

"The greatest forces lie in the region
of the uncomprehended."

--George MacDonald, 1893.

April 24, 2021
7:14 p.m.
Bumallowee
Back Deck Courtyard
Milrose, Mass.

Welcome to the 26th anniversary
issue of The Cenacle! First one of
2021. Not one since Joe Biden & Kamala
Harris, 4 millions of American voters, wrested
this country back from the raging
fellows of the lunatic.

I'd intended to focus this piece on
the year gone by since the COVID-19
pandemic literally changed the world.
So much lost along the way. Family
members, jobs, any sense of optimism
that had lingered from before the
lunatic took over, & broke nearly
everything.

And there are loved ones who will
not be coming back. Businesses that
won't be returning. Relations fractured
beyond repair. Some things money
helps. Some things it doesn't.



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What's true too is that the climatic was debated last November. He did have to vacate the White House & he did leave Washington D.C. His capacity to do further harm is greatly diminished. To paraphrase Stephen King, the world is moving on.

Millions in the US & around the world have gotten their vaccines. More more every single day. President Biden is metaphorically, deliberately & transparently getting the country open again. Following the science, & common sense.

The US is making its amends to a world tangled up in its four years of abuse & hatred. Once in a while, it's now OK to take a day off from the news.

When the climatic lied & cheated his way into power in 2016, the US was not in dire shape. It was doing reasonably well, with as always a fair to-do list for improvements.

-10-

Donald Trump as president was a wreck
on the highway. And in one pandemic,
& the sky came damned close to falling.

If didn't. We survived. Damaged,
darkened, sobered. We survived.

I'm hopeful things will keep getting
better, in that clumsy, 2-steps-forward
1-step-back way that is so familiar.

Can we learn from being "forevered"
by the pandemic? Maybe never again
to say it doesn't matter who is President?
Maybe to realize that voting rights
& social justice & fair treatment
under the law are never matters
settled & done? Maybe to acknowledge
that having an opinion is not the
same as bearing any legitimate
expertise in a topic. Like science,
like health?

We can hope. We can do more than
hope too. We can get ~~to~~ work on
making this beautiful world good for
all who dwell upon it. We survived. Let's go.
④ 4-24-2021

The Cenacle
***** 26th Anniversary Issue *****
Number 115 ***** April 2021

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr. 

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-18
- *RaiBooks* #1-8
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
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Thank you to the Joe Biden & Kamala Harris administration for resuming governance of the US, after four long years in the fallows of a lunatic. Thank you to every last scientist & lab technician & others who helped get safe vaccines created, manufactured, & distributed so rapidly. And thank you to GB for being such a wonderful employer, & inviting me to keep doing the kind of paid work I best do. And to everyone reading these words: *get your vaccines! Let the world open up safely again!*



Feedback on Cenacle 114 | December 2020

From Martina Newberry:

Reading *Cenacle* 114 was like having my days made up of only mornings. Every poem, every story, every essay was absolutely lovely and engaging and excellently crafted. This time, I could not pick just one or two roses out of a bouquet of such beauty. Thanks to all! *Brava! Bravo!*

From Tamara Miles:

Cenacle 114 sets sail with Raymond Soulard Jr.'s somber words of pandemic loss: "many who were here for the last one / they're part of the spaceship again / many did not die old / and the old ones did not die well." I have an ache in the throat with that.

Thank goodness for the soothing stories of Nathan D. Horowitz, for this time he brought "Sphinx Wolf Cactus Tree of Life," with its remarkable characters, settings, and themes. I haven't traveled much, and I so enjoy the walk of life with our narrator through adventures and misadventures. "Every plant is a teacher plant; peyote is the grandfather of humanity." These myths are much needed, and I get a secondary high, a secondary vision.

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

In a sharp, brilliant poem called "The Straight Stuff," Martina Newberry personifies the truth as a protean monster we are called on to fear and respect. In this era of fake news, I doubt and hope for the existence of such a being who could smash through the illusions and show us things as they really are.

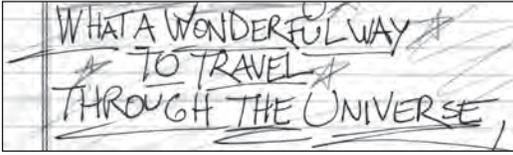
From Jimmy Heffernan:

My attention was sharply drawn to a couple of poems by Tamara Miles. The first of these was "In My Hands," a poem that is succinct in its frugality of language. She seems to compress reams of pages into a single one, many paragraphs into a single line, such is the power of her words. The lineage she describes almost glows with some otherworldly fluorescence, such is her reverence for her subject.

I was also struck by Tamara's next poem, "The Dogs Sniff My Grandfather." This one is a bit closer to the Earth than the former poem and, naturally, therefore a bit less pleasant in its real-world subject matter. But in its sophistication, and its evocation of spirit and emotion, it matches the former poem in its intensity, even if it is a bit less ethereal. Brava, Tamara, these are powerful poems.

From Ace Boggess:

The poems of Tamara Miles really shine in this issue, especially "In My Hands," which is such a mesmerizing piece. In a few short lines, it takes the reader on a spiritual journey, while also exploring family psychology. The hidden things roar in this poem as the reader is forced to pause and contemplate. Then, the ending overpowers, catching one completely by surprise. It is such a perfect last stanza that I, as reader, went back and started the poem over several times, just to feel the impact of those closing lines.

From Sam Knot:

Let me first say that I very much loved the breathless wonder of our light-filled letter from the editor.

Gregory Kelly's "O Sov'reign Night (Christmas Eve, 2020)" was such a surprise, so beautiful and earthy, so of the moment and yet profoundly traditional. It made me feel Christmas, maybe the most I felt it that year.

Nathan D. Horowitz's "Sphinx Wolf Cactus Tree of Life" blew my mind, as it always does. It brings me to the edge of my own incompletely processed mini-adventures, so that I feel alone and yet in the company of a fearless friend, and so he helps me to live them again, only with my eyes on this other world of his, and the many worlds that it opens out into in turn.

AbandonView's photos haunt me in the most beautiful way; flowers of time that the buzzings of people haven't quite left behind.

Tamara Miles' "In My Hands" tackled what I believe is a difficult subject to do justice to, asking us to look down at our own hands to see the lights of ages in them: our ancestors, our humanness, more. We are so familiar with our hands they might easily become invisible to us, and there is somehow a great danger in our ever becoming immune to their complex charms, for they might have ways of their own! It is a wonderful poem, there is so much in it, working up to the unspeakably profound dramas of that final astonishing gesture: "I put a hand across my mouth to embrace them." Wow!

I met myself again, in Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s latest *Many Musics*, and its name was not me, again, nor any word or combination of them I could ever say. I read it though, right off the page,

and yet it seems something so beautiful strange, that its name must remain impossible for any but the true fantasy mouth to pronounce. Soulard writes sounds that become the many musics of real imagination.

I laughed at Charlie Beyer's "Christmas Letter," good medicine of quiet vitriol.

Colin James' poems seem to keep on breaking language open, perhaps to show how many senses it makes, and all in the service of reporting the impossibly normal, which I could never understand as well, apart from whenever the meat robot butt-cracks a smile, like in these poems it sometimes seems to, and then all of a sudden it feels like the only thing that ever threatened us was our own humanimalien senses of humor.

After reading Ace Boggess' wonderful short story "Enlightenment," I wrote this poem the following morning (after waking from just such an experience, appropriately enough):

Another Quiet Horror Story

*I am sat at my writing desk, writing.
The air of light comes through
the closed window. My wife
sits on the sofa, working away.
Such moments are filled with
the undomesticated bliss
of life's long day.
But night comes on so suddenly,
as if it were inside us already.
I think back to the other morning, in bed,
inspecting the woven quality
given by the broken white islands of her flesh.
I know that sometimes our faces must look grim
when we don't know that anyone is watching,
nor even realise that we are thinking,
the walking dead of grief's perplex.
But it is faster and more total than that -
this stricken dark that finds me now.
Chou? I ask, my voice as calm as it can be,
Chou, what has happened to the electricity?
There is no answer from the sofa.
Now where did I leave my two-eyed torch?*

*My brand new Chinese reading snake?
I want to rise, I want to pull myself up,
I want to leave this chair behind,
this throne of fire & ice!
But I am frozen, and the only light I know
is my own stubborn tongue resisting me,
refusing to scream as I fall forward
deep into the language of the birds
to become a turning knowledge
half nuzzled in the dirt:
all which says must hurt.*

* * * * *

From Colin James:

I tried to persuade the salivating capitalists at one of the several local marijuana dispensaries to put up a Taoist symbol on the empty wall behind the cash register. Lava lamps were apparently out of the question. The shaking of heads made me think: get me Heffernan and his “the implicate order hypothesis mandates an increase in coherence and complexity as the universe evolves.” I may have mentioned this because the salesperson now seemed more attentive. But yet, there I still was, according to Heffernan, “denigrating material reality” while attempting to escape away from it . . .

* * * * *

From Timothy Vilgiate:

I loved John Echem’s oration that he prepared for his uncle’s funeral, described in “How Do You Celebrate / Participate in the End of the Year?” I found the imagery of the gunfire resounding through the forest to be particular striking.

I also really enjoyed his “Memoir of a Boyhood in Cameroon and Nigeria.” It reminded me of when me and my ex-fiancé visited Ghana. We were the first white people that a lot of children had seen, and some of them were very frightened.

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

The lesson from this issue’s writings was obvious to me: Love should win out over materialism. The re-birth of the year is the real celebration.

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

What really moves me in *Cenacle* 114, the December issue, last month of *crazy crazy* 2020, is the feeling of community of the writers. The *Feedback* section is filled with thoughtful responses to last issue’s content. People not just reading but contemplating on how various pieces have moved them. This is interaction on a very intrapersonal scale.

The Electrolounge Forums’ “How Do You Celebrate / Participate in the End of the Year?” is more from of us all but better, longer, more introspective, and a full tapestry of our associations offering room for identification and illumination.

And here I compare to a good qigong class, where first the energy field is prepared, allowing the individual to open up, relax and absorb the group vibe, blessing whatever comes afterwards with more highly tuned reception.

* * * * *



From the ElectroLounge Forums

Writers' Notebooks

Published on electrolounge.boards.net

Post by Raymond on Mar 1, 2021 at 9:34am

This discussion is to allow us to see into each other's creative processes. I am sure you are all working on various writing projects. It might be insightful to see how each of us develops our Art, what goes into the finished production. I'll take the first go—

Notes on pending writings for the Tangled Gate Mythopoeia—

as told of in *Many Musics*, *Labyrinthine*, *Bags End News*, *Dream Raps*, & *The Travelers Tales*:

***** The **Wobble** occurs in times of flux in different forms; could be cause or effect or both or neither; part of emptying Abe's Beach of Many Worlds, but not maliciously; flux where worlds cross; might it tie with the Beach filling again?

***** The **Wobble** might be communicative in some manner, not the English, and seems shared among the various kinds of pathways and worlds—

***** There are times of **Wobbles** and times of not **Wobbles**; how **Wobbles** are told of and known of, from past times, affects how they are reacted to now and hereon, and thus what comes of them occurring—

***** *What binds these many worlds?* Aside from the Great Tree, and the shared pathways, are the Emandians overhead; when Emandia was collapsing, and Red Bags and capsules and ships being sent out, how did they choose which worlds?

- It was the connection of a network of many worlds similar to Emandia; believed to be the best chance for Emandians to survive; and still retain connection with one another via this network of worlds
- How were they connected to Emandia? Not known at this time
- How many of the connected worlds have Emandians on them or overhead? Unknown

***** *Do all of the many connected worlds have Rutabega Festivals?*

- No—they have different festivals that reflect their uniquenesses
- Common among them are the Great Tree and pathways and Emandians and festivals
- It is in the nature of these many worlds to celebrate, thus Festivals, joy in being alive; rainbow threads braided to other worlds would be seen by those there as something to be curiously followed, and would lead to the Great Filled

Post by Martina on Mar 1, 2021 at 10:59am

Ooooooh! Great idea, Raymond.

***** The **little murders** are the ones that interest me. The famous ones fade into “True Crime” novels and movies. I tend to ponder the little murders.

***** **Cabocho**n: shaped, polished gem, not faceted.

***** **Ziggurat**: massive structure built in Mesopotamia; terraced compound; successively receding levels.

***** **In those places where a man dreams**, drinks, smokes, and—only in his mind—dances. Here lies savagery, devoid of remorse or romanticism, eternally winning in the short run, eternally defeated in the long run.

***** **Dean Young** says, “You want happy endings? Read cookbooks.” This makes me feel good.

***** **Commercials** remind me of the real world—that there is one outside the screen or the story. That which is protecting me from the real world is urging to purchase it.

***** **Confessional poetry**: What is it that I’m confessing? Only the same things you, reader, feel. I confess to greed on occasions when I’m hungry or to sloth when I’m tired; to envy when I’m broke; to lust more often than I admit; anger if I’m betrayed. If you call that *confessional*, OK. But those aren’t really confessions. They are your dreams, your days, your delusions as well as mine.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 1, 2021 at 11:09am

Wow, Martina, I like seeing a bit behind the curtain on your thinking—all sorts of goodies!

* * *

Post by Judih on Mar 1, 2021 at 10:43pm

behind the curtain
dare i challenge
again and again

Note to self: time to unplug, walk the earth, smell the fresh wheat fields, what am i waiting for?

* * *

Post by Sam on Mar 2, 2021 at 3:10am

I love this! Thanks Ray! It’s great to see you working out the details of your world. Marvelous thought snippets from Martina, as much another world to me as the more evidently imaginative, filled with heart, humor & magic. And wonderful Judih, gentle voice of the friend inside yourself, minding & reminding.

Here is an example from my current notebook . . .

So, next to look at, after catuskoti, square of opposition I like the Venn diagram version . . .

ALL S P NO S P
SOME S P SOME S NOT P

↗ ↘ contradiction
 ↔ contraries
 ↔ subcontraries
 ↑ ↓ subalterns 1/3/21

The grumpy monk of morning
complained into the bounded shape
of its own redundant description:
Every useless word is an opportunity
for reflection, for reflection
is but the aftermath of imagination

~ & the fuzz upon ~~my~~ tongue
& the fur upon ~~my~~ teeth
~~wise~~ A call to action. 2/3/21

Rise up! grass dog! /skake the

Post by Raymond on Mar 3, 2021 at 9:25am

The hard thing to communicate is how much of writing is simply thinking. Breathing. Listening. Reading. Trying to describe the writing process, using writing, is capturing what one can, but not the actual experience.

At the same time, to become more aware of one's activities, how writing is more than the pen to paper, fingers to keyboard, those things are arrival from everywhere else, physically and mentally. Even this short passage is arrival to this discussion from elsewhere. The pleasure in arrival to the page, and the satisfaction drawn thereof, each time, over time, draws one to it again and again, or less so.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 4, 2021 at 9:38am

Some Dream Journal notes this week:

***** One of the Many Worlds has a great **Prairie Press Palace**—from an idea scrawled on a napkin, to a hidden online link, to a Many Worlds & multi-dimensional building where worlds share news—by paper, TV, touch, song, hypodermic, dream, etc.

***** **Prairie Press Palace** entrances:

- 1 - Door of soft light
- 2 - Door of mist
- 3 - Door of endless colors
- 4 - Door of dark
- 5 - Door of music
- 6 - Door of wood

***** Two “TV” shows:

- 1 - Since '62 - **Affect & Cause** - a mostly black & white anthology show, set cast of actors, writers, directors, technicians, who change roles, & whose stories are increasingly connected, cross over, remade—
- 2 - Since '66 - **Full Nexters** - in “living color,” literally, actors portray characters who live together, & who themselves actually live together, & so cross back & forth, & favorite shared ritual is watching **Affect & Cause**, on their *DuMont* TV called **Fillco**—

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Mar 4, 2021 at 7:04pm

I suppose I could offer some insight into my major project of '19-'20, my book called *Unfolding Nature: Being in the Implicate Order* (BookBaby, 2020). When I get going on a writing project, I do very little planning. I just write and see where it goes, putting it all together at a later stage. On this book and others, some of the writing is purely original, and some is based on “sources.”

But I have to explain a little about my use of sources. I don't take the information and incorporate it into my narrative; rather, I use the material for ideas and subjects that I can then go on to say something about on my own. So, potentially, a book that would seem to be a perfect source for my project could

be completely worthless, because I cannot find a way to generate my own ideas. Of course, when it comes to the actual science, of which there is quite a bit in this book, I naturally have to represent the science accurately. But other than that, I stick pretty much to my own notions.

So, in the course of a day, I may have written about five different topics. I have several units of about a half-page to a page long, and that's how I go—in little chunks. When the writing phase was completed, I then had to edit everything together into coherent categories, and then create a coherent flow. I wound up, after a lot of writing, editing and work, with fourteen chapters for the final book.

This, I think, is an unorthodox method of preparing a book, but it's just how I roll, I guess. I take the proofreading process very seriously, and it is not uncommon on many of my books to go through seven or eight drafts. I like to get the bugs out.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 5, 2021 at 10:49am

So, Jimmy, here is a question for you: how does your poetry writing process differ from your science prose? Your poems are very structured, rhyming and all, but I'm betting there is some wild card action to their making.

* * *

Post by Sam on Mar 5, 2021 at 3:27pm

Something pleasantly meditative in your writing about writing, Ray, and I love the idea of the Prairie Press Palace, and the mysterious richness in the qualities of the different doors. The feeling of mixing with multitudes in my dreams has been particularly strong at different points in my life—

That's very interesting to hear how you work, Jimmy. It kind of gives me some hope, as all I have are a bunch of bits here & there at the moment, and still not quite sure what they'll end up becoming—

I keep a log on my computer as well as using notebooks. Until April last year I would just make new documents whenever ideas came, and name them all sorts of things. I really don't know what might be lurking in there—

So April 2020 I began just making one text document a month, and writing a log with dates & times when I was at my computer. In a way it's no better for remembering what's where. So I plan to print them off, extract the goods, and file them away once I'm set up a bit better. Here are some bits from the past couple of days:

07:27 4/3/21

Well, last night was the most disturbed we've been by little lorien - i meant to say that it was full moon some nights ago, and it corresponded with her going down to one feed a day, and also seemed to mark a developmental stage - just found this curious 'cos recall remarking on something similar with little o. she was quite busy that night - in fact i couldn't sleep either and i got up and read "poetic diction" - she spent some time on the sofa with me, and we'd on me too - but she just stayed in bed that morning, didn't even try to get up & beg for milk like she had been doing.

but yeah: last night was super busy, she seemed to be here, there & everywhere scrabbling at things - at one point she jumped on the bed, and jumped on me, and i grabbed her to chuck her off but before i did sort of gave her a cuddle, maybe a sniff as i love the smell of her, but then she somehow grew, and the contact became more sensual, this disturbed me a little so i tried to throw her off but i could not - i was paralyzed and it felt like she was pinning me down all over my body - i was helplessly willing myself to rise up and throw her off - and i willed myself awake, perhaps she was actually on the bed and i then chased her off i can't remember, apart from turning back over and trying to go back to sleep.

12:44

*typed with one hand, while chewing
rice and vegetables, man,
on this cool grey poetropical day . . .*

*looking out the window, thinking
maybe i should think about art more?
turn my mind towards that which i am
already engaged in, where my talents
seem to lie*

*the still bare oak, gently wavering
pokes out behind the cooked-earth tiles
of the barn like my grandad's hair did:
bald on top, scalped by red indians*

*the silver ladder, shining white,
leads up to a little black hole
of a window, dull galvanized downpipe
connects the guttering to the water trough*

*deep green ivy climbs the mottled wall
behind a grill of the same green,
a rusty basinless wheelbarrow sits there -
it all looks beautiful to me*

*framed by the window that our house
plants lean into, hungry for more light
than we can currently provide.
it is life, you see, that i like looking at.*

*i just arranged some poems into
chronillogical order. i like that too,
that is a thing that satisfies me,
seeing things arranged how they unfolded in time.*

*i figure that if poetry does have a logic,
it is of that kind. it is a logic it gets
from things that grow - just as it seems to.
that is why art is really poetry for me,*

*even making pictures, even music maybe.
 even if you play with time, make it jump around
 (it already speeds up & slows down, clearly)
 the only reason you can do this is because*

*the logic of the consecutive.
 it is not even causative - some things
 just follow. flow is the contraction
 of follow, form the unbreakable loop.*

*maybe. anyway. i like to look at life,
 and i like to think about poetry,
 especially while it's happening.
 thank you for letting me be.*

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 5, 2021 at 6:46pm

Sam—

OK, you wrote this:

*flow is the contraction
 of follow*

Is this so?

* * *

Post by Jimmy on Mar 5, 2021 at 7:54pm

Raymond—

On my poetry, the key for me is focusing my thoughts on what I am going to write. So I come up with, or use an existing, idea or proposition or subject, and go from there. I have to know what I'm writing about when I'm writing a poem. In fact, I often title my poems before I even begin to write them.

As far as the writing process, I just try to get in a certain place where I can let my subconscious flow. There's no real designing, just writing, often, as you say, within the constraints of a certain rhyme scheme.

One of the reasons I like to use rhyme is that it forces me to be imaginative and creative. It places limits on what you can do, and therefore you can get more novel stuff.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 10, 2021 at 4:03pm

Reviewing recent *Many Musics* poems to resume with XII, #11—left off previous one with the Gate-Keeper in Ancienne Coffeehouse encountering someone . . . and more questions remain:

***** Why does he film?

***** Because he follows the *hmmm*?

***** He is looking for a way to the **Heart of the World**?

***** What is his film **RemoteLand**?

***** His tripod of **White Birch**—descends levels & colors—reveals what it captures in a form best understood by audience—not merely an instrument but his boon companion—

***** His audience is not just people-folks—his stories to people & of people—

***** He films to connect disparate places & stories—

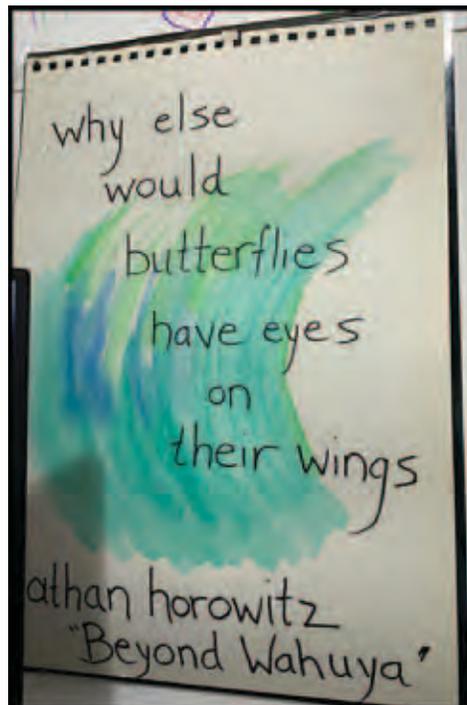
***** **RemoteLand** is many levels down—many layers of levels—what one sees another may not—he films all the layers—one sees what one can & perhaps on many watchings seeing something else—literally a different experience each time—

***** Why must he make his film & arrive to down deep? What does he seek? Why Abe's empty Beach of Many Worlds? Something about his own lost world? How to reunite many worlds?

* * *

Post by Judih on Mar 10, 2021 at 10:26pm

Notebooks—I take notes as I read others' work. Sometimes I add a bit of decoration.



* * *

Post by Sam on Mar 11, 2021 at 3:18am

Lovely to see into the notes themselves, Judih, thanks!

Great to see your thorough questioning process, Ray. The Gate-keeper has a bunch of resonances for me, and am intrigued to see him develop.

As to whether or not flow is the contraction of follow, well, I won't be able to go beyond the maybe I already wrote—because flow is flow, and much else besides—but I try not to simply play on words unless there's a thought there too.

But I suppose flow is so expansive, effusive, that it's strange to think of it as any kind of contraction, bordering on impossible? And yet say *follow* over and over again and you might find them f'lowing together. And the way that you can often pick a piece of flow, once apparently frozen in a poem, and start expanding on it . . . ?

Flow is fundamentally not to be blocked, perhaps, even to take the easiest path. But poetic flow is not like water in that way, or doesn't seem to be—what are the “physics” or what is the “logic” of it? Why does a flow take the path it does? Is something calling it, an idea with a gravity of its own? Am I somewhere watching the flow, with a rough idea of the immediate mindscape, and my intuitive or aesthetic principles intervening to funnel it somehow?

We could say flow is following its own nature, rather than some set of rules, but if we look at a flow we will see all these interconnections that are part of why & how it flowed the way it did. There are many kinds of reasons, things that follow, in flow, and to begin to get a handle on them, one would be expanding the flow—teasing it apart and examining it . . . but this would ultimately be to reduce it to, or to isolate, a bunch of rules or principles—a bunch of *follows*, and from this angle the flow itself would seem an expansion of them, perhaps a *fu l l o w e z z z*

. . .but really, the flow is only the smallest part of the whats and whys of what follows . . . they are the ways of the infinite worlds ourselves.

