enough.

--Richard Linklater, Waking Life, 2001.