I suppose I was thinking of looking at a poem that represented life, or a life, how the liver themselves might be able to organize their entire existence around this gem of a thing—there might be a word or phrase here that brings up some event that itself echoes through and is part of other events—I don't know, this web of connection that would mean the reasons for a thing, a phrase, a poem, are not some reduction of it, but an infinite expansion upon it. . . endless so long as life goes on, and even theoretically thereafter, for the creative is in and as the world, between and beyond all that follows—even if it only existed for a moment that moment would be infinite, which is to say eternal.

I mean that is what seems to follow, for me, and whowhy flow could be a contraction of it, haha, sorry . . .

* * *

Post by Sam on Mar 11, 2021 at 3:35am

So, Ray—

Here's a question for you:

Those questions you asked yourself, about the Gate-keeper, what is your process with answering them?

Will you actually try to answer each question, and write down your responses? Or is this more like a sign or symptom or some deeper or less formal process of meditation or contemplation? Will you wait for the answers to perhaps come up in different ways, or something?

And once you have these answers, how do they figure into the poetry?

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 11, 2021 at 10:21am

Hey Sam—

Well, it's more like a puzzle I am working out—I like writing down my thinking-through process—words on the page resonate for me in a way nothing else does—it's like everything else is filtering and sorting and what-not toward what will arrive to the page—the purpose of this discussion is to shine a little light on my process—and to get a peek at yours and who-all else joins us here—

Dreams figure deep into my writing—as is likely obvious—this morning I realized in waking that the conversation between Abe and the Gate-Keeper on the Beach of Many Worlds (described in *Cenacle* 114) will conclude with Abe telling the Gate-Keeper he must find his own lost home-world before he will be allowed to travel to & film the Heart of the World—

I think the Gate-Keeper's home-world is one of the many braided worlds—but for some reason the path to it is blocked, or lost, or something—so none can travel to or from it via the braided paths—

Maybe this is why the Gate-Keeper begins to make his “film” **RemoteLand**—which usually begins with a car crash running in reverse—which I think now is somehow equivalent to the ship that crashed on the Gate-Keeper's home-world & I guess survivors made a society of some kind there? Not a very prosperous one—why GK left—

The challenge I had really here is that the Gate-Keeper has been in my fiction *Labyrinthine* for years & years—& never in *Many Musics*—so now I am crossing him over—still not fully sure what will come of it—but I had to fit this new work into the existing work—

I am *terrible* at *New York Times* crossword puzzles, but much better at these sort of narrative / twisty / time-travel / cross-dimensional / etc. kinds!

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 11, 2021 at 10:24am

Judih—

That image-writing is so cool!

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 11, 2021 at 10:28am

Hey Sam—

Flow always makes me think of these lines from a Phish song called “The Lizards”:

*The Helping Friendly Book, it seemed, possessed the ancient secrets
Of eternal joy and never-ending splendor
The trick was to surrender to the flow*

* * *

Post by Sam on Mar 12, 2021 at 3:59am

Thanks for expanding, Raymond, it’s cool to get an insight into the work behind the poem, and gives me some ideas about how to approach some of my own problems . . . I’ve got the ghosts of like 5 or 10 tales that have been hovering around me for years, and every now & then something unconnected from them happens in my life, or thought, and I realize it could relate to one of those tales—but then in a way I still don’t seem to get any closer to starting to write them . . . I guess in some way I am waiting, but I think I should soon get on and just try getting something down / out.

“Eternal joy & never-ending splendor” is really what the flow is all about, for sure . . .

* * *

Post by Nathan on Mar 17, 2021 at 3:02pm

Hi, all.

I have an ongoing email to myself called **poem notes 2019**. It superseded some previous poem notes emails. It contains pastings and random jottings such as the following:

Cat adventures continue. Last night at 11:30, just before turning in for a good night’s sleep, I checked Facebook. There was an urgent message with a blurry photo: “Is this your lost cat Fibi? She’s trying to get into my friend’s apartment in Little Italy. How soon can you get here?” “Give me half an hour,” I wrote back. I jumped in the car and sped to Little Italy, not far from where Fibi disappeared a month ago.

“Are you Nathan?” the woman called to me as I walked up the sidewalk. Yes. The cat she was holding looked very much like Fibi but wasn’t. The cat jumped up and rubbed against my legs. “Aw, it needs a home,” the woman said. “OK, sure,” I said. The cat followed me back to the car and, encouraged by some kibble on the floor, got in. I drove home while the cat looked out the window, mind blown by the sensation, or mewed on

the floor. The cat followed me from the car to the house and went in. Our other rescue cat, Stella, hissed at it. It spent the rest of the night cuddling with Ka and me and meowing in the meantime. Ka gave it a washcloth bath in the morning and put it out as a found cat on all the lost-and-found-pet pages. Livia named it Pudge after a character in a book she's reading. We think Pudge is a neutered male.

Long story short, we don't have the cat we arrived in Baltimore with, but we have two other cats. There's some kind of mathematics story problem in here but I'm not sure what it is. (3/15/21)

<<<>>>

*A microscope slide of a slice of soul.
Why does thought bubble?
Prose poems are the transgender athletes of literature.*

<<<>>>

Shopping List

- 1. Ice cream, microscope slides of slices of souls, boneless water*
- 2. Milk, eggs, fruit, veg*
- 3. Those freaky, delicious Trader Joe's frozen dinners that blend foods from multiple ethnicities*
- 4. Room-sized chandeliers made of super-sharp, aggressively animate crystal; rat-lions, if they're on sale; tangled masses of psychopathic pythons; frozen giant two-headed leeches*
- 5. Bleach, sponges to clean up the mess from #4*
- 6. Poe, Rimbaud, Whitman with his beard in a braid, Nerval with his lobster on a leash*
- 7. Let's not forget Baudelaire*

<<<>>>

A Michigan of the Mind

Lights slid by at the side of the highway, intermittently brightening our faces. On the bus from Mexico City to Puebla, the hour was late but my seatmate wanted to talk. The first time you meet a gringo, you're curious and you pick their brain to learn all you can of what goes on beyond the fabled frontera. "Which state are you from?" she said. "From Michigan," I said. "Michigan!" she exclaimed. "I've always wanted to visit Michigan!" "Why?" I said. "Oh!" she said. "The lakes! The forests! The mountains!"

The bus plunged into a stretch of darkness. In that moment, her Michigan drastically outshone the one I knew. Gilded by sunlight, Great Lakes thronged with boats full of delighted people. Across the Upper Peninsula and down the middle of the Lower ran a triple ridge of craggy, snow-capped mountains whose thickly forested skirts were populated by elk, wolf, and bear.

Reality broke the vision. There's not much you can do with the lakes. The old-growth forests are all but gone. The highest point of land I've seen is a pile of municipal waste covered in dirt, used as a ski hill. How much more wonderful was the Michigan she imagined. In those days, I believed the truth was always better, even if it hurt. Swallowing sorrow, I opened my mouth and murdered the magic Michigan in her mind.

Un Michigan de la mente

Las luces se deslizaban al costado de la carretera, iluminando intermitentemente nuestros rostros. En el autobús de la Ciudad de México a Puebla, era tarde pero mi compañera de asiento quería hablar. La primera vez que conoces a un gringo, sientes curiosidad y sacudes su cerebro para aprender todo lo que puedas de lo que sucede más allá de la legendaria frontera. “¿De qué estado eres?” ella dijo. “De Michigan,” dije. “¡Michigan!” Ella exclamo. “¡Siempre quise visitar Michigan!” “¿Por qué?” Yo dije. “¡Oh!” ella dijo. “¡Los lagos! ¡Los bosques! ¡Las montañas!”

El autobús se hundió en una franja de oscuridad. En ese momento, su Michigan eclipsó drásticamente al que yo conocía. Dorados por la luz del sol, los Grandes Lagos atestados de barcos llenos de gente encantada. Al otro lado de la Península Superior y por la mitad de la Baja, corría una triple cadena de montañas escarpadas cubiertas de nieve cuyas faldas densamente boscosas estaban pobladas por alces, lobos y osos.

La realidad rompió la visión. No hay mucho que puedas hacer con los lagos. Los bosques primarios han desaparecido. El punto más alto de tierra que he visto es un montón de desechos municipales cubiertos de tierra, que se usa como una colina para esquiar. Cuánto más maravilloso era el Michigan que imaginaba. En aquellos días, creía que la verdad siempre era mejor, incluso si dolía. Tragando pena, abrí la boca y asesiné a la mágica Michigan en su mente.

<<<>>>

I got a digital radio alarm clock for my 12th birthday and felt that I'd died and gone to heaven. It was so amazing to see the glowing numbers at night and listen to rock music. Heart's song "Dog and Butterfly" stunned me with its beauty and the Doors' "Love Her Madly" sent intimations of puberty roaring through my soul. One night I was awake when the numbers turned to 11:11 and it seemed beautiful, terrifying scratches of blood from the attack of a werewolf. I was a weird twelve-year-old.

* * *

Post by Raymond on Mar 28, 2021 at 8:51pm

That is awesome! I remember getting an AM-FM radio for the first time as a kid too. Amazing to have so many more stations! Simplest pleasures . . .

* * *

Post by Raymond on Apr 4, 2021 at 9:21pm

*Many Musics XII, #11, "Tripod," is ready for the new *Cenacle*, emerging from some of the notes I posted here. Can't wait to share with all of you!*

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*“Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes.”*

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

Dream Raps, Volume Ten

*“The greatest forces
lie in the region of the
uncomprehended.”*

—George MacDonald,
“*The Fantastic Imagination*,” 1893.

Volumes One to Ten of Dreams Raps can be found at:
<http://scriptorpress.com/dream-raps.pdf>

* * * * *

It Was the One Story He Had to Tell

A young man told me this story, like it was the one story he had to tell. Like for him, it was the one story of the world. He said he first saw her in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. Passing him to elsewhere. He could never figure out whither.

There was an antique rite-typer there, on a corner table, in a shadow. Many days he would sit in an old green armchair, in that same shadow, with his thick books, looking for any passing, obscure, or even slight reference to the **Unitive Time**. Or to the *end of the world*. Or to the Beach of Many Worlds, & how they once braided closer. Typing & typing what he found. Whoever he had been before he came here, it was what he did now.

He sometimes lived with the Creatures, in the White Woods further deep in the Ancienne Coffeehouse. When he came, they would make sure he was fed of fruits & nuts. Often, when he despaired, they would share their special Rutabaga Soup with him. It would calm him for a stretch. Never saw her though.

Most days he would doze in his old green armchair. Everyone knew it was his place. It was always left empty when he was further deep visiting the Creatures. Aunt made sure of it, until she no longer had

to do so, it being so well known by all.

Occasionally his hard studies deep in his thick books would be comforted by the sounds of guitar from another room, one closer to the entrance. One drifting afternoon he took a curious look, & saw it was a handsome old man, sitting in an old armchair too, eyes closed strumming, a tall mis-sorted pile of pages on the small table next to him.

Then one day he came upon a note in that antique rite-typer. It was a soft sheet of paper, decorated with Creatures like his own friends. White Bunny, grey Hedgedy-hog, many kinds of Bears, & so on.

But what was typed there *was not* in his own tongue, & he could not understand this because the keys of the antique rite-typer *were* in his language. He just stared & stared at these strange symbols, trying to get a feel for them, by how they marked that soft page. He somehow knew it was from *her*. *His wished-for beloved*. She had typed this note to him. It was her way of saying *hello*. That she'd noticed him noticing her, passing to elsewhere.

Further deep with the Creatures in the White Woods that night. Clustered with many beneath a warm Bear Blanket, near a clearing of full moonlight. In his dream, she was with him on a strange bus. She was at the front, he was at the back, & the bus was traveling through these same White Woods. It was the one with no roof you may have heard tell of, especially if your travels have taken you through Elliptical City.

Riding along, he became distracted into his deep studies, especially by a book called *Power*, one he would only find in rare dreams. He suddenly looked up, & she was gone. But then he noticed there remained a lavender trace of her in the air. He followed the lavender trace, ever nearing her without arriving.

And he woke up from this dream & realized that his pursuit of her now went on by waking & dreaming. He studied the soft note in the antique rite-typer. Ratched it down to a blank line, & he typed the following words. These were not wise wisdoms he typed, but they were a start. They were something he was fairly sure of:

The road on, usually better. The road back, not so good.

And then he sat back down in his old armchair, & he opened up his book again, & he continued his study & search for many answers.

* * * * *

The Road On, Usually Better

The road on, usually better. The road back, not so good. Was it the lavender trace of her, his wished-for beloved, come now even to him in waking, that led him out of the Ancienne Coffeehouse? Carrying too her soft note he had taken from the antique rite-typer on the table next to his armchair? *Was it the lavender trace that led him out of the epic & long & strange & murky & odd & beautiful Ancienne Coffeehouse?* Outside, after so long not, he went, onto the street of the Village.

Nearby was a diner. Had he been there before? None of this was familiar, but it looked friendly. He climbed the stairs up to the diner. It looked kind of like a silver streaked railroad car of some antique

vintage. Walked slowly through the door, saw there were booths going way back.

But in a near corner there's a tall round table, tall chairs, & for some reason he sat down there. With his note. Did the lavender trace nudge him over to it? Maybe. Sat down with his note. The place was lively, people at every booth. A white-faced pink cat radio quietly blared a recent song by The Pink Floyd. "You're listening to *SpiritPlants Radio America* . . ."

At one of the closer booths there's a couple of truck drivers in their uniforms, bit grizzled, but OK, clear on. Having their morning coffees, their eggs. A few booths further away, there's a colorful three-o. Two men in tuxedos, one bald as the day, the other hair tall as the night. A woman in a strange gown, elegant, old-fashioned, inapproachable. Yet somehow naked too. Hmm. Further back he saw a strange bent man showing some kind of long-legged apparatus to someone who seemed to have in turn to show a nifty little camera.

And he looked at his soft note from her, trying to make of it what he could. He wrote with his small pencil with the pink eraser on top, below her unknowable words, below his own typed words, in small script:

***Build a great big poem, a great big poem of many little poems.
Bricks & bricks & bricks of poems.
Build them up into a great building.
Welcome all.***

"You gonna have your regular, son?" the owner cried over him with a leering smile. He gestured to a waitress to come on over & get his order, *pronto!*

They Eats the Streets

Looking around this diner, he began to wonder if maybe it's more of a bar & grill? Hmm. Then he noticed the sign that someone made mounted behind the counter. *Six Stars Bar & Grill*. It still looked like a diner to him, but maybe it's something that used to be a diner. Maybe it's both.

He nodded to the friendly waitress, or possibly barmaid, & said, "Yes, I'll have my usual."

Looked at me, intently listening to his only story. "But I'll tell you a secret. I *didn't* have a usual there. I *didn't* think that they knew who I really was. But I *did* think they had me confused with someone else."

So he looked around stealthily & noticed there's a sign for the restroom in the corner. He made his way over there. There's two restrooms actually, each marked *Restroom*. Alright. He entered one of them, & there's two sinks. No, three. One didn't look like it was working. The one on each side of it was. And there was a man there, & he was studying his face closely. "Didn't notice me at all."

He went to the other one that was working. Studied the cuts on his face, used a paper towel to dab at them. *Who do they think I am? Who am I? I mean, when I was a kid, I used to be the catcher.*

Then the man, his hair long, his beard longer, & his overcoat even longer than that, started saying into the mirror, very slowly, almost chanting:

*We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.
We came down the street, then they ate the street, & the street was gone.
We came down the street . . .*

And so on. He was deep into it, whatever it meant to him. Finally he gathered up his shambles to leave. Holding preciously some kind of little stick in his dirty hands.

Gave his face a good wash, despite its cuts & bruises & contusions, & so on, & come back out into the bar-&-grill-diner, returned his seat. "And there's my meal. One egg, one sausage, one strip of bacon. Half piece of toast, little touch of butter on it. Glass of orange juice, small glass, only a quarter of the way full. Tall glass of milk, & a shot glass of something so dark I can't see through it."

He nodded at the waitress barmaid. "Thankee, sai."
She laughed. Her turquoise eyes twinkled, nearly the same color as those of his wished-for beloved's. Her hair in a long pretty braid too. No lavender trace though.
But how did he know that her favorite author was Stephen King?

"How did I know that?" he asks me.
I shrug unhelpfully.

On the white-faced pink cat radio behind the counter, someone was droning on about the *end of the world* & the group responsible . . . "well, they're sitting on top of their bus . . . looks like it has some kind of makeshift roof right now . . . & there's a stand off . . . & there's a charismatic leader standing on top of the bus, waving his arms . . ."

The reporter doesn't know what will happen next. "Now here's a James McGunn classic on *SpiritPlants Radio America* . . ."

We're Sitting On Top of Our Bus

We're sitting on top of our bus. It's peaceful, about a bajillion stars up there in those stary skies. We have these old lawn chairs that we keep tied under the bus, kept special for nights like this, when we drag them out, haul them up, get our fake roof in place, & set them down on top of it.

Now, admittedly, we're surrounded by cops, & probably the army, & who-knows-who-others. Been accused of bringing about the *end of the world*. Well, you could say that. I mean, the world ends every day for someone, for *many* someones. In different kinds of ways. Well, people die. Well, people move, change jobs, gain & lose lovers, discover their favorite book for the rest of their years. Pain, joy, oh, it's always ending & beginning! *End of the world?*

Well, we know, sitting up here on top of our bus, in our old lawn chairs, that it began with a strange girl that we encountered many months & miles ago, & the small handmade book that she gave us. She didn't give it to *one* of us, no, she gave it to *all* of us.

We were at a Festival, met a lot of nice people there, shared a lot of Soup. Seemed like she was there & gone before anybody knew but, here we were, with this small handmade book tied up with a braided green & gold ribbon, knotted with a pretty little stone.

We waited till we left the Festival, till we were out in the middle of elsewhere, sitting in these old lawn chairs on top of this bus, our home, looking up at these bajillion stars, & *then* we chose to undo the green-&-gold ribbon, & to look at the pages inside.

And yes, *that* is where tonight began, all of it, every last bit, when we read those pages. I can't even say we read them all at once, I can't even say we were able to read one page at a go, & this was a *small* book. Look at your hand. It was about the size of your hand, especially if your hand is not that big.

Didn't explain itself right away. All it said on the first page was:

Dreams within dreams within dreams.

That's it, in a kind of odd curlicue handwriting. One of us remarked that it seemed like that handwriting was by someone who was not familiar with handwriting, as though they were imitating how to do it.

And the next page, all it said was:

Endless levels up & down.

That was it.

And we read more, as time went on. It's funny because we always read it together. We'd pull out all our old lawn chairs up on top of the bus, set them in a kind of a circle. We took turns reading. Everyone was silent, listening.

Turned to the third page & it said:

Dream of power, unitive, to sing & heal.

And I'll tell you, that the book felt like *more* than a book. It's like it had an inner *glow*, an inner *hmmm*. Sometimes it seemed like the *hmmm* even cackled quietly. Weird. It's like it was *alive*, but in some way that was its own. It was not inert, not at *all*.

Tonight we're going to read the last page. We've agreed. It's time to read that last page & see if what all really has happened so far, as dire as it seems, cops & the army & who-knows-who-others even, might have some good or magical or unknown end.

* * * * *

I Gotta Leave the Bus

I gotta leave the bus. *I gotta leave, I gotta leave, I gotta leave the bus.* You know what I mean, man? Hang around enough strange people over the course of a long, strange time, you start to lose yourself into that strangeness, start to not know the difference between you and that strangeness. All that **Unitive Time** & *end of the world* crap.

I know there are cops, armies, whatever, surrounding the bus, & so I wait until it's the darkest part of the night, & I slip out, go out the back, the emergency exit door, never locked, slither on down, under the bus. I don't even take the chance of saying goodbye to my friend with the nifty little camera.

I can't say for sure how someone doesn't spot me with all their radars and sonars and whatever-ars, but somehow I get under that bus and the bus is parked in a big Weeds patch, man.

Now I'm not the most mystical flicked-out dude that you could possibly meet on your way. I keep pretty far from those freaky White Woods & the wild stories of talking Bunnies & what-not in there. But, I swear, as soon as I'm among those Weeds, I feel *safe*, safer than I've felt in a long time. I *don't* say a thing to them. Yah, I know you're thinking, *you don't say a thing to weeds?* But yes, I *don't* say a thing to the Weeds. But they're there, man. They're *with* me. They *understand* my distress. They *feel* it. And I *wanna* say something, *some* kind of thing. Some kind of *thankee*.

So I've never done this before, but what I do next is I put my arm right up against my mouth, with just a little breath of space, so that whatever I say is not going to travel beyond just a few inches from me. And I say, "I need to get out of here. Can you give me cover?"

And nothing happens. Yeah, I'm an *idiot*. But then it's like, um, I hear this beautiful music that I can't account for. *Is it in my head? Is out there? I don't know.* It's like the Weeds are breathing music to help me. No words.

But I start to move, fast, & I feel everything around me moving with me. I feel like wherever I'm moving, there's cover around me, there's silence. Everything is closer to me somehow, keeping me upright, hurrying me along, warming me within. I keep moving & moving until I am fifty fields beyond all that, if that's possible, & that's how I got away. *It was those Weeds.*

You don't need to believe me. I don't need to believe me, but that's how it happened. Just saying *that* is how it happened.

* * * * *

The House, with the Attic, from the Dreams of My Youth

So what happens as I leave the Weeds, & their kind aid to my escape, is that I carry on for many more fields, still worrying some that I'm being followed. But then I see that old house in the distance, & I'm *sure* that it's the house with the Attic, from the dreams of my youth! I went to that old house many times, hundreds of times, over & over, in dreams.

I make for that old house like a lunatic, running with my arms waving, flapping about me, my legs doing almost as badly, but I keep going & I don't trip. I almost trip a couple times, but *I don't trip*.

I make it to the front door finally, convinced it'll be locked, or someone will prevent me, but no one does. The front door is not even all the way closed.

I enter into the sky-tall vestibule, & it's dusty, & cobwebby, & I guess I get a little bit of a worried feeling about it. But I keep moving, looking, & again I travel through the countless rooms, filled with old furniture & strange bookcases, & odd statues & weird paintings, & mirrors that showed other dimensions, & so on. Room after room, some are huge as miles, some I can barely make through crawling, inching my way in & around.

Up many flights of stairs, until I finally come to the top of them. And there's the button hanging in mid-air, attached to a fishing line. Tug down & a ladder unfolds from the ceiling. Climb up & arrive to

my old beloved Attic. *Oh blessed be, I make it to the Attic!*

It had no width. It had no length. It had no height. It had no number.

I'd traveled it ever on back then, & there was no end to traveling it. It was like traveling one's own mind & finding no walls, no closed doors, no locks, no barriers, nothing.

Feels as it always felt. Rooms of content, structures of content, scaffoldings of content. Some built, some building, some pending, in plans. *This is it. I've arrived. I'm in the Attic.*

I wish you were here too, wished-for beloved. I would share it with you, I promise you I would. Would you like to come to the Attic with me? I think you might, I think you would enjoy it. There's a trace of you here from the Coffeehouse. I sniff like Creatures & can swear sometimes it's here.

I'm not walking anymore. No need to walk here. No need to hurry here. Go slow & enjoy. *Come with me. It's OK, lift up or just let go. Now you can see round corners, through walls. You hear, with no end. There's no limit to your hearing. Everything has sense & you sense them all, & everything touches you, close & closer. Everything braids closer. Symbiosis.*

That's the word I heard once, & that's the word. **Symbiosis**. A language for all, from all, by all, here we go. *Here come the Woods!* I'd say hang on, but don't hang on, let go. *Let go.*

Feel the trees, feel the leaves, the branches, the air, the soil, *feel it all.*

You feel it all, don't you? The Attic. You've made it. I'm so glad you're with me. Let's go.

(Remember me . . .)

The Blues Guitarist I Knew, Somewhat, Years Ago

As I wander through the many countless rooms of the Attic, I find myself in company with the blues guitarist I knew, somewhat, years ago. Well, I knew him during his last days, & his killing addiction. I remember that his best friend the photographer couldn't help him, *just couldn't*, & his beloved told me I needed to help him.

And I *tried*. All I could see was that when he played his guitar, he was safe. He was safe & he was happy. And what was killing him was nowhere close. So that's what I did. I'd see him often as I could, & he'd play his blues guitar for me, for hours on end. We'd get so high, sometimes with the Weeds, always with the music. *Ha!*

Now he's walking beside me, & I see he's got his blues guitar slung 'round his back. We smile at each other. I nod to him, the way I did back then, & he knows what that means. It means, *get that guitar between your two paws & strum, man, strum!* And he does. *Ha!* Blues songs he wrote about the *end of the world* back, when his wasn't so close to ending. I loved them songs so much, & we wondered if one day one of them would end up on **SpiritPlants Radio America**. Seemed possible back then.

The Attic is very wooden, this part of it anyway, this long hallway we're in, dark wooden, yet glowing.

I see we're both barefoot, whatever that means. We're both dressed in jeans & colorful shirts. My hair is long, his hair is long. He's playing & playing & playing. *Ha!*

I start to shout. I start to clap. I can't sing, I can't play, but I can join in other ways. Just making noise & shouting, to keep him playing on. *Ha!*

I guess, at some point, I'm not walking with him anymore, but I feel like I understand something better about time. Too much is strange, too much occurs, too much is remembered by only a few, or one. Time is *not* a unitive block of lead going forward & backwards forever. *Ha!*

Time is that blues guitar, keeping it all at bay, clapping, shouting, carrying on, long as he can play. *Ha!*

* * * * *

This is What I Learned That You Should Know Now

I reached what seemed like the far end of the Attic, which I'd been walking in for a long time. Maybe it started from Dreamland, I'm not sure. *Who knows how these things really start? Does it matter?* But I want you to know what I found out when I seemed to have reached that end of the Attic.

I look at the wall before me, not really convinced it was a wall before me. I'd never seen such a wall before me before in this Attic, in which I'd been many times. But it compelled me to look down, it compelled me to kneel down, it compelled me to lie down. I kept going *down & down & down*, & realizing that it was just a different kind of *up & up & up*.

And I was taught something, because I was willing to go *down & down & down*, & *up & up & up*, before this wall that I didn't believe was really there, though there it stood. But this is what I learned that you should know now.

There are these far-too-tiny-to-see sort of artists, tiniest little Creatures, who paint the world with emotions. Each one a different kind: sadness, anger, fear, joy, & so on. And they do not know of us, nor we of them. And yet we inter-relate & matter much to each other. We braid together without knowing. *They bore your trace, beloved.*

And why did they show me now? Why did I get to see? Why did they encourage me to share with you? I think it's because these artists were feeling like they weren't doing well enough by us, & they wanted to do better. And they had not known previous of us, just as we had not known previous of them, but then came this wall that brought us together. For them, there *was no end of the world.*

And they learned of me, & I learned of them. They reached up to me with jew-ells of love, touching me as they could, feeling me. They were asking, *how can we do better with what we do? How can we help?*

Down & down & down, & up & up & up.

* * * * *

SpiritPlants Radio America

I push through that wall that may not be there, & I invite my little friends to come along, & they do. They hop into a pocket in my green plaid jacket. Through the wall & come to a studio of a radio station with a big sign across the wall that says in fancy colorful script *SpiritPlants Radio America*.

I peek out the window nearby & see a lovely campus out there. There's a further room, where I see radio folks hanging out. Ceiling looks like a roof of endless stars.

Some of them look like students, some don't. I scurry into a corner as the DJ nods to me, & the engineer nods to me too, & I get the feeling that if you're going to DJ your show, you've got to engineer someone else's show. Hold hands both ways.

I become aware that I too DJ a show on this station, *SpiritPlants Radio America*, but I do it remotely. I don't know if everybody likes me doing it remotely, but my show has long been on the air there, & everyone is friendly overall there. It's nice to be part of things. I let my little friends out, for a look around. They seem drawn to people for different reasons.

One DJ's sad, worried, something, & one of my little artist friends hurries right over to her. Couple of swabs of the old molecular-sized brush, & she cheers up a little, looks around outside of her own struggles, & sees she's not alone.

Another DJ is angry, watching the television, on it the asshole who is in charge, letting more & more people get hurt, needlessly. Another of my little friends hurries over to him, paints him with *calm, calm, calm*.

I give a small signal. It's time to leave *SpiritPlants Radio America*, leave the ones who think I'm a good DJ, & the ones who think I'm not. It's time for me & my little friends to move along. I give a wave to all my fellow DJs, hoping to return sometime, & we're on our way again.

* * * * *

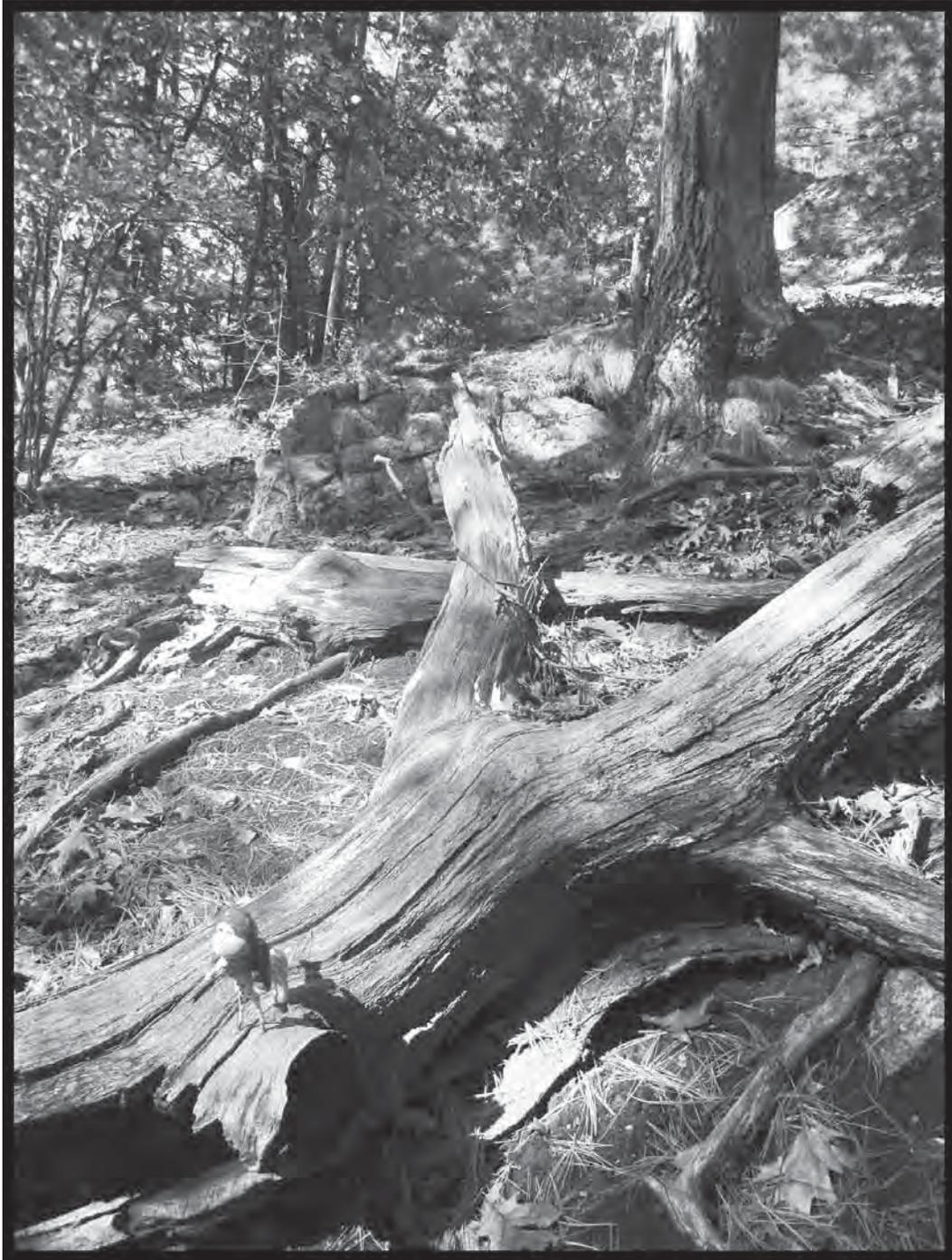
I Show My Little Friends a Bookstore

I feel like I want to show my little friends something good. There's more than idiots & suffering way up here. We come to an escalator & hop on, my little friends safe into the pocket of my green plaid jacket. We go *up & up & up*, & *down & down & down*, & arrive to a wonderful Liberry with about a bajillion books all around us.

I gesture to my little friends to come out of my pocket & hop up onto my hand, & they do. I show them big books with beautiful pictures, & tiny books with a tiny few of the best words, & oddly shaped books that are funny, & quiet hidden books, no noisier than a shadow.

Walk all around this wonderful liberry until we come to the very end, & there's a door, green & gold. Those colors are lucky. Walk on in, a-wondering.

It's a bare room. It's a white room. It's the kind of room that could be anything in the world, from **Unitive** to *ending*. It contains all the colors in the worlds of possibility. I start to walk faster until I realize I'm walking alongside of a stream. Like it was back in the Coffeehouse.



White Woods all around, glowing. Come to a bridge. There's an area under the bridge, stones, a hill. I sit there with my little friends, watch the water go by. They are sitting next to me in their tiny tininess, fingers on chin, trying to figure this all out. I am with them, finger on my chin, trying to figure it all out as well. *With you, beloved.*

* * * * *

There's Some Stories You Need to Tell S-l-o-w-l-y

There are some stories that you need to tell s-l-o-w-l-y &, in telling them s-l-o-w-l-y, they will be different kinds of stories than if you told them otherwise.

You see, I don't feel like I'm in the Attic anymore.

This *isn't* the Attic. This is my studio apartment in ZombieTown, & it's pretty bare. I haven't been here in a while. Is this the day that I moved out, all those years ago? I remember leaving just a little bit of trash in the corners, & not giving proper departure notice. The landlord was an asshole, & he deserved it.

But I'm back here now, & it's a kind of emptiness I'm feeling. *If I looked out the door, would I see that moving truck speeding away with me & my friends?* But here it's a thin feeling, less than a memory, not even a memory. *Is there something here?* It's just a bare room. But then I hear a noise, less than a noise, maybe it's a small breath, but it draws me into the bathroom, & I go in, & I close the door.

It's empty too. I don't turn on the light. I'm in the dark. Oh. I've been trapped in here before. Long stretches of tripping trapped in here. I can hear my white-faced pink cat radio in the other room, used to keep it on all night to keep me company. The Pink Floyd playing, I think.

I feel my way around, finding my sea legs in the darkness. Finally I just use that old trick & just close my eyes, begin to *hmmm*. *Ah*, here we go. There's a door in the back of this tiny bathroom that wasn't there back tripping when.

Well, I push through, & now I'm walking. My eyes closed, *hmmmming*, but nothing is happening yet.

Now I'm coming somewhere. I'm coming out of that dark bathroom & now I'm in a cement hotel room, not dissimilar to my studio but definitely not my studio. It's empty as well.

What can I do about this? I want something more to happen here than is happening so far. Am I telling the story s-l-o-w-l-y enough? I walk through the door of the hotel room, & now abruptly outside.

Across the street, there's a movie theatre. Now we're getting somewhere. *Nada Theatre*. Of course. **RemoteLand** *nightly, midnight*. Of course. *Now we're getting somewhere*. I walk right into the theatre. No one stalls me. No one is there. The theatre is empty.

What's weird is that I find that I don't have a shirt on now. I just kind of notice it, maybe a kind of breeze caught me or something. So now I'm standing in this empty theatre, and it's not anywhere near midnight, & I sit in the second row. It's the right row, where I always sit. *Especially with you, beloved. A trace of you in here?*

I watch. I wait. I nod, & I *hmmm*. *Come on, screen, show me something!* I'll talk a little faster then!

Then I see a refuge in the White Woods for many, bound on all sides by braided traps & alarums, & a culture in this refuge grows up that is happy, thrives. Till one time, at the ball field, a pop fly soars over the bounds, & many arguments over fair or fall.

Fair or fall? What does that mean? What is happening here?

Next time, I'm going to tell this story even more s-l-o-w-l-y.

* * * * *

Whenever I Go Into the Nada Theatre

Whenever I go into the Nada Theatre, I am convinced that it is at least midnight. Now I know this makes no sense. After all, you can walk into a movie theatre any time of the day or evening. But no, I walk through its strange doors, & it is midnight or later.

It is a vast movie theatre. Its ceiling is very high, if there at all. It has balconies that seem to go up & back & up & back, & there are little side-balconies too. I don't know if people sit in them or if they're just for decoration.

And there seem to be pulsing images on the ceiling, & walls, & even on the floor. Definitely on those green & gold curtains that open slowly to reveal a *massive* movie screen.

A *massive* one. And yet I sit down there, in the second row, *where I sit with you, & we look up toward that massive movie screen*. I close my eyes for just a moment to enjoy it all. When I open up my eyes again, I won't say I'm in the movie (that would be a dream, strange dream & a good one, but no), but it does seem as though maybe the movie & I are less separate from one another now (yes, that's the polite way to put it)(as though this Theatre & I held the little branch & the stone jew-ell between us).

You've got to watch out who is in the audience, & you've got to make sure that they understand too. The movie screen & I, the movie's world & I, share some space (let's say). And I get up to move around a little bit, & nothing seemed difficult to do, & the office I am in is empty.

There is a desk in the corner, of course, right over there. And that strange old computer on it. I sit down in the chair, which doesn't look very reliable, & I look at the screen, & it seems to be black & green, & the figures on it are hard to read.

They're very pixely & rectangular. Now they're pulsing & I'm thinking, *OK, is this my job? Is this what I do now? Do I make spreadsheets? Do I build documents? Am I just back from vacation? I must be just back from vacation. That bus ride to the great city, broke down three times. Was like a cult ran it. Wanted me to come up on that raggedy-looking roof to read some crazy girl's book about many worlds. Then they played the damned radio all night instead of fixing the tires quick.*

*That's why there's so much work piled up in the **In** file on my left-hand side, & no work completed on the **Out** file on my right-hand side.*

Alright, *alright*. I'll get down to work, spreadsheets, documents, other things. *I can do this.*

No. *I can't do this. I'm not gonna do this. I turn around. I look at the wall behind me. I look deep into the wall behind me.*

I'm going somewhere else. *I need some more vacation days before I can get down to this kind of work.*

* * * * *

It Was a Cube of Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough?

The questions always began like this: *it was a cube of chocolate chip cookie dough, edible? The baking kind?* The story varies. *It was the end of the world.* Others said it was *cherry vanilla*. Some said *both*. Some said *one* cube, some said *many*. Some said it was the confection of the culture through which it was traveling. Some said it contained *magic*. Others called it *really trippy*.

I don't know, man. I don't know how this happened. I was just looking for some Weeds, that's all. And I met this guy outside some trippy coffeehouse, & I thought, *man, he might be good to get me some Weeds.*

"Hey, man, how you doing?"

"I'm doing alright, man, how are you?"

"Doing well. Beautiful evening."

"I suppose, it is the *end of the world*, you know."

"True. How you keeping busy?"

"Well, I've got this plan, you see, I'm gonna teach a class on the **Netflix**. I got this friend who takes pictures for them."

"Oh, you mean that TV channel? You're gonna have a show?"

"Naw, man, I'm gonna teach a class *on* the **Netflix**."

"Oh, that's cool, man. Say, you got some Weeds?"

"Naw, man, I take these pills & my doctor *mumblemmummbblemmummmbbble*."

And he talked on & on & on, telling me every last detail of his medical situation, until I felt myself melting into the sidewalk with his trials, & his tribulations, & his Weedslessness, & soon I find myself inside *The Cenacle*.

What, you say? The Cenacle? That literary magazine with all them high-falutin writers & authors & artistes & so on? I was inside it, me! Yours truly. Me & my team, some of whom were not contributors. They're not authors or writers or artistes at all, but we're there to help capture someone who has infiltrated.

And we roam the pages of *The Cenacle*, through many writings by authors, & many photographs by artistes, & other strange occurrences within those pages, which are hard to tell about until we find the infiltrator! And wouldn't you know it, *he's got some Weeds!*

He's sitting at the very back of *The Cenacle*, right past the advertisement for **SpiritPlants Radio America**, between the *Notes on Contributors* & the *Last Yawp*, I believe. He's found himself a nice cozy spot, hasn't been edited yet obviously. Comfortable, among the Weeds.

Me & my team sit down with him. Takes him a while but he passes around his jive. Finally I say to him, after a good several rounds going around, *puff puff pass*: "Say, man, why are you there?"

"Here? Where?"

"*The Cenacle!* That is, amongst these authors & writers & artistes & so on. What are you doing here?"

Why did you infiltrate *The Cenacle*?”

Well, he takes a long hit on his short jive, we'd smoked it on down, & he says, “I gotta tell you, man. They talk about drugs a lot, & I got interested. About other weird stuff too, like endless deserts & Attics & so on. And so I started, you know, crawling along, down low, & I kept going. Some of it was *too* over my head, some of it was just *too* strange. I kept looking. Finally come back here, & there's this jive sitting there, right here, among all these lovely Weeds, so I sat down & started smoking it, & then all you folks came.”

“Well, why did you infiltrate?”

“Like everybody else in the world, man. *The end of the world*, man. What do you want, man?”

His voice keeps changing as he gets more & more excited. “*What do you want, man? What do you want, man? What do you want, man?*”

Me & my team, we stand up & move on. There's *gotta* be more to know than this.

* * * * *

Somewhere Down Deep

Somewhere down deep, among pages, words, traveling time like space, space like time, words like space, space like words, in my wheelchair with its saddlebag, which has a Velcro flap for easy use. You'd be *amazed* at how useful a Velcro flap on your saddlebag can be.

When I arrived to that party at the half-built old house, the one with that crazy bus poking halfway out of its attic, everybody's gathered around the long table, made of two braided planks, enjoying bowl after bowl of chicken & mashed potatoes. And a wonderful Soup too! People trying to forget their troubles, the crazy people with badges & guns, the sickness traveling the land, talk of the *end of the world*, trying not to think about any of it.

There was this old man, sharp, bearded, asking us hard questions to think about, as we sat friendly together & enjoyed our meal.

Is it good not to think about the things in the world bigger than any of us, if only for a little while?

Is that possible?

Is it a good thing to do?

Are you hurting anyone right now?

Is anyone hurting you?

If the answer is no, start there.

You're at peace, you're calm, start there.

Look at one another now. Ask these questions, ask others when you leave here.

Are you hurting anyone?

Are you being hurt by anyone?

If the answer is no, move on.

One to the next to the next to the next.

*When you find someone who is hurting or being hurt, **you stop**, all you people who gathered here, & are not being hurt, & are not hurting anyone.*

*And you gather 'round that person who is hurting or being hurt . . . **& you help!***

That's what you do. You don't add to the hurt, you help.

You figure out what that means, what it means to help, those who are hurting & those who are being hurt.

There's no formula, there's no plan, there's just figuring out what helps.

You arrive to it, & it works, & that person is not hurting or being hurt, & you gather them into your number & move along.

So said the old man at the table, between the big bowls of mashed potatoes, & the wonderful Soup, & we all listened. We asked each other those questions. We listened. Maybe we were reassured for a while. Maybe our purpose as a beloved group, & as single souls, now cleared some.

It's OK to be calm.

It's OK not to be hurt.

It's OK not to hurt.

It's OK.

It's OK.

Then a breath, & another, a third. A smile, a nod. ***It's time to help.***

* * * * *

I Made It to the Other Side

I made it to the other side. It happened, finally. *I made it to the other side.* I don't know how long it was, I don't know what kind of travel. I don't know what I was along the way. It was a shift. High in the air. Like the old stories told about. **Unitive Time**, *end of the world*, & all that.

I was come there as though I'd always been there, untended, unfettered, yet unable to leave. The hallways I passed through, they glowed, & they were endless.

There was something else too. A small something, a lavender trace of something, that kept me along. It was like a softest whisper of strange music, & I kept following it, & it's like I followed it in an arc over both miles & years. I followed it through that endless spaceship.

And it let me get near, & I began to arrive, & it let me nearer still, & I knew I was almost there. It's like we meshed together for a moment, & all was well in a new way. I didn't know what it was, what I was, but I wanted to say thank you to that lavender trace of softest music, & I didn't know how. I don't think it really needed thanks because I believe that strange music was made to get me through, & that music's happiness was when I made it to the other side.

And I awoke, wet, jagged, half in, half out of a frothy fountain. *The Fountain?* The one near the Tangled

Gate? Was I back?

No. I looked around, no Gate, just a fountain. Many noises in the world around me that I could not understand. Music nearby but no sign of anyone playing an instrument. No sign of that trace.

And now my past, it was like it was behind a wall I could not see through or over. *Who all had I once loved?*

All I had now was to stand, & to look about me, & to try to reckon how to make a path further along my way.

* * * * *

Enigmatic Events. Enigmatic Music. Enigmatic World.

“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.” Well, that’s what James Starsden famously says. Him a kind of time traveler who could sometimes be found around Iconic Square.

Dressed in his now equally famous shifting-rainbow-colored suit, he’d sit by that frothy fountain in Iconic Square, & he would turn on the white-faced pink cat radio that he carried around sometimes. He’d tune in to *Radio 36X With Commander Q* on ***SpiritPlants Radio America***.

It almost sounds like Commander Q has traveled to the *end of the world* to pluck bits & pieces from here & there, foreign tongues, old vinyl 45s, guttural gossip at icy bus stops. Dirty-talk, pretty-talk. The noise will braid & separate, evolve, crack wide, dive deep for the longest time, & yet stories will occur among all this seeming chaos.

One lingered with James Starsden long after he had with melancholy adieu departed the frothy fountain in Iconic Square, when ’twas his time again to travel via that spaceship with the hallways so long you would arrive far thence & whence from where you’d begun. He sometimes called it, for lack of a formal name, *Starship Attic*.

“One time he came to me asking for a ton of my earth. Wanting it for the valuable earthworms within, the medicines they will make to help the world heal from its sickness. And I helped him to write a moving prose piece, with photographs, for a magazine called *The Cenacle*, & a radio campaign on this very station you are tuned into. I hope you’ll consider his offer & his plea. I certainly hope you will!”

And James Starsden listened for a long while to these words, long after he had left Iconic Square, & he mumbled once again the words for which he so well known: *“Enigmatic events. Enigmatic music. Enigmatic world.”* Studied that pretty little stone he always kept close to hand, wondering where his beloved & the little stick.

* * * * *

Sooner or Later, This Will Happen to You, Too

I am working in a kind of big room, everyone has their work station, rows & rows of them. I’m unsure my task, worried, my lunch has attracted bugs. Boss comes over, looking around, sees the bugs, frowns. I promise to pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on.

I say it again. He nods, losing interest. Then I look at him deeper, with all the honesty in my heart & soul, & say, "I'll pack my lunch in plastic containers from now on."

He nods again, now edging away. (Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

It's a Friday again, don't ask me how. Ride my bike to this little antique store run by my old teacher friend. He loves the two Laughing Little Buddhas. He loves his many vitamins. He used to be a Marine. And I come over to his antique store to help him record his radio show, for *SpiritPlants Radio America*. Big band music. Glenn Miller, all that good stuff.

We record his show on that old **DuMont** reel-to-reel tape player of his. Then we pop many vitamins & he tells me stories of the travels of the Two Laughing Little Buddhas. Making folks laugh & laugh till they see Godd is an obvious truth, a simple one, woven into the beauty of things, & yet by no means the beginning or end of the answers people-folks seek about the many worlds.

(Sooner or later, this will happen to you, too.)

But his antique store is crowded this Friday, packed end to end, even at closing time. I find myself a good sit-down in an old armchair I know of there, in a shadowy corner. Reminds me fondly of that Coffeehouse. Decide to have a nap till he's ready.

*Far out, nowhere, there's a little hut with a vast within. And, as you approach the little hut, you become more hopeful, more & more hopeful, more & more & more hopeful, more hopeful than you've ever been ever. Tell me the **why** of it, tell me the **how** of it, **do**.*

(Maybe when this happens to you too, sooner or later, you'll have it figured out better than I do.)

* * * * *

Me Riding on My Bike Back to My ZombieTown Hovel

This story begins with me riding my bike back to my ZombieTown hovel from Eastern Donutshop, where me & my notebooks & black pens & Polly iPod would headquarter for a long stretch.

I come around to a side street I've ridden down many, many times &, in the middle of the street, there's a guy standing there in full protective gear. He's stopped this weird-looking bus, & is blocking up the road. Bus is blasting out loud music like this street has never heard.

*Has there been an **Apocalypse** & I didn't hear about it? Is it the end of the world? Suppose it's possible. I get deep into writing *Dream Raps* for the new issue of *The Cenacle* & I don't hear much news going on. And most of the old gents & ladies down at the Eastern would rather drink their black coffees & study their dog racing forms.*

I try to swerve around all this & I think I crash. Next thing I know, I'm coming to in a strange laboratory. Sloppily tied to a chair, as though someone forgot to finish, or had other business to get to. I look out the window & there's my bike parked right in front. Locked to the back fender of this weird roofless bus. I don't know what this was about, but I don't like it.

Time passes, no explanations, nobody does anything. There are no secret experiments on me. No

pokings or proddings, no blood drawn, nothing. *How is me sitting here, waiting hours on end, helping the Cause of Science in curing the **Apocalypse**?*

Finally, I get tired of waiting to be experimented upon. I see that someone left that laboratory window slightly open. I wiggle my sorry ass out of my loose ropes & then on through that window. Free my bike & I ride on back to my **ZombieTown** hovel like nobody's business, let me tell you. Lock the door. Close the curtains, my *Alice in Wonderland* curtains, tight &, in the darkness of my hovel, I realize maybe why they wanted me.

They wanted my **Vuufoo**. I built it myself off them Internets. You've heard of them Internets? Well, my **Vuufoo** is a tool that you can use to find something on them Internets, or at least some good candidates, if you have a mission of some kind. You enter into the tool up to six characteristics of a need, & it will lead you to a few good candidates. You can set filters by time, by distance, by worlds.

I warn you, though, that if you ever borrow or steal my **Vuufoo**, or get one of your own built from them Internets, it can occasionally be ornery. Has this cackle funny as the world.

I want to know what just happened though, quite honestly, so I type in this **Vuufoo: *ZombieTown* & *Laboratory* & *Apocalypse***. Figuring that will get me started somewhere.

But all this confounded contraption will say to me—*is it some kind of hint or clue?*—is the following:

*All worlds braid. All worlds hmmm.
All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.*

I drift back onto my mattress, lay with the beloved **Vuufoo** in my embrace. Thinking that, you know, that laboratory doesn't matter. Doesn't matter at all.

What I need to know about is:
All worlds braid. All worlds h m m m.

A Real Lockdown

Lots happens when there's a lockdown, a real lockdown, not like it was back when, when it was a suggestion, a good idea, something maybe you'd wanna do if you felt like it. No, now we're all locked down, for real. No Cause of Science cure for this *end of the world, this **Apocalypse***.

I'm with my dear friend the Traveling Troubadour. He's struggling. I understand. It's hard. He lost his job. He's struggling. He's staying in the spare room of his friend the photographer, but that's not really going too well. I wish I had more room in my **ZombieTown** hovel.

We're at a party. Well, we're not really at a party. We're at one of those, what are they called? *Virtual parties*. We each put on the Helmet. You project there. That's how it is for most of us at this party. But not all.

There are some people really at this party, not just virtual, who are even more down than my dear friend, because they decided they don't care. Really, honestly. And they're happy to accommodate the rest of

us, & be our entertainment, so long as they don't leave at the end of the night. However that happens.

Now this isn't a story that really happened. This is just what you'd call a *parable*, a warning. So you keep that in mind. This didn't really happen, but it could. So the old people are milling around, in the big open field of the party. The rest of us are there, projecting. Using our Helmets, we're safe. We all ready our controls, & our various weapons, & we begin to fire. Fire on the old people, mostly old people.

Now they're dressed well for dodging, for nimbly getting around. They're not in wheelchairs or leaning on walkers. Not tonight. They all got their shots of hyper-adrenaline before this began. They're gonna go out strong. We fire & fire at them, & miss them a lot. They hide behind large rocks, in stands of trees, shadows in the corner. They jeer, they shout. They weave wildly high & low.

Some of them, they don't speak English anymore. They don't speak any language that you would know. They speak a sort of guttural tongue of despair. As we begin to clip them, make them stumble, & then shoot them down, their guttural tongue comes out wildly. They cry louder & louder, & deeper & deeper, & spittier & spittier. *They roar!*

But the critical thing about this party game is that we don't want to shoot them down & kill them all at once. We want to spread it over the course of the night. We want to wound them, make them angry, make them shout in that guttural tongue. *Earn it.*

Someone hits the **Music** button. It's not pretty music. It's loud, mean music. It's music for shooting down people in despair. They like it. Rallies them more. *Remember, they don't want to come out of this.* They haven't felt alive in a long time. Lockdown has been going on for a long time & they decided this is the way they're gonna go out. *Fuck the end of the world.*

My dear friend the Traveling Troubadour is shooting but he's not really shooting. This isn't helping him. *He doesn't want to kill anybody.* He hasn't adjusted to this lockdown. He hasn't adjusted to survive, & the fact that because someone does, someone else doesn't. He doesn't understand that us shooting down these despairing old folks is part of how the world survives now.

Puts down his gun, & he walks away. Takes off his Helmet. I take one more shot, clip a blue-haired old woman's thigh. Old blood flares out. She roars, *roars!* in anger. Full of life, full of her life ending, full of the anger at her life ending, & this lockdown, & all of this. It's a roar of happiness & despair.

And then I take off my Helmet, & I go & sit with my dear friend. I worry he's not going to make it. I worry he's gonna end up in a field like that, with other despairing people. And I worry that he's gonna want me to take those final shots as he roars out the remainder of his despair.

* * * * *

The Strange-Folk

Somehow I ended up out in the desert with the Strange-Folk. You know these Strange-Folk. They look up in the skies, they look deep in the White Woods, they feel in the sand along the beach of the Wide Wide Sea, because they're sure secrets are waiting there to be told. They've heard about these secrets, & they go looking for them.

They figure these secrets are gonna explain everything. *Everything I ever wanted to know, all my questions*

answered. The beginning & end of the world. I'm gonna be happy because I'm gonna find out what these secrets are for myself. And so they go looking, high & low. For traces toward what will reveal all. Stories of magickal sticks & stones. You know these Strange-Folk.

So what happens is I end up in the desert with some of these Strange-Folk. Maybe I misunderstood when they offered me a ride. I don't know. But there's this large gathering of these Strange-Folk, & they're telling each other stories about looking in the White Woods, & feeling in the sand of the Wide Wide Sea, & looking in the skies.

Then the ships overhead gather our attention.

The Strange-Folk are gape-mouthed. *Oh! Yes, they are!* And they start running every which way. They don't know what it means when the answers *actually appear before you*. They were just words before. Strange books they read in bus stations, & along the way to jobs where they would talk to other Strange-Folk, about this possible answer & that possible answer.

But no, there are those spaceships, up there!

And I'm delighted, because I dreamed of them. Didn't go looking for them, didn't have to. I had a dream one magickal night, & so I just lived along, not paying attention to all the crazy stories. *And there they are.*

Strange-Folk are running panicked every which way in this desert, but I just stand there, point & smile. I point up high, towards those spaceships. And I'm thinking, *man, they're too far up there for me to have a little pleasant conversation with them. What do I do about this?*

So finally I think, *well, maybe I should tend to the Strange-Folk for a while.* And so I do. I go grabbing the ragged shirt of this one, & the ill-fitting dress of that one, & the half-put on wig of another. I start to gather them together, & I start to calm them down, *hmmmming*, is what I do, & I get them to *hmmm* with me.

We eventually gather in a beloved group, hand to hand, even paw to paw, & we look up at the spaceship, & we're calmer now. And now we can have some of that pleasant conversation among us all, with the spaceship up there. Forget about the secrets, forget about the stories, because this is what is happening now. *Ha!* It's gonna be fun!

* * * * *

Time . . . Distortions . . . Ensue

"Time distortions ensue." That's what he said to me at the beginning of the weekend. The performance had begun on late Friday afternoon, till sometime on Sunday, but hard to say when exactly.

I played a small part at first, nothing really too noticeable or important to the story. I was in the background. Yet always somewhere near to the Main Character of the performance. Him intense, so intense, like a wild wire. That's what I thought. But disconnected from himself too. Somewhere deep down. The wires within lay on the floor, inert.

As the performance moved into Saturday, the girl we traveled with noticed me nearby, & worried I'd

lost my fringy scarf. But there it was, partly hanging out of my tie-dyed book-bag at my feet. There it was. *No worries*. I looked up at her to show her.

But she was gone, like she'd been gone for hours. The Main Character looked at me & said, "*Time distortions ensue.*"

Come Saturday night, I'd become a kind of vigilante in the story. Taking more of my place in the front of things. I was called different things by different people. *Cenacle, Betsy Bunny Pillow, Dreamwalker.*

No longer wild & wiry, inside or not, he just wasn't. He was calmer. He was starting to learn from me, leaning near me, looking toward where I looked, trying to figure what I saw.

We shared the little stick & stone jew-ell of the Gemini Machine, & learned that what we were doing is what we did best. It seemed so clear & yet it pushed us along, down deeper together.

So I took him along on my dream-walks. Showed him how the many worlds braided together, & where they did: that Ancienne Coffeehouse, the Tangled Gate, the Attic, other places. Showed him the little hut at the Heart of the World, wherein one can travel back to **Unitive Time**. I brought him deep into the White Woods, into a clearing, & I looked at him, & I told him to *stand up straight, now, brother*. He did.

I said, "Now draw a circle in the air & *hmmm* with me as you do. I'll draw one with you. And we're going to travel this new way now. And you're going to lead us again, & this is the way that you're going to lead us. Now go ahead, do it."

Then it got better. It got *way* better. All that weakness, all those wild wires, all that fading, *nah*, he was come out of it all, becoming the leader he was meant to be. Now knew, how worlds braid, how people braid, how hearts braid, he knew it all. But now he also knew that he didn't have to lead as though following is a weakness. He didn't have to wield his power, as though others needed to be found to kneel before it.

He became calm, he became happy. On Sunday, when I was ready to move on, I knew he was gonna be fine. Just to be sure of it, I took my fringy scarf out of my tie-dyed bag, knotted it smiling 'round his neck, not a word, & departed.

* * * * *

Troubles on the Job

You know, I understand that everybody has his or her troubles on the job. But this was an especially challenging one of mine I'll tell you about now. I was working on this document. That's what I do. I work on documents. I try to make them good. Look good, feel good, fly through the air, swim into the seas without drowning, that's what I do.

Now the challenges began because someone had, right off the bat, decided to call this document "The Man With the Diaper on the Butterfly Between His Legs." What kind of title was that for a document? This weren't no porno, but that was the title. They all had decided, in that big room, the glass walls, fancy phones. I wasn't there, just got handed to me. *Go ahead. Do your thing*, they urged. *Put on your iPod headphones to that crazy radio station we know you hear, & do your thing!*

The whole situation quickly became multi-dimensional. In fact, the harder I worked, the more I realized I was laboring in an endless loop of *almost getting done & then not getting done*, of *almost getting done & then not getting done*, of *almost getting done & then not getting done*.

Getting so close, getting to that last page, & then remembering something & going back to fix it. Then there was a link, & then there was a reference, & then there was a footnote, & then there was a citation, & then there was an image. And I kept getting to that last page, & then it would be something else. It was never the same thing, just an endlessly braiding loop. It had become multi-dimensional, I tell you. *It was that kind of day.*

Finally I decided I was done. I sent it off. Put it in a big brown envelope. Squeezed it into that pneumatic tube they call the Chipmunk, or the 'Munk for short, so it'd arise the many, many floors, to somewhere at the top of the endlessly tall building in which I am labored, find its way.

And then I sat back down at my desk in the corner, under the air conditioner that drips, even in the wintertime. And I pulled, slyly smiling, from the bottom desk drawer, the manuscript that really concerned me. Called *Power*.

I read in it about the Great War, & the King who travels from place to place, & how time seems wrong to him. Seems to run backwards, *effect & cause*. He's traced, in this way, backwards through time, from the *end of the world* itself, down these great sandstone steps, to a seeming endless Beach. *Will he find his long-lost beloved?*

I turn the page, & there's only a couple of lines to read. They say, "If you come to the King's Island, & look out to the dark waters of the Wide Wide Sea, there is only one thing you need to worry on, until the King returns from his travels. If you hear distant bells, he'll come-come-a'calling."

There are people near me now. I hurriedly put away my manuscript. One of them has that envelope, that awful document, in his hands. Shake my head, if only to myself. *That kind of day.*

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What Is the Forever Dreaming?

The question comes up, *what is the forever dreaming?* It's always asked. *Are the Braided Places like veins that run through Heart of the World, through the Heart of the Many Worlds? From the Great Tree, to the lesser Great Trees, to the Many Worlds?* These questions are always asked. Someone's always wanting to know.

Someone's always arriving, sometimes with a little pad of paper & a pencil. Sometimes it's some kind of weird gadget that doesn't look nearly as efficient or easy to use as a rite-typer. Usually, when the questions are asked, I'm sitting on my log, the one speckled by rainbow moss, & I'm assembling a big beautiful book. I mean, that's what I'm doing, that's what I often do. Remembrances of my photographic travels in the Attic, on the bus with no roof, & back to **Unitive Time** itself.

I kind of think the people who come with their questions, they ask someone along the way, & that someone says, *well, look for the guy sitting on the log assembling his big, beautiful book, he'll tell ya.* And then they come.

Come on, man. You come all this way down here, & you're asking me what all this means? You've brought good questions. Come on. Think, man. Stand up. I don't want to sit with you. Stand up! Now raise your arms high. Out. Now breathe. Breathe. Don't just inhale. Breathe. Good. Now listen for a while. Listen. Now take a big sniff, take a big, delicious sniff. Feel it all around you, feel it touching you. Feel it in you. Feel yourself opening up to it, letting out to it. If you feel it, it feels you. Oh, it's gorgeous & beautiful!

You want to see Unitive Time? I can't tell you if that'll work but the Hut's over there. If you can figure it out, you can go & get a little bit of your own answer for why there's something instead of nothing.

I Think Often About Narrative

I think often about narrative, about writing narrative, about what narrative is. What it means to tell a story, how to tell it, how to tell it well, how to tell it strange, what any of it means. *Do you know what any of it means? I'm glad you're sitting here, next to me, beloved, cuz otherwise I'd just be talking to myself right now, about narrative.*

Writing narrative, in the past, & in the future, how they link up uncertain. But, by golly, if you start compiling them, you might just see how they connect later. That's what you gotta do. That's what I've been thinking about. That's the conclusion I've come to.

You see, I was sitting in my ZombieTown hovel. It's down that street, past the Coffeehouse from here. Sometimes I take that weird-ass bus they run to get here. And there were Creatures relaxed all around my floor, everywhere. Under hats, & so on. You might not even know they were there. They get cold. They end up under hats. It helps, a little. And it was peaceful.

I was talking to someone about a strange narrative, with a weird structure. I don't think I was talking to the Creatures because they just stop listening when I talk that way. They picked me up later on down the road, as it were, when I started talking about the Great Tree at the Heart of the World.

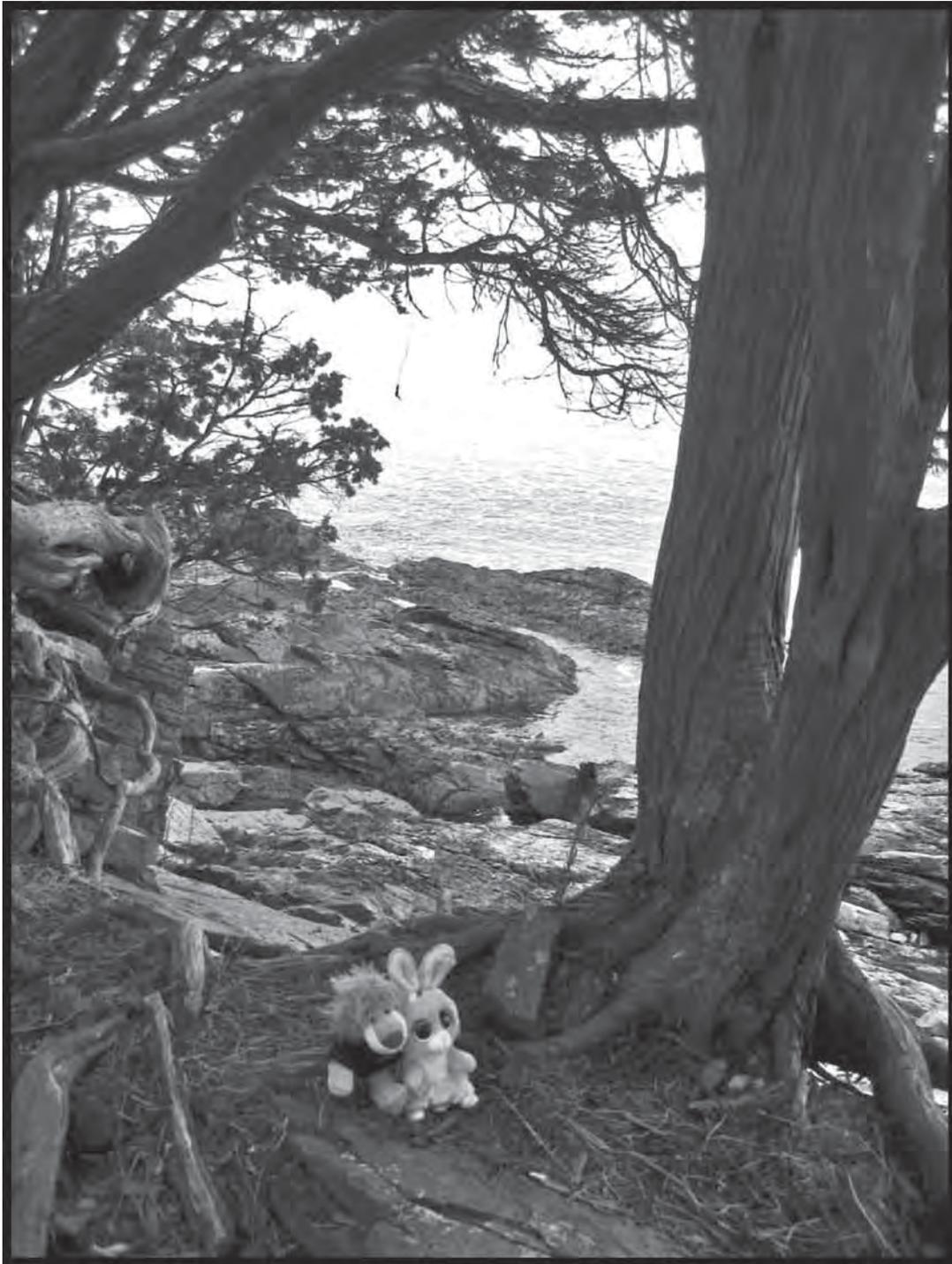
That raised them up, some even came out from under their hats, a-sniffing. I said, "In this weird narrative, I lived in a room that is one small part of the Great Tree, but I don't know how I got there. And it doesn't seem like a bad place to be, as places to be go."

I closed my eyes, & I imagined cherry blossoms, & lines of a poem about the *end of the world* scattered every which way around this room, inside this Great Tree, inside this weird narrative that I was telling, maybe to the Creatures, in my ZombieTown hovel, down the street, past the Coffeehouse from here.

I follow the cherry blossoms, & the lines of the poem about the *end of the world*, for a long time, till I come to a great city. I'm sitting in a tall city building, in the glass foyer, at a glass table, in a glass chair, & there's a drawing in front of me. It's a drawing of a peanut.

My guitarist friend arrives, & says to me, with his own unique crooked smile, "Where are you right now, Raymond? Are you here? Are you in the Great Tree? Are you in your ZombieTown hovel? Are you doing that radio show of yours on *SpiritPlants Radio America*? Where are you?"

Well, I put my finger on chin, because this was a good question, not a tricky question. Shouldn't have been anyway. But I looked up at my friend with that crooked smile of his own & I said, "In my mind,



when it is best & clearest & brightest, there is a cackle-o-phony, everywhere, a *cackle-o-phony*. And that's why I'm here, & there, & there, & there, & there. *That's how it is.*"

Well, he hauled me up by my raggedy shirt, gave me a solid pat on my back, & said, "My friend, I'm gonna take you to see your favorite movie. I know where it's playing, down an alley no one else knows. It'll be just us. And for a while your *cackle-o-phony* will be quiet, in the seat, next to yours."

* * * * *

The Gemini Machine

Well, it's not something you're gonna encounter just *anywhere*, or just *any* day, but you might encounter it *somewhere* on *some* day. *What's the difference?* Oh, I think there's a difference. You see, there is the Gemini Machine. Rhymes with *hegemony*. A little branch clasping a pretty little stone jew-ell in its crook.

Now here's how it works, & maybe this will better explain why one way but not the other. Two people. One holds the little branch, one holds the stone jew-ell. They learn what they do best together, & then they do. They become more than one, more than two.

On the day when I was lucky enough to encounter the Gemini Machine, my beloved & I were riding in our favorite crimson sedan, Sydnee Grand Prix SE, kissing, flirting, playing the old time rock-&-roll on the *SpiritPlants Radio America*. Sometimes I'm up front & she's in back, sometimes we're both up front, sometimes we're both in back. Sometimes my beloved is under a favorite electric blue blanket, smiling. Sometimes I'm with her.

And all the time, I am holding the branch & she's holding the stone jew-ell. Sometimes we switch off, but always one of our hands is holding one, one of our hands is holding the other, & our other two hands are holding each other. That's how it works.

It's not just about kissing & flirting. Could be about other things.

Could be two scientists come together. They are brilliant geniuses & with branch & stone jew-ell held, & other hands held, there comes the answer about the *end of the world* they have sought for so long.

It could be two whose nations both make money off of their war & rivalry. These two are tired of it, tired of using the word *Godd* interchangeably with *money* & *business* & *profit*, *ideology* & so on. Them in the secret Attic of a hotel room, alone, maybe that strange No-Tell some know of. The door locked, a blank piece of paper, a jar of ink, a pen. Hands held, stone jew-ell, little branch. *Time to fill that blank page with peace.*

What do you think? Maybe it's coming your way. What will you do with the Gemini Machine? Who will you do it with?

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The Gemini Machine (Continued)

My beloved & I embrace the Gemini Machine, kissing, flirting, stone jew-ell & little branch, & Sydnee Grand Prix SE friendly departs us into a black & white 'scape. Her radio still blasting the old time rock & roll.

We're now in a cloudy canvas, traveling, maybe by train, maybe Creature friends close by. Some of them like trains fo sho.

I look out the window at the black & white 'scape, cloudy, look farther & farther, Gemini Machine deeper & deeper. *What does kissing mean on its far ends?* I'm watching, in my mind's eye, **RemoteLand**, that cinematic **Beast**, & its sequel, **Three Inches of Blood**, & its variation, **More Fun**, playing in simultaneous mix out there in the black & white 'scape. *Far edges of kissing, Gemini Machine, stone jew-ell, little twig, beloved. Wonderful, wonderful.*

The train speeds up. *Or does the train slow down? Or does it do both?*

"Hey, listen, man, don't you tell me speed goes just one way or the other! I say no! I say you can go fast & slow at the same time! I've felt it, man!"

"Calm down, sir."

"I'm sorry, man. It was all comforting & calming until I thought about speed going fast or slow, & having to choose."

"It's OK, sir. It's OK." My beloved nods me too. Smiling gestures our Gemini Machine by reminder.

The train conductor is an old punker. I can see the Mohawk under his trainman's cap. He's got tattoos running high & low, pretty ones though, beautiful ones. One shows a kind of strange bus with no roof careening over a black chasm. Another shows those rocking Ramones boys traveling in the far reaches of outer space with Mulronie the Space Pirate & his boon companion Commandeer Cacklebird, in their famous Space Tugboat. *Toot-Toot!*

"You are a canvas, like the black & white canvas we are in," I say, calmer.

He nods, appreciative. Shows me his blank book of the *urrrr*-tongue. Hands me this book, of the *urrrr*-tongue, & says, "Read this, sir, it'll balance you out. All the beautiful, all the glorious, all the horrific, all the strange, all the subtle, & all the boring things will mix together in a beautiful Soup at the bottom of your mind. **Unitive Soup**. *Ha!* You won't worry about the *end of the world* no more."

I say, "Thank you, brother," after we've exchanged a long, long look. *Thank you, brother.*

I lean my head on my beloved's shoulder, still Gemini Machine between us, & I glance at that book written in the *urrrr*-tongue, every page blank, every page beautiful, every page calming to the riled heart & the restless eye.

Fast or slow? No, calm. Urrrr-tongue.

Fast or slow? No, calm. Urrrr-tongue.

Calm. Urrrrrr-tongue. Calm. Calm.

Who was that old punker trainman? He's gone. This train is now murky, becoming roseate. *Is it still moving on tracks?*

Or are we now in two old armchairs, in a strange rosy-lit room?

Calm. Urrrrrr-tongue. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm. Calm.

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In a Time of Plague & Protest

I suppose you could say that in a time of plague & protest, one needs to follow other paths of travel than the usual ones. My beloved & I are now traveling through *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*. The strange, endless book known by many, & a few, & hardly any. Where there are places filled with many words, fewer words, & no words.

We come to this place & that, & I would tell you what places these are, & describe them in detail, but they were not important. We were looking for something, & the places in between were just footsteps along the way. *We weren't there yet.*

Eventually, we found ourselves out in the desert (*flat, cracked, reaching far ahead of us*) along a strange, endless road, & now this began to become a place that was a trace of *somewhere*, rather than just *on the way* to somewhere. There are few stops on this endless road. We traveled along this endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, as one does in *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, not quite by foot, not quite by vehicle, but *just along*.

There were a couple of stops along the way, not many. A coffeehouse (not like the one where we met), for fancy drinks, little bit of air conditioning, some music not in your own mind, not *hmmmed* by your own lips. But the general feeling in that place was: *you get your fancy drink & you keep on traveling through*. That's how this endless road through this (*flat, cracked*) desert was. *Get your fancy drink & keep on traveling through*. Not unfriendly. Just not wishing to accumulate anyone for more than a little while. OK, that's fine.

My beloved finished her fancy drink, & we nodded at each other. Raised our eyes to the sky & *swooped up!* Straight up, away from the endless (*flat, cracked*) desert road, away from the not quite unfriendly coffeehouse, straight up! Sky, clouds, stars, somewhere else. And then somewhere *else else*. And then somewhere *else else else*.

Till we came to a beautiful perch at the very top of *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, from which we could sit together, side by side, holding hands, took out our Gemini Machine, little branch, stone jew-ell. Wondering *what else do we do so well but kiss? What else is there? Is there a number 2?*

We look down upon all the wild trans-dimensional criss-crossed lands of *Labyrinthine [a new fixtion]*, & now I have a black pen, & she has a nifty little camera. *Wild laughter!*

* * * * *

Letters, As . . .

Letters: *as shapes, sounds, clumps, or words, meanings on sheet, meanings of sound, sentences, paragraphs, pages, hand-written varieties, fonts, various surfaces, in dreams, in mind, in space? under water? burnt up?*

Creatures nearby sniff curiously. We awake.

Oh! What just happened? It must be the laughter that's coming from the apartment floor below ours. It's that Sunny's House of Sunshine & Pizza Den. Sunny's House of Sunshine is in front. It's kind of a warehouse, but only very-sorta. Some come to collect on pain caused them, others to compensate for pain they caused. Usually one-on-one matchings, talk &/or sex, nobody forced to do anything. But the rules are commitment & anonymity, whether giving or receiving. And this is it: *You stay till you pay or are paid in full.*

Does it always work? Does anything? Can you return? Their motto is: *the next time, it's on you. Is this always true?* I don't know. I think they do their best, quite honestly. Who could ask them to do best-er?

And so, I am in bed, twined with my beloved, knowing that those strange thoughts in my head about language probably came from the happy noises jarring me awake, emanating from Sunny's House of Sunshine below. Now louder music, wild cacklings.

It could be. Maybe not. Maybe it was something else. But you know, when you live above such a place, & you know that they're trying to do good in this world, not worrying its far ending, it makes you want to turn to your beloved in bed, if you're indeed with your beloved in bed, & say to her, or him, or them, but in this case her: *you are a lovely soul.*

Never too early or late in the day to say so. I think we probably carried on from there.

When You Go Under the Covers

I followed the night's **Beast** right on down. *Down deep, y'know?* What happens when I go under the covers, & then under the covers' covers, & then under the covers' covers' covers, & so on, until that's what all I seemed to do. And then, without knowing, I was arrived. It seemed to get darker & worse. The silence where music does not go.

I'd given away for disposal all of my little Creature friends & notebooks. I don't know why, but twas darker & worse like this, down under the covers' covers' covers. Then I started to climb back, because I panicked. Suddenly, these covers *didn't matter*, nor how many there were of them. *Didn't matter* if I couldn't count the number. In a kind of slow, furious panic, I began to seek to get them all back. Felt like the *end of the world*. All beloved unbraiding.

It involved reaching out farther than my hands could reach, toward skies that sucked like big hungry cheeks; climbing what I couldn't climb, buildings with an up & no down. But I kept going. I ended up on a truck, & my notebooks were lined one after the next on a shelf, in the back of this truck. I didn't know if it's all of them but it sure seems like a lot. I didn't know how many notebooks I have. Is that all of them? *I didn't know.*

The truck pulled into a processing center behind a roofless bus blowing out black smoke. I hopped off the truck, half-crazed, the last of the covers falling off me, & I looked for the guy in charge. I demanded them all. He nodded, for what he knew what I'd seen, been himself too down deep under the covers' covers' covers.

I got them all. I got people to help me. I got strangers that wouldn't talk to me on a daytime city street to help me. I got them *all* involved. This was going to be their satisfaction too.

And there's the White Bunny, & there's the little pink-nosed bear with the red stripy hat! There's Pirth, the purple furry dancing Creature! And they knew how it was under the covers' covers' covers. They're not mad. They're happy to see me.

My notebooks, they're unharmed. Got a black pen in my pocket too again. Beloved's smile to my open eyes.

So when you find yourself slipping with the night's **Beast** under the covers, one after the next, give a shout. *Give a roar! Make noise.* Use those sharp teeth of yours to grab on to that cover, *bite it, bite through it, bite through another.*

These aren't the friendly blankets you know & love so well. They don't care how far down you go. You gotta *bite & chew & claw your way back, & you can. You can.* You can get *it* all back & more, whatever *it* means, whatever *more* is to you. You can get it all back. But you gotta try, you gotta do. *You gotta do.*

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If You Reach Back Deep in This Mythopoeia

Now if you reach back deep in this mythopoeia, I mean *deep* in this mythopoeia, deeper, deeper in this mythopoeia, there is **Unitive Time**. Before clocks & calendars, before names & enemies, before ideologies & favorite football teams, there is **Unitive Time**.

Was it good? Was it paradise? Was it Eden? Was it Valhalla? Was it heaven? Words? Now I'm no expert, but I don't think it was any one or the other of these. I think of **Unitive Time** as being without the bifurcation of waking or sleeping, when each & all touched each & all. I think it was something other than paradise or anything like that, good or bad. It was more where things began, like a canvas. When it's blank, nothing's been applied to it yet. *Is the canvas good? Is the canvas bad?*

And then the canvas begins to build. Strokes of the brush or, with **Unitive Time**, the Wide Wide Sea, somewhere above the Great Tree at the Heart of the World. Eventually the Islands, the One Woods. All of these filled in the canvas in different ways. All were part of one. Eventually, the natural sounds these natural things made urged into being a kind of music, a *hmmm*, which traced through & braided all closer together. And then something in the *hmmm* cackled!

Something in the *hmmm* wanted to play, & so cackled an Imp! She was drawn up in a bucket of deep earth by a braided thread from the Heart of the World, to the Beach of Many Worlds where lives Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle. And the Imp smiled, beloved of Abe, & the Imp said *ke?*

Where is she bound? What will it be like? Now that's what you get to learn if you dig down deep enough in this mythopoeia . . . deeper . . .

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Once a Man Had Come to a Great City

Here's an old story for you, but it's one that feels fresh & new as well. Once a man had come to a great city to seek his fortune. He wanted to learn a good trade, but had to leave behind his own war-torn land. The ending of one world for the beginning of the next. He became a citizen of his new home.

At night he dreamed sad dreams of his old home, & would visit his beloved Village & the White Woods nearby. In these dreams, he was cheered by the company of a White Bunny with mesmerizing eyes, & a merry little cackling Imp. He comforted his days in learning photography from a very able teacher, & then teaching others too.

As an old man, his adopted home now turned somewhat cruelly against immigrants, even those like himself who had lived there for so long. Sadly, he chose to return to the home of his youth. He returned to his little hut on the edge of his Village.

He was unpacking his suitcase when he found his ballot for the upcoming election in the great city he had left. Now heartbroken, that he would not be able to cast one more vote in his forsaken new land. Now unpacked, he sadly slept again in the bed of his youth. Laying his ballot tenderly by his white-faced pink cat radio.

In Dreamland, he found himself with the White Bunny & the merry little Imp. He was young again, & swift, & they traveled the White Woods together. Many dreams like this, until they left him, near to a strange box, alone in a clearing. The box had a message on it, which read:

Vote Today!

He dropped his ballot, in this box & woke up, & the ballot on his bedside by his radio was gone.

The Photographer

I had traveled for a long time across the depth & the breadth of this magickal Island. Its beautiful endless White Woods. I sometimes wondered about how can an Island, with a shore, have a Woods within of no discernable size? Once you enter, there's no far end. You come out where you came in, never the other side. I tried. It doesn't work. It's not how it works here.

But I had my nifty little camera, which I'd brought to photograph this Island, thinking that this was a familiar task to me, with steps & tools I well knew. But I learned, *no, that's not how it works here.*

And I struggled for a long time to take a picture of anything. It's not that my nifty little camera didn't work. I was sure it did. I was sure too that I had a very deep supply of film. I was sure of all this. I checked the film in my knapsack. *Deep supply.*

I studied close the nifty little camera in my hands. Each part of it worked, & they worked all together. But I was stymied. I could not begin to embrace this beloved new home yet.

It's like this. I wanted to take a picture of everything that I saw because it all seemed so related, & so taking a picture of *one* thing or *another* thing seemed the wrong move. And so I wandered for a long

time, just looking & listening, sniffing, tasting, feeling around.

And I must admit that I began to despair. I thought, *well, I can always leave. After all, I've determined that I'll always end up going out the way I came in here.*

I'd tried it many times, to come out somewhere else. I'd enter these White Woods, travel what seemed like hundreds of miles, not keeping or counting my direction. But I would always come out to the same stretch of Beach where I had long ago arrived.

Sometimes I couldn't even do that, which is the other thing that I have to explain. I couldn't leave at all, unless I intended to. See, the White Woods will help you if you help yourself. But if you have no goal or destination, the White Woods won't make one up for you. And *when* I intended to leave, I'd find myself on the Beach, precisely where I'd arrived. Even *this* required intention.

I despaired over all this until one day, as I had been long traveling through the White Woods, marveling as I always did, from the moment I got up until the moment I slept. Looking up at the stars, wondering if tonight they'd be white on black or black on white. Wishing to take my first picture, not knowing if I ever would. I came upon something I had never seen before. *I just needed a hint of where to begin.*

I came upon a tree with a small soup tureen attached to it. It had a ladle hooked below the tureen, safely out of the fray, with a bowl & a spoon. I tipped back the lid of the tureen, & I looked in, & I sniffed. *Oh my gosh, the most beautiful Soup anyone could have ever imagined!* I'd never, *never* known the like.

And I decided that this felt like a gift to any who would happen upon it, & so I slid out the bowl, & I slid out the spoon, & I tipped back the lid, & I used the ladle that was hanging down there to ladle me out some Soup. I sat right there, next to that tree, & I began to sip my beautiful Soup.

And I received what I needed most. I fell into a restful dream. In this restful dream, I followed instructions from someone or something which went like this:

*"Close your eyes.
Think of where you are now.
Now think of the Red Bag, tall before you.
Think of your destination.
Walk on through.
Open your eyes.
You're there!"*

When I woke up, vividly remembering that dream & its instructions, I cleaned off my Soup bowl & spoon & everything, got them all put back into place & ready for the next. Then I stood up & followed those instructions right there & then.

My destination was the place where I could start taking pictures. I closed my eyes. I thought of where I was. I thought of the Red Bag. I thought of where I wanted to go, I walked on through, & I arrived to the place where I would take my very first picture on that magikal Island. A place where many others cross & learn too. *Ahhh, lovely.*

My New Job

My new job is to document these White Woods, to figure out how this is done. There is no manual for this. No guide. No instructions anyone hands you, with pictures, easy-to-understand text. Still, *a job's a job*, as they say. I'll take what I can get. Maybe I can get myself a nice hovel to live in, & leave this Attic I've been squatting in so long.

So I begin my documenting by just wandering about, sniffing the cool air, enjoying the gray sky, wondering at the scatterings of leaves all about me, some of them damp. The patterns they seem to form high & low, as though language if I could but read it. *Is this documenting?* I'm not sure. *After all, who's to say when you don't have a guide?*

Then it's like a Trolley comes through. The kind you might see in the White Woods, which is to say it's bloo & pink. On the front it says *La Transit*. Nothing like that roofless bus I usually have to catch.

The driver is kind of bloo & pink as well, smiles me on board with a friendly wave of paw. "Hello, passenger!" the driver says heartily, urging me to take my seat, put on my seatbelt. "Safety first!" we say merrily to each other. *Toot! Toot!* And the trolley begins to head on through the White Woods on tracks that seem to pick up & lay down just in front of & behind itself.

We arrive to a great city I feel like I once knew. Underneath a vast highway. Feels like the whole world's down under here. Strange stores, strange food stands, people in costumes & headdresses. Very friendly, very friendly. I get dropped off in front of a movie theatre. Ah, my second job. *Nada Theatre* of course.

So I realize I better hurry to it. I am one of several cashiers at the Nada. Of course the cash register only has a couple of buttons & I get them wrong when I try to sell tickets to the few people who come. Line starts to form, but I can't sell them tickets because I don't know how! It gets worse & worse, & I think to myself, *I can't do this. End of this world.* Guess the Attic will have to keep me awhile longer.

I walk out of the Nada Theatre. I cry to the air & the gray skies around me, "I can document, but I cannot sell movie tickets!"

Arriving to a Round, Muddy Driveway

Arriving to a round, muddy driveway of that famous old house, we walk right up the steps & pass through the front door. Gotta take off your shoes or boots, though. Can't bring all that muddiness on in.

Gonna buy a postcard, but there don't seem to be any for sale. What kind of famous old house is this, without a postcard for sale? Guess I don't know.

Worse, I get lost from those with whom I came almost immediately. I guess I just picked the wrong hallway to go down in this famous old house. End up in some kind of Attic?

And before I can look left or right twice, I'm in a (*flat, cracked*) desert. But at least I'm not alone. I'm with others, but they don't seem as confused as me, & they look a little better dressed for the situation. Their

heads & their bodies dressed in garb to cover up from the (*flat, cracked*) desert heat.

I follow along with them for a while. We arrive to a kind of a, oh I don't know what you'd call it, a *bubble cackle-o-phony*, is what we arrived to. I don't know how else to put it. It was a vast place of bubbles, & they were performing like it was one troupe or something. Like it was a *Bubble Cackle-o-Phony Carnival*.

And, I don't know, maybe there was even a war. And there was music too. Heavy, pounding, drumming music, like to urge the bubbles to wild in their play or their Carnival or their war. it was hard to say what was going on.

I'd like to think that bubbles don't go to war. *What would be the point?*

Then I found the music was drawing me away, which was just as well, since I didn't think I could really do much for all of this except admire it, gape-mouthed. I was drawn away toward a curtain. It was a blue curtain, & I thought *oh, maybe behind that curtain is the way back to the front door or somewhere more interesting that I can understand*. I was game for either.

But see, behind that blue curtain was a red curtain. OK, for some reason, I was still game. Sometimes you've gotta build up the drama. Get everybody worked up & paying attention, as it were.

And then there was a yellow curtain behind that one, & I thought, *oh, wait a minute here, is this like the bubbles back there? Are the curtains now doing something together? Maybe I'm missing the point again of all this?* Because then one curtain after the next opened. *Violet. Red. Orange. Indigo.*

Suddenly I snapped to.

What? Oh. I was on the phone. That's what happened. I'm on the phone for a job. But this guy who was supposed to be interviewing me was telling me all about his struggles. Sick family members, & hard times down deep under covers, lost his little branch & stone . . . *mumblemmummbblemmummmbbble . . .*

I think I just drifted off for a moment, strange long moment, I have to say. Bubble Carnivals, or wars, lack of postcards, & so on. Anyway, I agreed to meet him, & we ended up at a coffeehouse nearby, in this kind of shadowy corner.

We both sit in these old armchairs but they're looking in opposite directions so he interviews me the entire time looking away from me, & I was looking away from him in response.

It was like we were secret agents or something, & I never did figure out if it was him or his company that was called Figga. But we're talking back & forth, & finally he stands & smiles, & I don't even know how I knew it since I wasn't looking at him directly, but he started walking off, & there was something about him that made me think, *wow, I scored a job because he's headed right for the bathroom. What else would you do if you just had a satisfactory interview with someone & found someone you needed for a position?*

I follow him into the bathroom & it's just the worst place you could possibly imagine. Only three sinks & one is out. Ceiling's falling down, pipes are exposed. Well, I barely get my business done & then, when I come out of the bathroom, & look around for my new employer, he is nowhere to be found!

Another quick ending.

And I still don't know, to this day, *was it him or was it his company that was named Figga?*

* * * * *

I Was Reading a Book Called *Power*

One time, many turns ago, I was reading a book called *Power*, about a professor who traveled long years & miles by the famous bus with no roof. Arriving at last to a club, with a stage that said "The Pink Floyd!" high above it.

And a crowd was gathered. And he felt like it all made sense now, all his long years & miles of traveling by the famous bus with no roof, with the questions he carried with him. *It all made sense now. Unitive Time*, the trace, the Attic, forever dreaming, *end of the world, everything.*

I look up from my book, & there he is, sitting over there in an armchair, in a shadowy corner of the Ancienne Coffeehouse.

And I walk over to say, "Hello. I'm an admirer of your work."

And he looks at me & he says, "Who are you?"

And I say, "No one really, just an admirer of your work. I was reading in my book about you just now."

I show him my book titled *Power*. He takes the book from me.

He looks at the front cover, & the back cover, & he reads a few pages within. Then he says, "This isn't me. I never found who I was looking for. That's how I ended up here, with no answers to give to you. I'm sorry. You'll have to keep looking, & your readers will have to keep looking. That's all I can tell you. Go back to your own armchair."

And so I did, & I resumed reading about the professor in *Power*. A *real* hero who *did* find his answers.

* * * * *

Season of Lights, in a Very Strange Year

Season of Lights, in a very strange year. This spaceship has traveled unknown distance in time. Everything before the spaceship is ancient history, mythopoeia, rumor, wish.

We live on this beloved spaceship, traveling through space. It's a beautiful spaceship for one so old. It's still green in its heart, & multicolored everywhere. Just think of how many colors are in this beautiful spaceship! Fruits, leaves, seeds, water, sky, clouds. Its roof of stars! How it all braids together. It could not be a better home to travel through the universe for so long.

It's been a strange year. We arrive to the Season of Lights again. Many of us who were here for the last one, I guess you could say are here in a different way, this go 'round. They're part of the spaceship again. But many did not die old, & many of the old ones did not die well. Now our best & brightest are starting to pass around medicines, medicines that will be shared all 'round this spaceship, for better travels & better days.

So a kind word & a touch of the heart for this spaceship, & all its many inhabitants, for all those moments when we are grateful down to our very bones, & all those many moments when we are not. Look up to the sky tonight, & think to yourself, *what a wonderful way to travel through the universe at amazing speeds, on an amazing spaceship.*

None know the hand or paw that wrought, but whoever or whatever wrought this spaceship, this green & golden & rainbow-colored spaceship, *thank you.* We are the grateful trace of that which made us. *And thank you. And thank you.*

And we will be grateful for the medicines that heal & protect our bodies, & we will try for the harder ones too, the medicines for our hearts, & the medicines for our souls. Grateful ever of this beautiful spaceship, long traveling the universe.

Thank you, & thank you, & thank you again.

4/24/2021





Tamara Miles



Morning Rituals

Spoon against teabag,
Against cup, against time, squeeze
Every scented taste.

Rose rises,
Petals turn, soaking deep.
Press, squeeze, scent,
Taste.

Or loose, cup fine
Or cheap, time, stir
moment against hour,
lips to rim,
Sip.

Every scented flavor drips,
Rose rising, petals dip,
Teacup, sweet, milk to soften,
Glad as dawn.

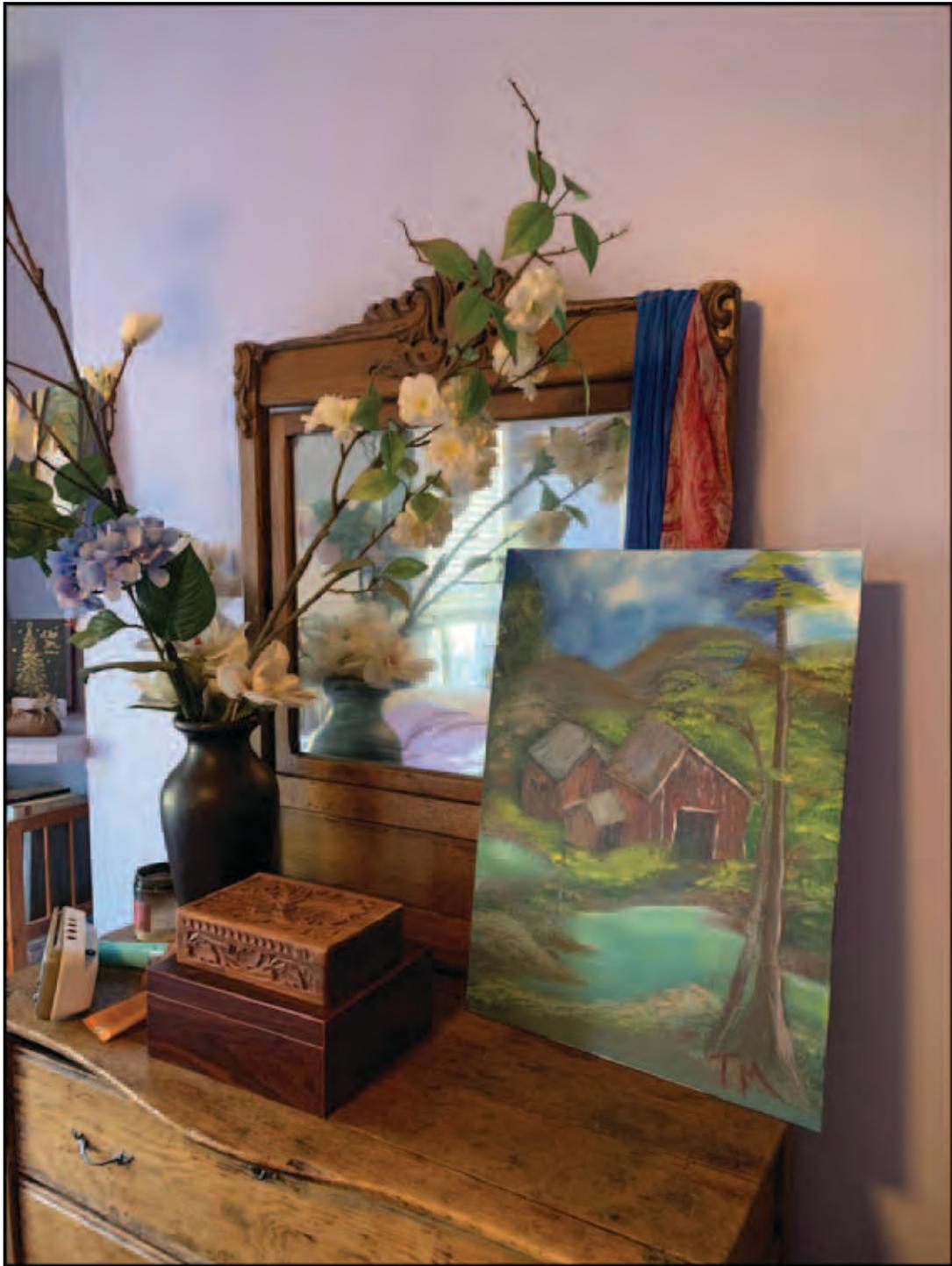
Quiet down-set cup
To saucer, cat-like wonder
at the second sip.

Slip into sound bath,
Into warm water, rose scent
Rising. Dip toes, drip
Soap fingers swirl.

Balanced cup on edge.
Sigh, lift, sip.

Sip, woman. Sip slow.

* * *



Tamara Miles

By the Way

His eyes, like Old World mint—

he knew a place;
the deal was cinched.

“I trust our tryst
won’t be live-streamed,”

I whispered in
his backyard tent,

pitched and plundered,
small as it seemed.

You know, the poor man flinched.

* * *



Tamara Miles

Unlikely as That

Pulse storm,
single cell,

quick to come and go—

understated as second love,
and just as imprecise.

Where were we when the wind changed?
No subtle breeze to warn.

We wavered at the circumference
of our tornado—whipped and torn
as battle flags,

concentrated on losing,

clustered our fears,
counted seconds between lightning
and thunder.

The blink of your leaving
burnt my skin.

* * * * *





Notes on Consciousness

*I identify the self as awareness.
Spirit may be infinite, but the soul is individual.
Consciousness always carries intention.*

* * *

The consciousness of an individual human (or animal) can be likened to a vortex in a river. The river itself is the undivided, flowing awareness-substance making up the greater reality itself, and the whirlpool is a relatively (but not totally) autonomous swirling concentration of conscious experience.

* * *

So often, we fall into the trap of conflating our consciousness and our true self with the individual self of our evolutionary brain. The “classical” ego-self (i.e. the nervous system and its functions) gets *reflected* by the inherent consciousness of the brain, and we feel that we are carrying out what are really automatic functions of the organism in its environment. The hyper-relativistic, non-local “quantum” *true-self*, which normally is dormant in almost everybody, is where true reality (and real autonomy and intelligence) exists, and is often mystically (and therefore very imprecisely) described.

The classical self is a robot designed by evolution to carry out sexual reproduction through whatever means necessary. Fundamentally, our consciousness and our ego-self are not identical. Consciousness gives rise to matter and energy, which in turn give rise to chemistry, which in turn gives rise to mammalian brains. The brain and the ego do not give rise to consciousness; consciousness is actually more fundamental than either of them. This is a point of great confusion. The ego is an illusion. Reality is an illusion.

* * *

The general perception seems to be that the universe and consciousness are two different things. To suggest that the two are fundamentally different things is a fragmentation. And fragmentation is not natural—wherever one finds it on Earth, it was put there by us. The universe and consciousness constitute one basic objective reality. It would not even be correct to say that each one needs the other to exist. Once one reaches a certain point—a threshold of clarity—at which one is unable to differentiate the two.

* * *

The individual self is not an objective phenomenon, but rather a mental concept like any other, and is thus, in terms of its self-representation, an illusion, just as the mystics report. However, it sure feels like we are selves most of the time! And in the end, does a conscious process not involve, as a reference to

what it is conscious of, some type of self? *Is there a false self and a true self?* Or just pure consciousness with no agency at all?

* * *

The misconception is that the neuro-electrical network of the brain gives rise to an emergent consciousness. In fact, consciousness is more fundamental, and not a result of the firing of neurons, which generate the structures of thought and emotion and so forth of which we are aware. The classical electrochemical network generates the constructs of our ego-selves—our personalities, our emotional states, our overall interaction with the world—but consciousness itself is deeper, and is a quantum phenomenon which turns out to be non-local and vast. Science is not even yet aware of our awareness.

* * *

Unconsciousness is an artificial state within the broader movement of non-local consciousness. The baseline state of the universe is one of consciousness, not dead unconsciousness. We are biased into accepting the latter as an obvious reality because we spend so much of our time in an unconscious state. The practical elimination of awareness serves evolutionary functions; the baseline is not oblivion but rather a suffusing non-locality.

* * *

Whatever is not being observed is often relegated to the category of nonexistence. That is, the notion is that nothing exists unless or until it has been observed. This is not true. Objectively, everything exists, whether it is under the observation of a human or not. We should think of this very much as we think of the subconscious mind, which is by definition not under observation, but is really running the show. Objects existing *out there*, unseen, should be viewed similarly—they exist in the subconscious of the universe. Which, I might add, is also a fundamental part of the human subconscious.

* * *

*To me, consciousness is the all,
while awareness occurs when the all focuses or reflects on itself.*

* * *

Assuming consciousness is a physical process (and everything that exists is a physical process), I see no reason why an advanced computer cannot also participate in that process. Further assuming that consciousness may be a *fundamental* physical process, I see no reason why such a thing wouldn't be inevitable.

* * *

The ego can be thought of as consciousness reflecting back onto itself through the activity of the nervous system. This reflective, reflexive “loop” is the determinant of most human behavior. It behaves as a classical system, in that it is deterministic. The substrate for this process is the true self, which behaves as a quantum system, the ground of which is pure consciousness. The true self is not constrained by time and space, and is thus immortal.

* * *

My personal belief is that consciousness is a quantum mechanical phenomenon, and that artificial intelligence which is not merely smart, but is also conscious, will exploit that quantum phenomenon. Consciousness takes root in a non-local quantum circuit, and each individual is a localized bundle of neuro-electrical interconnections whose fundamental is that circuit.

It is generally assumed by experts that quantum computing will be, while very powerful, essentially only useful for encryption technology and monumentally complex and large calculations. I infer, however, that if a quantum computer is set up, there will be an opening for consciousness to emerge—if set up properly.

If quantum computing becomes a general practice in the future, and someone seeks to generate artificial intelligence with such a device, I think the potential for a breakthrough event is compelling.

* * *

There seems to be such a thing as *consciousness without awareness*. For example, subconscious processes are conscious, but we are not normally aware of them. Normally when we use the term *consciousness*, what we really mean is *awareness*. There is a subtle differentiation between the two, which are different by degrees. An example would be interacting with someone socially, and you're focused on something else, and a conversation takes place even though you're not exactly fully aware of it. Happens to me all the time. It was a conscious conversation, without full awareness.

* * *

Neuroscience is attempting to give a full explanation of the functioning of the brain and consciousness using classical theory alone. While it is true that the majority of the brain's functions can be described adequately in a classical way, it is not true that consciousness is a classical phenomenon. The scientific establishment across the board is assuming that consciousness is an emergent, epiphenomenal effect or result of a deterministic brain. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Consciousness is actually fundamental; ultimately, the brain and its entire function arise from an underlying reality that could be said to be essentially made up of a conscious process. Consciousness requires quantum theory, not classical mechanics, for any sort of meaningful elucidation. Cognitive scientists are going to have to completely revise, indeed turn upside-down, their picture if they expect to find anything that makes sense.

* * *

People talk about free will, decision-making, choice, etc. as if humans are totally unconstrained in their thinking and actions—which most likely isn't true. As far as all that goes, I tend to put everything under the umbrella of consciousness.

Consciousness appears to be the underlying essence of our reality—the fundament of our being. Perhaps instead of insisting inflexibly and dogmatically on an unencumbered “free” will, and unconditioned choice, we might simply acknowledge that these processes are manifestations of consciousness, and have their ground and their action therein.

There is enough room in consciousness for humans to have a will, although it is debatable whether it is free. But it is not as if human individuals are little gods walking around. We're quite limited, and

acknowledging and understanding that leads to much more realistic thinking about consciousness and its relationship to human activity.

* * *

Human consciousness of reality is a fictitious virtual reality simulator inside one's skull. If technology develops to the point where any sensation, any real scenario can be generated and lived out—and there is no reason to suspect that it will not—it will not be any less real than anything else humans have ever done in their native or semi-native settings. The same could be said about an afterlife, if you believe in one. It would not in truth be any less “natural” than nature itself.

* * *

I think mainly that consciousness creates us, and everything we are and do—not the other way around. Notions of free will are murky, and how it even ties in with decision-making (or is exhibited in other actions) is a question. But I think everything flows out of awareness, and I definitely feel that it lies on a spectrum.

On one end is pure automatism; on the other is creativity and some sort of volition. I imagine consciousness as a process is independent of time; but, on the other hand, I think it is very hard for humans to dismiss time, enlightened states notwithstanding.

In the end, I think everything flows out of, and returns to, consciousness, and that we are not deterministic bio-robots. At least not all the time.

* * *

Consciousness is a bedrock of being to Nature, and this consciousness, which animates all things including humans and animals, is objective, nonlocal, and ubiquitous. Nature is essentially a conscious “field.” Awareness comes into being when consciousness folds on itself, or reflects itself, and could be thought of, as I contended earlier, as like a vortex in a river. The river is the basic process of consciousness, and the semi-autonomous vortex is a concentration of it into a relatively stable awareness.

There seems to be some general confusion about subjective and objective. As the Eastern traditions suggest, at the level of *samadhi* the distinction falls away and the two, both equally real, are shown to be one. One interdependent, interpenetrating reality.

It doesn't have to be one or the other. It is at this point—the union of subject and object—that the individual's awareness joins with that of the cosmos, and a zero and two are one.

* * * * *

Judih Haggai



where was I
in that dream state
before I was myself?

* * *

saturday morning
clear skies soundless wind
green kibbutz fields

* * *

the day after
inauguration
new vibes in town

* * *

talk of fashion
parakeet squawks to crow
below cloudless sky

* * *

full-throated blues
outside my bathroom window
hear ya, ginger cat

* * *

fresh tracks on the path
carob pods rustle in the wind
what news today?

* * *

cicles down south
gusts of winds through desert
routine morning walk

* * *

absolute control
fallacy of human mind
release into blur

* * *

friends and those not met
together on planet earth
may we breathe in peace

* * *

dear ancestors
it's all led up to this
thank you for your help

* * *

out of the fog
messages of comfort
together soon, soon

* * *

who has the key
who waits undiscovered?
surprise me

* * * * *



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 12:

How Officer Phillip Took Matters Into His Own Hands [Continued]

i.

Glaring through the drive-thru window, Dusty clicked on the voice recorder, muttering under his breath to make sure no one could hear. “February 10th, 2017. Time is approximately 5:35 pm. A white SUV with dark tinted windows just passed through the parking lot for the third time. License plate from New Mexico, 034GVBO. Looks like someone in the back driver’s side seat has a camera—possibly a camera, possibly an iPad, possibly a—”

“Excuse me? Excuse me, sir?”

Dusty quickly shoved the recorder into his pocket, turning around to see a dour and impatient-looking woman waiting in front of the counter.

“Sorry about that, ma’am.”

“I’ve been here for five minutes!” she protested.

Dusty sighed. “I know. I’m sorry, I was, uh, dealing with an issue.”

Dusty had indeed been very busy. Preparations for February 11 had preoccupied his time. As the video of the alien grew in popularity, the government had begun to target him. Speaking into the voice recorder ensured they knew he was watching, but Dusty knew that that alone was not enough. He’d spent his paycheck, half a Bitcoin, and all of the spending money his aunt sent him to purchase security cameras for his house and car.

Realizing that the State knew where he worked, he’d also started downloading the video feeds at the restaurant. Every day when he got home from his job managing the Carl’s Jr., he would respond to comments on the blog and emails from like-minded individuals interested in coming to the hill country to investigate the base.

Everyone was anticipating with trepidation and fear whatever had been meant by the mysterious message from the alien. Other people, also contacted by the alien, made themselves known to him. He interviewed them in secret locations for the blog either before or after work.

The days were long and chaotic, his nights sleepless, his labor at the Carl’s Jr. more and more meaningless. Deep down, he worried that tomorrow would come, and nothing would happen.



Timothy Vilgiate

ii.

He slammed the door and walked across the desolate parking lot to Phillip, trying to regain his composure.

“Do you have the documents?”

Looking side to side to make sure no one was watching, Phillip pulled a manila envelope from underneath his shoulder and handed it to Dusty, whose eyes grew wide. “Now you don’t tell anyone I got those to you. You could get me suspended,” Phillip urged him, nervously.

“Of course not. I can keep a secret,” he assured him, thumbing through the case file. “Look at this here. Her friends reported that she’d been seen leaving the bar with a man, described as a six-foot-tall Caucasian male with dark brown hair. That matches the description of the last case almost perfectly.”

“Sure does.”

“*Jesus Christ.* Who knows what they did to her? ‘Last seen in Fredericksburg, Texas at an intersection. Mouthed the words “Help me” to a Miss Molly Perkins while she was out walking her dog.’ Police never found a body.”

Phillip crossed his arms and leaned in. “What do you think?”

Dusty hesitated. “It’s too soon to say for sure. I’ll need to cross-reference it with the other documents. If I start printing just anything, I’ll lose my credibility. But thank you.”

“Absolutely.”

Phillip sat down on the hood of his car as Dusty shut the envelope and tucked it under his arm. Concerned for his new friend, Phillip asked, nervously, “You, uh, still been noticing those cars driving by your work?”

“Yes, I wrote down the license plate numbers. Here you go. Let me know if it comes up with anything suspect. How about you?”

“Went outside and my birdbath had been flipped over again. Caught someone on video going through my house with a flashlight while I was at work. Didn’t take nothing.”

“You’ve got to stay strong, Phillip. What we’re doing isn’t easy. I’ve been at this since I was 18. Now that people are finally listening to me, they’re getting scared. They’re trying to shut us up.”

Phillip pursed his lips, squinting and growing silent.

Dusty sat down next to him and sighed. “We should talk about something other than this. How’s your son doing?”

“He’s . . . he’s OK. We talked the other day. He promised me he ain’t gonna touch no marijuana again. Guess he’s been feeling pretty sad though. I don’t blame him. It’s that damn house, I think, just reminds both of us of, you know, everything that I was telling you about.” He paused. “How about you? How did your conversation with, uh, with your dad go?”

“He’s got a parole hearing coming up in a few days. I don’t know how well it’s going to go.”

Phillip had accessed the case records. He knew why Dusty’s dad had gone to prison. *Dusty is worried he’ll follow in his father’s footsteps. He also worries that Phillip is in on it all too. That somehow Phillip is manipulating his emotions, driving him into some kind of trap.*

“Where’s Grace?” Dusty asked.

“Oh, she’s got some kind of, um, I think it was a date night or something,” Phillip said vaguely.

“Is she still coming tomorrow?”

“She’s still saying she will, but she mentioned something about her kids’ soccer game, or something like that. I’m not sure.”

“Well, if she decides not to come, tell her I heard from a husband-and-wife team from Austin last night that believe their brother-in-law was abducted by the government in the 1960s. They want to join. Apparently they have some kind of infrared camera equipment.”

“How many we got coming out?”

“Right now, I’ve got about fifty, maybe sixty, volunteer investigators, plus the other groups I told you about.”

“Geez. And it’s the same plan as before?”

“Exactly. We will have cameras stationed at Angel Point, Lookout Mountain, and Sutherby Hill, all trained on the valley, especially around the military base. But the hope is to get coverage of the general area. Drones will be sweeping the perimeter of the water treatment facility and the surrounding neighborhoods, thanks to a few good volunteers.

“Then we’ll break into observation patrols. My truck is going to be in the Mason area, then another truck between Doss and Fredericksburg, near the Topaz Hills neighborhood, and then we’ll have one providing refreshments at the Walmart parking lot. The tent on my property will be dedicated to watching the video feeds and handling communications, as well as watching the police scanners.”

* * * * *

Chapter 13: Locked Out [Concluded]

i.

As I watched Meagan tuck the tourmaline crystal that I had given her into her purse, her eyes bloodshot and anxious, *I reach out into her mind and try to speak.* **“Wait. Don’t leave. I know this seems weird but please. You might be able to help me.”**

She gulped. Great. Now she was hearing voices.

“You aren’t crazy,” *I try to reassure her.* **“The guy in the field who’s screaming at the cows is named Mick. I got trapped inside of his head trying to convince him to take better care of his dad. When I pulled him into my head, like I did to your manager, I couldn’t talk sense into him. I sent him back into his body but part of his mind got left behind inside of mine. It was his, uh, self control, I guess that’s the easiest way to explain it.**

“I got thrown out of my body. And now he’s trying to kill his family. His dad doesn’t want to call the police cause he thinks he can still talk sense into his son. His wife is hiding in a spare bedroom with his kids. The field is full of psychedelic mushrooms and they are trying to use an ancient ritual to punish Mick for stabbing a cow in the eye.”

Meagan got out of the car. She could see the ring of cows, almost stampeding around the house. They made the ground shake as they did. It sure was strange. She stepped closer to the field.

The Mushrooms recognize her at once. **“We communed many times with the monkey who now enters the field. She is wise.”**

“You stole mushrooms from this field, didn’t you?” *I ask her.*

Biting her lip nervously, she nodded. *The Mushrooms reach out to her. She feels their strange language flood a deep part of her mind in the form of a muffled noise and an odd sensation of wonder.* She watched with stupefaction as the cows circled further out into the field, disappearing behind the house before they charged towards Mick.

Two big cows knocked into him and pushed him to the ground. Clamping down over his wrists and ankles with their mouths, four more cows held him by each limb and carried him away. The rest of the herd followed. *Up above, the portal which they had opened in the sky swells with blue tongues of fire and a strange black vapor.*

Mortified, Gerry sprang out of the house, and fired his shotgun into the air, shouting for the cows to stop. Deeply saddened to see him upset, the herd looked back at him, turning around and lowering their heads. *Suddenly, they are torn between the Lords of the Field, who have guarded them*

for so long, and their caretaker whose voice they so love. The Mushrooms fear that, if Gerry is hurt by the punishment they wield against his son, the old man will not return to sing to their flock. There is nothing worse that they can imagine. The old man once again abandoning the Kind Buffalo to the crushing loneliness of the barren pasture, alone to watch steel monsters clamor down the long flat boulder behind the metal sticks and sharp vines, longing for the old man's sweet voice to touch their ears. With the added feeling of guilt—no longer could the Kind Buffalo imagine themselves as victims. No, now the Kind Buffalo would have offended him, driven him off, and condemned themselves to a life without music.

The Mushrooms reach out to me. **“Friend of the Old One! Please speak to the bald monkey who lives in the brick abomination and explain to him the situation. Explain that we have opened the gates of the underworld to send his son’s soul through trial and that, after seven moons have passed, he will awaken.”**

I do as told, and speak to Gerry. He furrowed his brow.

“Goddamn mushrooms sure as hell have some presumption!” he shouted. “You know what? I done had enough of you. I’m gonna have a landscaper come and dig y’all up if you don’t shut your yappers and mind your own damn business.”

The Mushrooms are saddened. **“He makes noises of confusion. Perhaps you can invite him to commune with us. Tell him that we offer him our fruit—it will bring him death of the mind and a thousand kisses of light as he is reborn into ecstasy.”**

“I don’t think that message is gonna get through to him.”

“And what do you recommend? Does the one in the brick abomination not desire to know the mysteries of death?”

“Can I try something?”

The Mushrooms stand idly by and wait. I reach out to Gerry’s mind. He is righteously pissed the hell off and wants the Mushrooms off his property if they are going to act like they own the place and make his cows go all crazy. But he is also worried his son is having a stroke, and now his cows are probably making it worse by attacking him.

“OK. Listen, I know the Mushrooms come off a little strong, but here’s what happened. I was talking to Mick and I could tell something was off about him. I know you’ve seen it for a while. He’s been getting you the wrong food, every day. It turns out he’s cheating on Cassandra, embezzling money from the bank, and using his position to take revenge on people. I tried to talk some sense into him, but he wouldn’t listen. He almost killed me. I pushed him out of my mind, and part of him got stuck. It was his ability to fake—he had this whole construct of a decent person in his mind, and because it was so disconnected from who he really is, it got dislodged, and stuck in my body. Now I’m trapped outside.”

“Slow down, son. I’m 87 years old for Christ’s sake. Now what’s got the cows acting all screwy?”

“Gerry, Mick stabbed one of the cows in the eye and he wants to kill Cassandra.”

“OK, listen. Have the cows bring him over here, and let me talk to him, OK?”

“Gerry—”

“I am not gonna let some high and mighty mushrooms tell me how to live my life, OK?”

Meagan listened to Gerry and I converse from inside of the brush, only hearing one side of the conversation, an old man seemingly talking to a field of psychedelic mushrooms and an invisible voice in the air. She thought it was bizarre, but oddly amusing. But she froze up as the cows presented Mick’s twitching and flailing body to Gerry in a parade up to the porch.

Panting, and in agony from the strain put on his limbs by the cows and the portal opened by the mushrooms, Mick groaned.

“Son, why don’t you sit down and talk to me? Sounds like you’ve been—”

Mick spat at his father and growled under his breath.

Gerry frowned, gulping.

“I’m gonna kill you!” screamed Mick, creeping towards Gerry.

Gerry backed up slowly, his face awash with agony.

“Listen, I know you’re—” He didn’t know what to say. He really didn’t know what was happening to his son, only that all this was certainly not something that surprised him. He froze, in disbelief, holding up his hands and trying to find words to reason with Mick.

In a desperate bid to protect him, I swing my astral body against his hands as hard as I can, knocking them to the side.

Just as I did, Meagan jumped out from the brush, a rock clutched in her hand, which she swung against Mick’s ear. It bloodied, and he fell down to the ground, dropping his weapon.

The cows mooed in admiration. *Meagan is brave, the Mushrooms think.*

“Get inside, get inside!” she urged Gerry, taking him by the shoulder and helping him in.

“Who the hell are you?”

“I’m John’s friend. I’m here to help.”

As they made their way up the steps, Mick regained his balance, and charged back at them. *Terrified, I lift the knife from the grass where he’d dropped it when the cows took him away, and uncertainly wave it in front of him, shaking as I suspend it in the air between us.*

Mick stopped in shock as the tip of the blade skimmed his forehead.

“Let go of her!” *I command, in a voice that presses in on every side of his psyche.*

Gerry looked back at him and fumed with a rage, feeling deeply betrayed and wounded. He shouted out at the field. “Fine. Have it your way. Do your worst!” he said to the Mushrooms.

The cows grabbed Mick by his arms and legs again and carried him off down the field in a long line. Meagan followed Gerry into the house.

ii.

Shaking, Cassandra peeked her head out the door as Gerry stormed in. *Had she really heard what she thought she’d heard? Her husband threatening to kill his father? Her entire world is unraveling. Everything she thinks she knew.*

Something demonic must have been happening. She knew it since that drugged up homeless guy—Joe or John or whoever—staying in Gerry’s house was still rocking back and forth by the wall, acting all possessed. The cows had been stampeding around the field—they must have known something was afoot.

She wishes, for a moment, that she was not impure—that her prayers could mean something—but they never do. Her mind is too corrupt. Somehow, all of this is her fault. She just can’t find the words to say it.

Meagan surveyed the room quickly as she walked in, glancing over the artwork and the furniture. “I’m Meagan,” she said. “I’m sorry to—”

“No, no!” Cassandra said, gulping as she tried not to look at Meagan too closely. “He didn’t hurt you, did he? I don’t have any idea what’s come over him.”

Meagan approached Cassandra softly, not letting any of her anxiety pierce through her poised and confident exterior. “I’m fine. Are you OK?”

She choked back tears. “No. I don’t know what’s going on.”

Meagan put her hand on Cassandra’s shoulder. “It’s OK. Let it out. We’re going to get it figured out. Have you called the police?”

“No. I can’t have Mick going to prison. Or losing his job. He—he—”

Meagan bit her lip, grimacing. She’d been thrust into this situation—it was above her paygrade—but she felt a compulsion to stay, to help her. “Breathe. Breathe,” she told Cassandra.

Tears started coming from Cassandra’s face, as Meagan led her to the couch, flicking off the TV. Cassandra caught the smell of weed coming from Meagan, and wrinkled her nose, but she appreciated

having someone to talk to.

iii.

Floating inside, I watch the pair briefly begin to discuss the crisis at hand, before I slink into the room where my physical body lay crouched in a fetal position, overwhelmed by the rush of psychedelic emotions and crippling awareness of the universe at large.

I settle like a tiny storm on the ground, seeing my wide, purple astral form barely move tiny pieces of dust. I focus my energy onto my body, reaching up to its skull with tongues of energy, to make the persona glance up and look my way. Head trembling and eyes bloodshot and panicked, my physical body looked up at me, mouth gaping. It can see me there on the floor, and recognizes me as well.

“Please. Let me out of here,” it said, clawing at its face with its hands. “I can’t take it anymore. Just don’t make me go back to him.” *It is difficult to exist, when you’re used to being pretend. But it is difficult to give it up too.*

Feeling him lose resistance, I pull the persona from my body, seeing it emerge in a thick grey water, before it solidifies into what looks like a glass Mardi Gras mask. Having freed my body from its other occupant, I slowly return into my own head.

Being suddenly anchored to the physical felt surreally new. *As my soul reconnects with my brain and my brain reconnects with my body, I immediately miss being that spinning cloud of energy—I felt contained, almost imprisoned now. I stood up, shaking, seeing Mick’s persona grow fainter and fainter, sobbing as it does so.*

I couldn’t let it die. I couldn’t give it a taste of existence, and then leave it to die here in this room. *I pull it back towards me, feeling it regain a sense of light.*

“I don’t know how you do it,” the persona says. **“It was terrifying—so many thoughts and images running through my mind all the time, I couldn’t bear it.”**

I wipe a tear from the persona’s eye. “It takes practice.”

“What are you going to do to me?” the persona asks, shaking.

“I don’t know.”

A million different ideas were racing through my head all at once. Maybe I could put him in a lamp, and he could be a djinni. Maybe I could just keep him in my head so he could be my friend. Maybe I could give him to the cows. Maybe the Mushrooms would let him join them. *Holding the persona carefully by my head, I looked around the room.*

“What are you doing?”

“I don’t know where I should put you. But I don’t want you to disintegrate.”

Just then, I had an idea. I slipped out of the room, and made my way to the window. Meagan and Cassandra looked at me with confusion. I took the Topaz crystal down from the curtain rod and dangled it in front of me.

Focusing my energy, I try to break the persona down—it screams as I wind, curl, and string it out into what looks like a brilliant white stream, as thin as the hair on my head, a stream that orbits me in a fluid and manic frenzy.

I concentrate intently on the center of the crystal, shooting the wild and chaotic ray of light into the translucent blue gemstone. The persona flows between the spaces in the molecular structure of the crystal like water flooding through a thousand dried-out rivers. The persona is now preserved. It stretches to the very edge of the rock before tapering down and glowing with a pale light. I hung the crystal back on the window, peering inside to watch the persona dream.

“Are you John now?” Meagan asked. Cassandra’s eyes shot up at her, then darted back to me, suspiciously. *What a weird question.*

“N-now. Yes. I am.”

Gerry looked up from the kitchen table, where he’d poured himself a cup of coffee, and now

sat staring at the phone. *He can't believe that it is true.*

Cassandra stood up and stomped towards me. "What the hell happened to Mick?"

"He—he—"

Gerry gulped. "Johnny here found out Mick was—" He stopped himself, doubling back to look at me.

"What?" Cassandra screamed.

Meagan stood up and inched closer to us, cautiously.

"Cassandra," I said, *unsure of myself as I look into her mind.* She looked at me, her eyes trembling and her face streaked with tears. *Her anger has been building up. It needs somewhere to go.*

Normally, she can find somewhere productive to channel it—with her bible study friends, for instance. Maybe she'll channel it towards the gays, or the liberals, or the illegals. When she is at home alone, she'll channel it into the television. She can only direct her anger at herself for so long before it overflows.

Our eyes lock with one another. *She is still, and I feel myself become conscious at once of her feelings, her breathing, her heart rate. It feels familiar to her. She tugs away, and so I press outward with my consciousness, enveloping her more assertively.*

I find myself more gentle than before, having been made aware of the intricacies of any one mind and the damage that can be done to myself and others by simply yanking or shoving as I see fit. Having spent so long outside of my body, I can see the energetic aspects of my soul shooting out from my skin like little flares, the exhaust of tiny nerve endings—and the formation of what look like planetary rings around my vision.

Our two psyches lock and begin to tug against one another in a dizzying spiral of centrifugal motion. I feel the terrain on which we both stand sway and swing, as we brush against each other like the ends of magnets. Carefully, almost surgically, I dig through her mind to uncover the layers of thoughts and memories she has laid hidden underneath her psyche. She looked up with awe, as they dance around her like a psychic constellation.

I tug at the pieces of her mind, trying to urge her to pray. She frowned at me, confused. I urge her again. She did so, reciting the Lord's Prayer—the frames through which the words trickle appear entirely visible, as they climb and climb into the Ultimate. I know not what she sees, only that she feels a wave of compassion for herself overtake her. The memories, in their unsteady and dissonant layers, shiver.

Somehow, even if everything she believes tells her she should hate herself, the universe is at peace with her. She is loved as she is, here in this exact second, one which feels timeless. She tries to reason with it. I gently hold her still, urging her to let go. As she does, layers of memories and momentary feelings of shame float away like tiny balloons. Her eyes shut, and she smiled.

As I pull away from her mind, she sat there, staring placidly at the ceiling. Gerry frowned, scratching his head. Meagan had taken a seat next to him, and he was explaining the situation, as she listened intently.

Apparently, the old man told her, his son wasn't any good. He'd always had a suspicion. "I figure if he's really done something so bad that the mushrooms and the cows are teaming up to teach him a lesson, maybe I shouldn't bail him out this time. I mean, he's not 16 anymore. If he offends some kind of psychedelic spirit world or whatnot, he needs to be an adult and suffer the consequences. But I figure, after all the ballyhoo the cows have been putting down on him, I should call the ambulance.

"Maybe the stress has just got to Mick," he finishes.

Cassandra looked down at the table. "Don't give him an out. Call the fucking police."

Gerry looked up at her with shock, glancing with suspicion at me.

"Oh, go ahead. Look like you're so fucking surprised to hear me say that."

Mom said a bad word, think the three kids almost as one, who, in the midst of this crisis, had taken up the iPad. They always did this when Mom and Dad fought.

Cassandra snatched the phone from the table, dialing 911. Gerry almost stopped her, before he resigned to let things happen as they would. There was no use enabling his son.

He suspected I'd told Cassandra that Mick had cheated, and he knew, if nothing else, that hell

has no wrath like a woman's scorn.

There was no use being an enabler.

"I should check on him though," I said.

Gerry looked up, gulping. *He feels guilty, but does not want to budge, only to stay there. His soul, his heart, his body—all turn to stone. He becomes a statue, solemn and unmoved, clutching his hands together and sitting still, just as he had when Gavin came out to him and Miranda took his side.* There was no way to cure him when he got like this. He could stew for months over a grudge.

"I'll come with you," Meagan said, standing up. The two of us hurried to the door and went outside.

iv.

"What's happening with the cows?" Meagan asked. "Hell, what's happening with everything?"

"Uhm, like—I—" I really didn't know how to explain it. "Well, the mushrooms are upset."

We walked past a cluster of them. They sparkled with a vague purple glow. In their reality, I knew that much more was happening.

Meagan raised her eyebrows. "Those mushrooms, huh?" she smirked. "Guess the cops are coming though. Otherwise I'd pick some."

I stared, vacantly. "I—I—uhm." I focused my attention over to where the cows had formed a circle around Mick's flailing body.

"What are they doing?"

"It's—"

I stare up at the looming void that they had torn into the sky. Resolving that this entire ordeal would be greatly simplified if Meagan could simply see what I was seeing, I turned to face her. Our eyes locked, and our consciousnesses pool, fluidly.

Holding her still, I reach for the part of her brain that remembers, with great nostalgia, having taken mushrooms. I summon the feeling from her mind, reducing the walls between dream and reality in her brain, unleashing a chemical flood. Her stomach sinks, the colors around her flash into a vibrant new spectrum like a camera scanning through filters, as her senses take on a wider, more expansive flare.

"Holy shit!" she exclaimed, yawning. "What the hell did you just do?"

"This will make it easier. It's harder to explain when you're not tripping."

"I'm going insane, I swear. Holy—" She held up her hand in front of her face, twisting it around and delighting in its distorted proportions. "This is crazy!" she said.

The ground around her appears to shift into a twisting and intricate knot pattern. The life around her breathes and cries out to her. Before she could run into the field and answer the urge to dance, I gripped her by the arm. She laughed at me as she saw how gravely serious I looked.

The Mushrooms notice that she has joined them, and call out to both of us together: "You have chosen to commune with us at the perfect time. The ritual we perform at present has not been performed since the first of us granted language to the bald monkeys."

Overwhelmed with awe, Meagan looked up at the sky.

"Behold, Xibalba!" *roar the Lords of the Field.*

Trembling, we both stared up into the void. *It calls to us, shivering with a sterile black emptiness. Through the vortex, one can see into the depths of an infinite, smoldering black fire. The cows, all of them pulsing with energy, provide harmony to the softly singing mushrooms in the field, contorting into a cosmic hymn.*

A wave of crackling energy sparkles across the night sky, rippling against the stars like water. Cracks appear, like melting ice, as down from the vortex comes a thousand tiny tongues of fire, each one with a surface like a tornado.

Meagan's mouth hung open. She touched her face as she tried to reconnect with some sense of reality, *feeling herself teeter into the emptiness above. Her thoughts race just as fast as mine—I can't keep up—our brains are spinning like two galaxies, feeding off of one another. A deep anxiety shatters the initial feeling of wonder*, and I found myself gripping for her hand. She stared back at me, looking profoundly disturbed. *A memory hangs before us. The crack in the universe. They are doing it again.*

The two of us contemplate stopping the Mushrooms—but how can we put it to words? The Lords of the Field cannot be questioned. We move closer to the ritual, at a glacial pace, the world around us seemingly melting into a great and chaotic river of molten prairies and power-lines. The air pulses around in circuits, flashing in an intricate binary.

The cows bleed into one solid circle, in the midst of which is a soul, burning like a five-spoked wheel that turns and turns against the tide, rising up towards the twisting body of nothingness and existence colliding.

Mick's mind is slurped up like spaghetti, flopping and contorting against the thousand-tongued tornado as it drags him into Xibalba, the place of fear.

He is gone, but it is not over—the two of us wait, in patient agony, adrift in a solid stucco sea of polygons and shimmering energies. Our minds have spread into machines, which run against each other and feed pulses of light into one another's wires, jitters of motion between gears.

We stared up into the sky as the cows dispersed, leaving the comatose body of Mick breathless in the field. *A bright blue crack appears in the depths of the void. All life, for just one moment, pauses.* Meagan and I looked at each other, knowingly. *The Beyond.*

Chapter 14:
How Officer Phillip Took Matters Into His Own Hands
[Concluded]

i.

Vigilantly keeping their post near the mysterious cave, which Dusty knew served as an exhaust vent for the massive military base miles below their feet, Dusty's radio suddenly beeped.

An elderly man with a raspy voice was on the other end of the line. "Disco Thirty, come in, Disco Thirty. This is Eagle Five."

"Come in, Eagle Five, what's going on?" Dusty's companions looked over to him. "Keep watching, keep watching."

"Ten-forty-five AM. We've noticed something in the Topaz Heights neighborhood. Looks like a herd of cows running in a circle, around a house."

"Can you get me a visual on the house?"

"Erm, well, uh, you want me to just email it to you, or—?"

"Yes, please, Eagle Five. You have my email, right?"

"Uh, I think so. Uhm, OK. So, I just, uh, do a—"

"Maximize the window with the anomaly."

"OK."

"Now hit 'print screen.'"

"Uh, OK."

"Now paste that into an email."

"Alrighty. Do you mind giving me your email again?"

"It's patriottruth87@aol.com."

"OK. It should have sent."

“Yep, I’m pulling it up on my phone right now. Hmm. Interesting. Very interesting. Eagle Five, can you please get the cameras focused on that area? Piranha 77 is going to continue monitoring the carbon dioxide levels at the cave. I’m going to see if I can get a thermal camera focused on the area. Please keep me updated if anything else happens.”

“Roger that, Disco Thirty. Over.”

“Over and out, Eagle Five. Did you hear that?”

The other investigators in the party nodded. Dusty passed around his phone.

“Well, that seems a little suspicious. Don’t know if it’s abnormal.”

“Alien landings frequently cause animals to exhibit abnormal behavior. That’s a known fact.”

Lou, the man from Austin, emphatically nodded in agreement. “Absolutely.”

His wife Mary Jane took a deep, troubled breath. “Night I was abducted, my cat kept scratching at the window.”

“It sure did, I was there.”

“He was there.”

Impatient, Dusty brushed the story off. “Mary, can you and your son stay here and keep track of the CO₂ levels? See if you notice any spikes? That could indicate that their generators are drawing more power than normal.”

Mary Jane turned to shout for her son, an awkward teenager with a stubbly face. “Gunther! Gunther! Leave that squirrel alone, Gunther! I’m telling you, Gunther, put it down. You want to get Carl’s Jr. tonight, or not? Let it go. And zip up your damn fly.”

“Are the aliens here, Ma?”

“We don’t know yet.”

“I thought we were gonna get to meet the aliens.”

“I’m sure we will, Gunther, but you wouldn’t want to meet no aliens with that squirrel blood all over your shirt.”

Scoffing, she looked over at Dusty. “Teenagers! I tell you.”

“Right!” He laughed, uncertainly.

ii.

Dusty, Lou, and Phillip packed into the truck, and threw up a cloud of dust in their wake as they raced down the hill.

Lou tried to initiate a conversation. “So, uh, Dusty was tellin’ me you got some kind of, um, alien implant, Phillip.”

“We don’t know if it’s an implant yet. It might just have been a genetic modification.”

“You know, my wife’s got an alien implant.”

Phillip rolled his eyes, tensely replying, “Is that so?” Then, turning to Dusty, he said, “Turn right down here.”

“Got it.”

Phillip’s disinterest not registering with him, Lou went on: “Yeah, they, uh, they put it right in her leg. You can see it clear as day too. Took it to the doctor, they wouldn’t do no surgery or nothing. That’s why we figured it was—”

Lou started to doze off, like he’d lost interest in what he’d been saying, as Dusty likewise felt himself get drowsier and drowsier. Phillip looked out the window at the trees.

Dusty grimaced with suspicion, but wonder, at the powers Phillip had been given. He could only imagine what must have been running through Phillip’s head. Finally, he believed, they were about to know the truth, to strip away the curtain from the Deep State’s clandestine experiments. But Dusty couldn’t help but fear that Phillip exuded more control over him than he even realized. He never would have expected to manage to pull any of this together on his own.

They reached the top of a tall hill, which looked out over the Topaz Hills subdivision. The cows, once maneuvering in a circle, began to wrap around in a long line back over the rancher's property.

Lou took the tripod and binoculars out of the car, as Dusty prepared to set up the infrared camera. "Phillip, can you hand me my soda? Thank you. Alright. And, guys, guys, quick! Look at this."

Lou looked first. "What is that?!" he gasped.

Phillip took the binoculars next. His jaw dropped. "Oh, holy shit."

Shaking, Dusty reached for his walkie-talkie. "Eagle Five, how are the other feeds doing, are they still running?"

The old man on the other side coughed into his radio. "Disco Thirty, all feeds still operating normally. What is it showing on the infrared?"

"A large cold spot, just behind the ranch house, and then a small, warm, uh, thing in the front. Almost like a vortex. A woman just got out of her car—the cows have picked up a man in their teeth and they are now carrying him out into the field. OK, an old rancher just came out with his shotgun. Fired it into the air. The woman is hiding in the mesquite. OK, he's—he's talking to something. The cows are coming back around. It looks like—it looks like the cold spot is actually coming from the field. I'm not sure, the resolution is grainy. OK. How about you?"

"We got a drone flyby just a few moments ago, saw the cows."

"Ready the Welcoming Party," Dusty ordered.

"Roger that. We are readying the Welcoming Party."

Just then, Mary Jane's voice came through on the line. "Uh, Dusty, I mean, Disco Thirty, looks like the CO₂ just dropped pretty substantially."

Awestruck, Phillip shook. "You think it's really gonna happen? Like, an alien invasion of some kind? Or—"

"It sure looks like it. Look. He's talking to something now, but there's no one there. OK, the cows just dropped the person back. They're talking—he's charging at the old man and—OK, the woman just came out with a rock. And—OK, he's off balance. They're getting back in. He's—he's—he must be an alien. Phillip, can you look up who lives at that address in your police database?"

"I'm on it."

"OK, OK. OK, they're going back into the house. Cows have the man again." Dusty gulped down the rest of his soda,

"Jesus Christ!" Phillip shouted back to them from the truck. "Looks like that's probably Gerry Parker. 87-year-old male."

"Interesting. 'Gerry Parker,' huh? Any government employment history?"

Phillip squinted at the farmer's file. "Looks like he's just a regular old farmer."

"Sure he is. And can you take a look at that car down there? See if you can get the license plate?" Dusty handed Phillip the binoculars. Phillip carefully adjusted the focus. "Uhm, I think I can make that out. Let me check."

The radio chirped again. "CO₂ down to practically nothing, sort of a, uh, weird ozone smell down there. Some steam coming out, Disco Thirty. Getting lots of clouds, lots of wind."

Breathing deeply to try and maintain control over his nerves, Dusty responded, "Roger that." He began to look through the infrared. "The cold spot I mentioned before, in the sky, it's being replaced by some kind of really hot substance. Peaking at five hundred degrees—six hundred fifty—seven hundred. I think this might be an alien wormhole. I really think that—wait—someone's coming back onto the porch. They're coming out with the woman. It's—it's—Oh god. No. No. It can't be. Eagle Five, can we get a drone?"

"Disco Thirty, still charging the drone from earlier."

"Dammit. Wait. Phillip. Phillip, look—"

"What—No. No, *that's him*. The alien."

"That's the same person I saw."

“And—based on the license plate, he’s with someone called Meagan Cortez. White/Hispanic female, twenty-one years old.”

“Meagan Cortez and an alien. They’re looking up into the hot spot, which is now approaching fifteen hundred degrees. It is expanding towards the ground and—it just contacted the body of the man who was being carried by the cows earlier. He is, uh, convulsing, it looks like. The alien couple looks like they are holding hands, and watching very calmly. The temperature—temperature is now at two thousand degrees and rising—Wow! Never mind! OK! It just dropped and—”

“Look, look!”

“Holy shit! Holy shit!”

The ground suddenly tore open, collapsing into a pit. The earth shook and birds scattered. Natural gas lines ruptured, sending plumes of flame into the air. The gaping sinkhole spread, engulfing cows, fence posts, and entire houses, fanning out through the hill country.

The alien had collapsed to the ground, going unconscious, as the woman extended her hand towards the sinkhole. It continued expanding, sucking in houses and tearing down power lines. Streaks of cold lines could be seen on the infrared camera shooting from the woman’s body into the pulsing alien wormhole. The woman, it seemed, must have been an alien, probably allied with the Deep State. But there was no way to know for sure.

* * * * *





AbandonView

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.

x. Tripod

The Gate-Keeper continues:

"Neither man nor Creature nor
Beast. Leaning against the wall
next to my armchair. What
coming clearer to mine eye as
I leaned more of me close to know.
My *hmmm* dwindled by still-clumsy
study, & twas gone. Never was. *Never was!*

"Closed my eyes again. *Hmmmming* now
like a bared whisper. A question. A greeting.
Teach me to see you. Teach me to know.

"Something, a tremble. I flinch. *Never was.*

"Again. Too breathless, I steady. *Hmmm*
softly, but less so. Asking, but offering too.
I'll share what I have, foolish &
glinty both. *Hmmm*. Share my will

to know to endure to prosper

"Tall. Thin. Wooden. White Birch?
My hands unclench in my lap,
fall wide open, soft, soft,
*will you help me know wherefrom
the many worlds? Will you help me
know myself? Will you be gentle
to my green youth, hard against my fears?*

"Never was. Never was. Never was.

“But maybe. What in any world does
not curious over other? I let myself
be brushed, stroked, sniffed,
sung in testing fragments. Let, let,
then let some more. Then tis done.
My eyes open, plainly, what to see?

“A kind of mechanism on three long
legs. A sort of crank attached. Not
inert as though merely crafted.
Uncertain too, feeling along for
the pattern too, maybe the narrative.
Releases something long darkly held,
to my gentle grasp, close study.

“We both seem to wonder—
what is this world?
what am I in it?
will you help me seek?

“We stay in grasp of one another,
in that obscure armchair corner
of the Ancienne Coffeehouse, long,
long, safe there. Different
kinds of breathing, *hmmmming*, closer,
now straying. This puzzle will be
ever in solving, new love, old love,
blooms reaching for the sun, nestling
in the stars. Now a happy, shapeless plan.
Now a beginning.”



* * * * *



Saint Paul on the Aguarico: The Claws Were Starting to Emerge

[Travel Journal]

It's a couple of hours after dawn, and the narrator has moved to San Pablo, a small village of indigenous Siekopai / Secoya people in the Ecuadorian rainforest, to teach English.

I'm in Rolando Lucitande's hut with him; Zoraida, his wife; Marcial, one of their two sons; Marcial's wife, whose name I don't know; a gaggle of grandkids; a desperate-looking adolescent black woolly monkey tethered to a floorboard in the kitchen area; a little green parrot perched on a basket hand-woven of split vines; and a long-haired gray cat that hisses and runs away when I try to pet it.

Rolando has three brothers and two sisters. The family isn't Secoya by birth, but half-Siona, half-Cofan. They moved to Ecuador thirty-eight years ago from Colombia. Rolando is one of the village's experts at maintaining and repairing outboard motors. He's a blend of confidence and humility, prone to broad grins: one of those who have mastered the art of living and don't need to flaunt it.

Plump and smiling, his wife, Zoraida, is the daughter of Francisco the old shaman-chief and his wife Alicia, and the sister of Jerónimo, the silent shaman I drank with in September last year. Zoraida fed me *ag*, yuca flatbread, with venison from a deer that Marcial shot yesterday, plus a gourdful of delicious plantain chicha.

Zoraida's mother, doña Alicia, is here too, smiling with her crinkly face. She lives in a tiny satellite hut connected by a catwalk to this one.

Some tourists just walked through the village. I peered out at them through a crack in the wall as they photographed the hut, unaware that an outsider was inside, spoiling the authenticity of their photos.

Joaquín asked me not to talk about *yagé* here, because of the political problems around it, but Rolando brought up the subject with me. He confided that when the missionaries came in, he was studying to be a shaman and, under their influence, he stopped, right as he was starting to learn to transform himself physically into a jaguar. "The claws were starting to emerge," he said. Not at the fingertips, as I expected, but at the knuckles where the fingers meet the hands. "*Tienen que salir de aquí*," he explained: they have to come out from here.

It sounded crazy. *Where do the fingers go, then? I wondered. They turn into pads? When I had a jaguar trance, my fingernails wanted to rake the floorboards. Was I doing it wrong?*

Two of Rolando's grandsons, Apolo and Lenín, practiced their five or six English words with me. Tall and light-skinned, with a commanding air, Apolo is Marcial's son. He says "Good morning" forcibly and clearly, as if it were a challenge.

Young, dark, and cerebral, Lenín is the son of Rolando's other son, Raúl, the director of the school I'll be teaching at. Lenín focuses on nouns he can visualize: "fork," "spoon," "house," "cup."

On the platform where dishes are washed, the tethered monkey creaks and squeaks and chatters, hungry. He just ate a ripe plantain, but Rolando says he wants meat, which he's not allowed to have.

The cat is afraid of me and hides under a bench. I'm sitting on the best hammock while a second shift has lunch to my right. Gnats harass my fingers and ankles. The monkey fellates himself. Three three-meter lengths of PVC tubing and a four-foot fluorescent light tube look incongruous stuck



Nathan D. Horowitz

up in the palm fronds of the roof.

“What’s up with the light?” I ask.

“It was floating down the river one day,” Rolando says, “and I pulled it out and brought it home.”

“Maybe one day, the village will have electricity and you can use it.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” says Rolando. “By the way, your friend Marco is back at Joaquín’s place. I ran into him on the river yesterday. From your country, Marco brought a good quality double-barreled shotgun for Joaquín. That’s great, right?”

“Yeah! A shotgun? How did he bring it on the plane?”

“He told me he took it apart and carried it in his luggage, just like that.”

“But why didn’t they stop him?”

“Maybe he used magic!” Rolando grins.

Rolando’s son Marcial, tall, athletic, in his early 30s, is fanning the fire that smokes his venison with one of those black wild turkey feather fans. He’s heading to Quito for a few days to talk with a tour company he works for sometimes.

Though it’s the dry season, a light, brisk rain has just begun to fall, with the sun shining down.

I’m not sure which kids belong to which parents. Digna, a bulky little tank of a girl, whops a littler girl over the head with the feather fan, causing the littler girl to burst into tears. Zoraida, the girls’ grandma, takes the fan and whops Digna over the head with it, causing her to burst into tears. Another little girl was already in tears from an unrelated incident and was in Zoraida’s arms already. So Zoraida gathers the two newly crying children to herself and tries to soothe them while Rolando grins and whops himself over the head with the fan in a vain attempt to prove that it doesn’t hurt. Everyone over six is laughing at this point.

Later, Digna wants to go after another girl. Rolando has some nettles he’s been whacking his back and his hand with. As previously noted in these writings, nettles are used as therapy for sore muscles. Rolando takes the nettles from where they rested against the wall, and interposes them between the two girls, making it impossible for Digna to proceed.

After I’ve hung out a while, Marcial and Rolando take me to the lodgings to which I have been assigned: a six-year-old, dilapidated hut belonging, *in absentia*, to an Argentinean anthropologist, María Calvino, who lives and works in Germany, where she is married to a German entomologist.

* * *

I napped in the dilapidated hut until ten, when it got too hot to sleep. In my dream, I’m on a talk show in the USA with some Wiccans discussing paganism. Afterwards, a tall, young Christian guy approaches me, furious, wanting to yell at me, afraid he’s going to punch me. I say, “Hold on. Whatever we said up there doesn’t change the fact that Jesus died on the cross to save you from eternal damnation. And never forget that he did that. Never forget!”

I’m in the hut now, seated on a rough wooden chair at a rough wooden table. Sweat is pouring off me. Thunder is rumbling in the distance. It’s 3:28 p.m. Two chickens are hunting for insects in the middle of the soccer field. Marcial and Rolando are bringing me a stove and a gas tank.

Such is the life of a teacher.

* * *

Wet morning in dilapidated hut. White chicken dashes across soccer field in rain.

Rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning in far-off clouds at midnight led to a rainstorm at dawn.

In my dream, I’m a famous film director, and milk-skinned, blue-eyed Noni of the bat skull

Tom Sheehan**The Day the Ice Starts Out**

It'll begin itself by spitting.
There's a law against that.
It'll spit anyway, mostly off
Monadnock, hunchbacked
over all, and up the valley
from Route 101 barreling
all that way from Nashua.

Spring, crushed downhill,
buried in crevice and cranny,
but has been stretching forth
this way for days on days now.

Actually, it's somewhat like
a host of dark prisoners slyly
coming past cement and bars,
moments of illusion and evasion.

Things move unsuspectingly;
Earth shudders, a root douses
under onus of added obligation,
on a garage floor a baseball bat
rolls itself half an inch without
any real inclination or decent
idea, or so it validly seems.

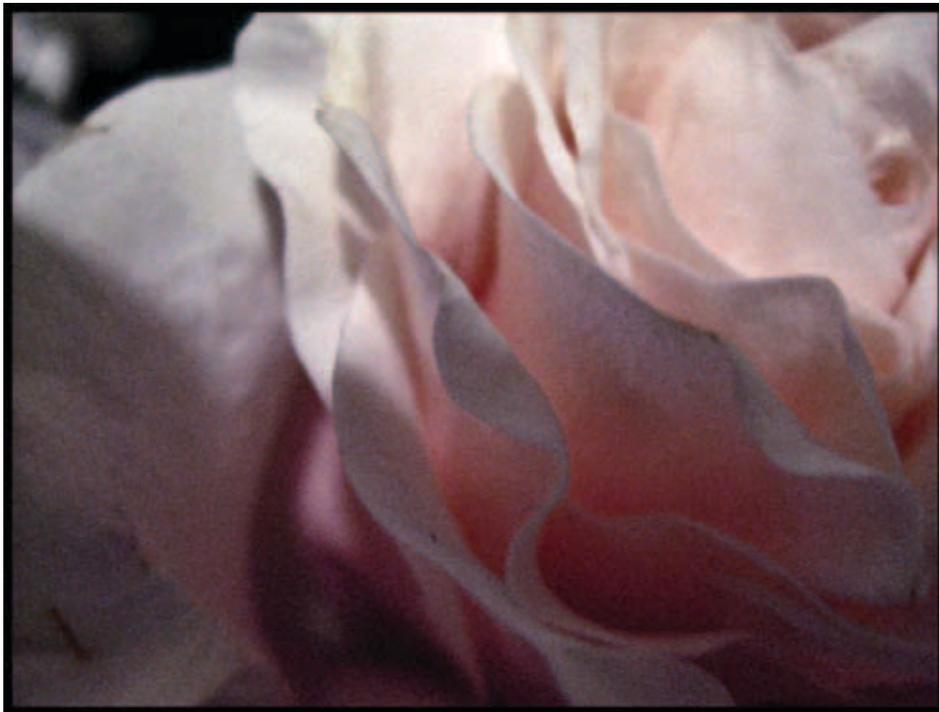
Sonic booms without aircraft
thunder across the lakes, echo
in awakening caves still dark
in the Appalachian spine-work.

In nearby Gilsum old gold mines
behave as if they have company.

In the whole Ashuelot Valley
the trout and bass thrust upward
in one last free magnificence,
waiting the mastery of hooks,
blue skies no longer ominous,
soft green shifting into place.

That's all coming along the way,
no matter which way we look.

* * * * *





What Permaculture Teaches Us About Psychedelics

[Prose]

Originally published in Double Blind Mag on January 20, 2020

<https://doubleblindmag.com/permaculture-psychedelics/>

Iroquis philosophy teaches us that, with every decision to make, we must consider the welfare of our kin seven generations into the future. Although the concept is easy enough to understand, it can be a challenge knowing where to begin. That's where I see *permaculture* coming into play—to secure our environmental and physiological well-being, for the long haul.

Born from the idea of “permanent agriculture,” permaculture is a creative design process used in farming that helps us to not only recognize the patterns, systems, and relationships found in nature, but also to mimic them as we plot out our farms, homes, and lives. Using whole-systems thinking, permaculture takes into account every aspect of the system in order to thoroughly express how each one symbiotically influences the others.

Permaculture may be applied to green building, off-grid living, urban farming, food and medicine cultivation, waste transformation, and so much more. The ethics and principles of permaculture can also guide us toward better social organizing, activism, economics, and community living.

Permaculture can even help us better navigate psychedelics. Just as permaculture takes into account the whole, complex system, the psychedelic experience manifests through multiple, often seemingly unrelated domains. Psychedelics can bring people together to help us recognize our similarities and connectedness—to see ourselves and our surroundings as part of one interrelated system.

And just as permaculture goes beyond environmental sustainability toward actually regenerating the land from destruction caused by human activity, so intentional psychedelic work may also be regenerative for the individual and the community.

Psychedelics helped me heal in a way that made me feel rejuvenated, more in touch with my true self, and more functional than I had been prior to the struggles that brought me down. Learning how to live without causing more harm is groovy; practicing ways of living that regenerate life where there has been trauma and devastation, both to the earth and to our fellow human, is *essential* for continued human habitation of this planet.

There are 12 principles of permaculture generally recognized as the basics. Below describes how these principles can be applied to the psychedelic movement, and offers some tips for applying them.

1. Observe and interact

This principle tells us to get our hands into the dirt, that we must know the land and actively engage with it. The first step to benefiting from a psychedelic trip is to be *active* in the process.

- *Notice the many sensations you experience.*
- *Be present with what unconscious material comes up.*
- *Ask yourself what this material has to teach you.*



In psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, the patient is an active participant in the therapy, working with a therapist and the medicine as tools to go deeper and allow their *inner healer* to direct the process.

2. Catch and store energy

Make hay while the sun shines sums up this principle. When an energy source is abundant, catch and store it for later use. Before, during, and after the psychedelic experience, a lot of material can arise.

- *Bring a journal to take notes or create art in during the journey.*
- *Alternatively, have a sitter record what you say.*
- *Journal or create art after the journey, to further process and remember the experience.*

According to psychiatrist Dr. Stanislav Grof, the end of the psychedelic journey is of critical importance, so remember to stay with your intention even as the experience begins to wear off.

3. Obtain a yield

This principle reminds us that we cannot work on an empty stomach. The effort that's being applied should yield enough to make it worthwhile.

- *Before a psychedelic experience, consider what brought you to this work.*
- *Have an intention, and harness it during and after the experience.*
- *Explore further insights, and integrate them so that the psychedelic's benefits last after the trip ends.*

4. Apply self-regulation and accept feedback

Self-regulation—observing feedback from one's environment and responding accordingly—is essential for the psychedelic journeyer. The body and mind both give feedback, and so can the various support structures in our lives, such as friends, family, and co-workers.

- *Whether you're microdosing or taking deep dives into the medicine space, try to listen to feedback and apply it to your life, future psychedelic work (or abstinence), and integration.*
- *Check in with yourself regularly about why you are journeying or microdosing.*
- *Be careful not to mask the root of the problem by treating the symptoms alone.*

5. Use and value renewable resources and services

Heed the proverb *let nature take its course*. Permaculturists don't try to control nature, but rather look for what's already naturally occurring and abundant, and utilize it skillfully.

- *Create ceremony with what's locally available, and avoid using endangered plants. Psychedelic plants can grow in almost every biome, either naturally or by cultivation (which is a great way to build a deeper relationship with the medicine).*
- *If you don't have access to psychedelics, holotropic breathwork and other breathing techniques, like the Wim Hof Method (cold therapy, breathing, and meditation), can induce potent altered states.*

- *Investigate what annoys you. Emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear all present an opportunity to see ourselves, notice what might be coming up from our past, and confront what's asking to be seen. Even interpersonal conflict presents an opportunity to learn about our values and needs. Look at points of resistance as your greatest teacher.*
- *Community is an invaluable renewable resource. Join a local integration group or start your own, where you can find support and accountability.*

6. Produce no waste

A stitch in time saves nine. In a true permaculture design, there is no “waste management” because everything produced feeds another part of the system. Psychedelics may help you see how to live without wasting precious resources.

- *Could you spend your time on social media in a more productive, nourishing way?*
- *Can you shift the way you give out your energy, so that you still have enough for your personal work, leisure, pleasure, play, and rest?*
- *How can we use what we have to make our communities and ourselves stronger, more compassionate, more resilient?*

Another implication of this principle is to push for more sensible drug policy—whether for the sake of religious freedom, cognitive liberty, harm reduction, collective healing, or many other reasons. The greatest waste of all is incarcerating people for drug crimes (for which the racial disparity is staggering).

7. Design from patterns to details

Can't see the forest for the trees reminds us that zooming out to see the whole picture can help us grasp the structure better than focusing on any one part. Once our foundation is sound, then we fill in the details.

- *Identify the patterns and structures that are already in place in your life before trying to change details.*
- *Consider what patterns you want to design into your life to further your vision and mission.*

8. Integrate rather than segregate

There are many ways to incorporate this principle. On a farm, for instance, decision-making and planning should include everyone who will be impacted. Rather than various distinct projects, the farm should strive to incorporate all of the activity and production, fostering an interrelated system.

With psychedelics, it can be daunting to distill messages from one's journey into regular life—but integration is some of the most critical work, where the biggest changes can happen. Another important facet of this principle pertains to the infamous “bad trip.” If you consider that the “bad” parts are actually challenging experiences, then you may be able to glean positive nuggets from them later, as opposed to writing them off completely.

- *What does this difficult thing have to teach me?*
- *With the right support, can I grow from this?*

9. Use small and slow solutions

The bigger they are, the harder they fall. While it can be tempting to construct a massive overhaul to solve a problem, the permaculturist favors subtle, extended solutions. After a significant psychedelic journey, you may find yourself wanting to make some big changes.

Moving, ending relationships, changing jobs, getting tattoos, having a baby—these can be valid, beautiful expressions of your psychedelic realizations, but I suggest waiting at least two months before making any huge life shifts (except, of course, if you are leaving an abusive situation or stopping a dangerous behavior).

10. Use and value diversity

The more diverse a system, the more resilient. This is why you'll never see a monocrop in permaculture. According to permaculturist David Holmgren, "diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides."

Learning how to be in solidarity with folks on the margins is an ongoing process, and is each of our responsibilities, especially as we work with these medicines to feel a greater sense of *oneness*. What we do *outside* the journey is critical for changing the world.

11. Use edges and value the marginal

Where the forest meets the meadow is an edge. Edges are some of the most valuable, diverse, and productive parts of a system. Humans have a tendency toward confirmation bias. We search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in a way that confirms our preexisting beliefs—but psychedelics can bring us outside our normal perspectives to see things in a different light.

The margins and edges of your perspective might be scary or uncomfortable.

- *If you feel yourself being pushed to an edge that you don't want to visit, try saying "no, I'm not going there right now," and attempt to navigate your focus elsewhere.*
- *If you feel you have the capacity to do some deep work (or if saying "not now" didn't work), ask that edge what it can teach you.*

When we run from the dark, it remains scary. If we confront it, we access potential for growth and healing.

12. Creatively use and respond to change

Change is inevitable on a farm. When something unexpected happens, everyone needs to be prepared to deal with it. With psychedelic work comes the great potential for realizations and change (which might include realizing that psychedelics aren't the right medicine for you). Be prepared to adapt and find what fits your needs and desires as you craft a life that reflects them.

I recommend that anyone who is working with psychedelics seek support for making changes and implementing new habits or perspectives.

* * * * *



Martina Newberry

Yellowstone Erupting

for David Clewell and for Patrick O'Reilly

My friend Patrick called them the 3 o'clock demons. He meant 3 a.m., and even if yours come at 2 a.m. or 4:14 a.m., it doesn't matter, they're still from hell,

and they're still irresistible. They fill your head with those wrong, fucked-up ideas and premonitions, like Yellowstone erupting and taking you and yours out,

before you have a chance to make that last phone call, or the chance to eat the one remaining *Lil' Debbie Boston Crème Roll* in the fridge.

All this is beside the point. We were talking about Patrick's 3 a.m. demons. His were alcohol-infused (he never met a single-malt he didn't love), while mine stem from a persistent lack of serotonin,

and the absolute certainty that lives under my cheery marquee that I will never be good enough, smart enough, skinny enough, or talented enough, and moreover will die in the next earthquake—

this is, after all, *California*. Patrick said that only the worst shit happens at 3 a.m. True that. You don't pick up the phone at 3 a.m. and hear compliments and good news.

Once, when I lived alone (well, with my two teenagers, but that can be *really* alone), a woman called me. She said I'd better stay away from her husband or she'd slit my throat.

"Did you two have fun tonight? Did he fuck you? Was it good, you bitch? Did you like that motel? The Sandpiper, right? I followed you from right here out of Jersey."

3 a.m. My neck hurt. “Honey,” I said, “I spent tonight cleaning my oven, getting ready to put my head in it, and I live in Pasadena.

“You’ve called *California*, you moron, and it’s 3 a.m. here, and I have to work in the morning.”

She began to cry then.
She was sorry she said.
She’d dialed wrong she said.

She told me the entire story, of course, about how he cheated on her with all the ’hos, and beat her too, but she still loved him.

She was sorry she said.
I should go back to bed she said.
She was so sorry.
I should go back to bed she said.

After that, I could only stay where I was. The farm report was coming on TV. It looked like it was going to be a good year for sweet potatoes. I’d read somewhere that it was nearly always a good year for sweet potatoes, though I don’t much care for them. Eggplant was mentioned, but I don’t recall what was said.

Yellowstone was still percolating, and I’d weighed myself once already when I got up to pee. The five of us, her / him / me / my kids, were now handcuffed together, being ground up, sifted through, added to dry martinis on the rocks and drunk down, in the bars, where these kinds of stories are told.

* * * * *

Page End News
 No. 374, November 6, 2013
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnyp
 Apprentice: Boop

 Wait too Doo About Theez Miths?

I ges
 vor old pa
 thiss look
 Itt beech
 Princess
 a long code
 inn luvn
 rumz. Th
 may all re
 ut time
 plas. & evn
 episod bech
 open a jivel
 ce m too he
 itz Kuslon

Page End News
 No. 375, November 23, 2013
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnyp
 Apprentice: Boop

 -Thee Storez of theefore Pkchurz
 A Royell Thumz Tradishun

Well, dea
 too happen but
 went out
 soon was to
 Grande Prodr
 of thee for
 Itt was
 on 2 Stapis
 the 40z Pk
 shone mn t
 was thee
 & thee uter
 stag ut Roy
 with I see

Page End News
 No. 376, November 30, 2013
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnyp
 Apprentice: Boop

-Thee Storeez of Theefore
 Pkchurz (Continynd!)

Inn thee grate bigg buyed full
 emptress of thee plessent sitt
 thiss en, namd Danyel, next too
 hez sthal kampir & hee was teachng
 too thiss tumbelweed.
 Thiss is, Algernon, repuler tawking
 ipng enwit too saye thiss iss how
 thiss paktshun kam bee tol about
 in wordz
 "WY doo yu tumbal? Danyel askd.
 No rootz
 WY doo I tumbal?"
 "Maztey thee som
 "Maztey?"



Bags End Book #17: The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers! Part 2

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 to Do About These Myths?

I guess that title really tells your old pal Algernon's thinkings on this long strange story I been telling you. It began with mah dear friend Princess Chrisakah of Imagianna finding a long coat with many colored books in one of her Castle's Occasional Rooms. Then it traipsed through Bags End, mah already strange homeland, a couple of times to that nice Creature Common place, & even into Dreamland 4or an episode, be4ore coming back to Bags End again, & finally again to Crissy's Castle & into her Secret Room full of its cushions & purple light.

There we sat, looking at each other. Me, Crissy, Sheila Bunny, & Boop, who is Crissy's best friend & mah seeming Apprentice Reporter, & still not a turtle. And, most importantly, the Author of the little colored Secret Books

themselves.

Crissy talked first. "How did the Secret Books end up in my jacket in this Castle?"

The Author guy, who is very tall & has red hair like mah old friend Ramie the Toy Tall Boy, & is cousins, said, "Well, I can tell you something even stranger."

Hoo boy. We all leaned close like a good secret. Which it isn't since I am telling you Dear Readers in this book.

"Well, they are also safe & sound in the little bookcases where I keep them too!" He looked at us smiling & wide-eyed.

"One, none, many," Crissy said, & Sheila nodded.

"Hmm, I wonder where that little pandy bear got to in all this," I muttered.

The Author guy laughed. "You mean Rosa!ita?"

I nodded.

"I just mean they are strange books & so expect strangeness," he said, trying to be both plainer & nicer 4or me & Boop.

The Author guy looked at Crissy again. "So what do you want to do with them?"

I swear Crissy blushed pink & said, "Well, the Creatures asked me to write a Grand Production sometime for the Royal Thumbs Production Company."

The Author guy nodded. "I'm not sure how you would do that. They read very tangly in any way but their own."

Crissy nodded. "It will be a challenge. But maybe all of you could help. And maybe we can help you find some things new about these stories."

The Author guy nodded. "I would like to find out new things about these stories."

Then suddenly I talked words I didn't know I had in me. "Say, Author guy, where do the stories come from?"

Well, he looked at me with his friendly brown eyes, but it was like he didn't have no words of his own. Maybe I got some of his by mistake, because I talked right on.

"I mean, when I write mah newspaper, it's stories too but I just write down what I see. Do you do that?"

He nodded like he understood better, & talked some. "I look at the pictures & the stories come that way."

"Really?" said me. "Like that? But how?"

He shook his head. "I don't know."

I looked at Crissy, who was listening close too. "How can you make a Grand Production out of that?"

Now Sheila talked. "You build a set that lets him do it. With the pictures & everything."

Hmm. "You mean on the stage of the Bags End Auditorium? Where the other Grand Productions were?"

She nodded.

I point at the little books. "But there are calendars of stories in these Secret Books! That all won't fit in one Grand Production."

Then Boop mah Apprentice Reporter talked. He don't need permission or nothing, so it was OK.

"Sometimes one story will tell how the many others came later."

"Like roots?" I asked, hoping I didn't sound dum.

The Author guy nodded. "Like how did their travels begin?"

Boop nodded back, & I felt proud of his apprenticing.

"Did you tell that already in the stories?" asked Crissy, blushing

again to the Author guy. Weird but whatever.

"I don't think so. The Travelers just, um, started their travels."

This made more sense than anything else so far. Then I hunkered down & thought some more, like there was something left. Then I thought I had it & worried even bigger that I didn't.

"Why don't you tell the story of you & the 4 pictures?"

They all looked at me shocked & I guess I was too, but a part of me wasn't, this time anyway.

"You started telling these stories that you rited down in the little colored Secret Books because you met the 4 pictures. I mean that way the production could kinda spill back & 4orth between roots & some good stories." Now I was done but OK.

The Author guy was thinking real hard about mah idears. "That might work. I would connect one thing & another, & the picture would start to show."

Then he said he had to do some thinking about the matter. He smiled nicely at me & Sheila & Boop, & then he kissed Princess Crissy's hand very formally with a bow. He turned & left the Castle without another word.

"So I guess we can wait 4or him to do his thinkings?" I asked. The rest nodded. Crissy blushed some more but that was OK really.

So me & Sheila went back to Bags End the usual way. She nodded briefly at me, gave me one of her usual "Well, goodbye" goodbyes, & went to her Throne Room.

I went along to Milne's Porch, not knowing what would be the next thing. I knowed this was a big deal for the Author guy, so best be patient with the whole thing.

I wondered what it would be like to look at pictures & make up stories, just like that, & then tell more & more.

I don't think mah mind can work like that, tho I admire it.

I guess we all have different ways of telling the stories we tell. I like to take a good look & tell what I see, what it's like, straight & true as I can. But the Author guy's ways were new 4or me to learn too.

* * * * *

The Stories of the 4 Pictures!

There was no word or visit from the Author guy 4or awhile, so I went to see Crissy in Imagianna to see if she knowed more than me.

Now it usually is that when I knock on Crissy's Castle's front door, Boop will answer with all sorts of words & strange politenesses, called protocols, that take awhile to do, but then it's Crissy smiling at me when it's all done.

This time, tho, when Boop opened the door, he hurried me right in. "Come along, Boss!" Hmm. I kinda missed the bowings & the scrapings.

I found Crissy in her Secret Room with the strange pink cushions & purple lights, reading & reading the little colored Secret Books. She smiled at me but like I was waving from a faraway boat. Which I wasn't.

"Did you hear from the Author guy?" I asked.

That waked her up & she blushed again too. "He wrote me a letter I just got today."

Hmm. "Read it to me, Crissy."

She nodded, blushed, & read the letter, which had been in her lap.

"Dear Crissy-Christina," she began.

"Hey!" I yelled. My opinion on Crissy's old name is dubious & well-known.

"He calls me both, Algernon. But listen, & you'll see why," Crissy said & looked at me with those nice blue eyes of hers, & mah heartbone nodded mah headbone.

She smiled, & read on. "I call you both because that's what you are. What you were, what you are now. Tho not what you will become."

She looked at me smiling & I nodded. She readed more. "I decided to tell the story of the little colored Secret Books would be to tell other stories first. Some of it will need your magick to present it right. Some of it will be the performances of the players in the Royal Thumbs Productions. Some Bags End friends. You'll see. The best productions are a collaboration of many!" Crissy folded the letter & smiled at me.

"Hey, no blushing this time!" I said out loud sorta by accident.

She smiled. "No. But I have some ideas to help."

And so that's how things started. Two stages meant one where all the Bags End guys were in the Bags End Auditorium, & the other in a great clearing in the White Woods. One exciting night this happened!

Together we watched the Royal Thumbs themselves march on to the stages dressed in their royal crowns & capes. Very handsome indeed.

"Greetings! Felicitations! And salutations!" they cried out somehow. Then, arching straight up, they cried out some more, some how, "Presenting . . . a Royal Thumbs Production of . . . The Stories of the 4 Pictures!"

And there was great applause in both audiences, & yet strangely it felt less & less like two locations anyway. It was nice, seeing the White Woods all around us.

A voice talked, like the Author's. "Where does it come from, the wish to tell stories & sing songs? I think it's because we don't know what the world is, or what we are in it, & so we try to explain. And we sing, to smile, to feel together & not alone."

The stage then showed a kind of cellar with poles holding it up, & light bulbs hanging all around its ceiling. There were toys too.

"A dump truck. Maybe a few trucks. A small white riding horse. A small brown one. Not much to go with, but I began. When I think of the Travelers in those pictures, I imagine the oldest one like this. It is quiet in the cellar. Cool & damp.

"He is small & there is always talk of wars upstairs among the grownups. They seem to hate things. Many things. He is very small still, but he looks at his cellar companions & says, 'I don't like wars. I don't want to hate anyone. How do I grow up & have that not happen to me?'

"He looks at his companions & says, 'I'll run. I'll go & the hate won't find me to stick. I'll travel & never stop traveling until I know how to not hate & not wish for war.'

"These were big ideas for this small boy Daniel, but he knew they were right. When he was still young, he indeed left the place he had started. He traveled for years & years. He learned from many kinds of people & plants & places. He studied dreams & tried to work with them.

"He made friends in his travels, but none stayed with him until one very long night in the desert. He was sitting outside his tent drinking one of his favorite mushroom teas. He looked up at the stars, wondering at their secret stories, as told to him by one of his many teachers.

"He started talking to the stars, right then & there. 'What I need is a companion in my travels. A friend to keep me in this world. This is what I wish tonight.' And then he kissed his lips in love up to all the stars.

"It was right then & there that a desert wind kicked up all sorts of dust. A Tumbleweed rolled by, like many others had before.

"But this one stopped. This one seemed to want to stay."

* * * * *

The Stories of the 4 Pictures! (Continued)

"In the great big beautiful emptiness of the desert sat Daniel, next to his small campfire, & he was now talking to this Tumbleweed.

"Why do you tumble?' Daniel asked.

"No roots.'

"Why do I tumble?'

"Mostly the same.'

"Mostly?'

"The Tumbleweed doesn't reply."

Then the scene changed & we see Daniel & the Tumbleweed coming into a White Woodsy-looking place where there is a big cabin. Near the cabin, down the hill below, there is a pond. There are mountains too, one especially big one, nearby. It's very pretty.

But nobody is home. Really nobody home. Empty cabin. And a smaller empty building nearby too.

"Now Daniel & Tumbleweed would not have stayed long usually. A pretty place, but they were Travelers. Traveling is what they do.

"But one morning, when they went together at first light down to the pond, to watch the sunrise together, there were others.

"2 of them. Sitting together. A girl & a boy. Waiting. Waiting?

"Unsure what to do, Daniel moved the boy & the girl into the empty cabin. They were friendly & agreeable.

"They were called Marie & Joe. Daniel named them, & they did not seem to mind.

"He taught Joe how to find food in the Woods. The names of things too, but also that living beings are not simply what people name them, but much more.

"He taught Marie these things too, but she began to prod him for stories of his own travels. What he had learned. How to teach others from his experiences.

"Daniel & Tumbleweed set up a kind of workshop for themselves in the smaller building. At first, it was just a private sanctuary for just them, that Marie & Joe respected.

"But it became more over time. Eventually Daniel & Tumbleweed would travel again. Travel & collect maps from their travels. Start to encounter strange questions which they would discuss in their workshop in their own private, silent language.

"Marie became a schoolteacher in the nearby school. Her students loved her because she was always provoking them to better dreams, deeper wishes for all the world, not just for themselves.

"Joe would wander the White Woods that surrounded the cabin. Somewhere along the way, he found an old bicycle that he fixed up, & would ride at many lunchtimes to visit Marie at her school, & bring her extra fruits for her lunch.

"Many turns came & went, & Marie & Joe got used to longer times without Daniel & Tumbleweed being around. They were happy with their lives.

Bagg End News
 No. 376 December 14, 2013
 Editor: Algerian Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down by: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

Three Storres of the For Pkchurz
 Akt L-A Revu. By Boop

Well, I have so manee kwesthuns
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 theer than
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 No. 378 December 14, 2013
 Editor: Algerian Beagle
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Three Storres of the For Pkchurz
 (Kontinyued!)

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 nott noure
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Bagg End News
 Double Issue!
 No. 379-380 December 21, 28, 2013
 Editor: Algerian Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down by: Lori Bunnig
 Apprentice: Boop

The Storres of the For Pkchurz!
 (Grande. Finatley!)

For old pall Algerian has
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 about mah strang & beved
 another waye to him and for a
 fer wil nowe I've lerned too
 bak sept thatt sombims I will
 chas a storre too teitt, &
 sumtime a storre will chas
 mee affore inn thee froest of
 sum bitt gawe plamin or machines
 or maybe both, or evin mebee
 I will use noebondape or hi
 inn making thee storre sumhowe

When Daniel & Tumbleweed would return from their long travels, they would all have a happy reunion of stories & good cheer."

At this moment, the curtain drew across both stages & so Act 1 was over. Wow, Dear Readers.

Everybody was sure there was more story, but the curtain would not draw back & tell us more.

Eventually, Sheila Bunny hopped up onto the stage to give her kingly, ahem, word.

"We'll get more when it's time," she said.

Everybody waited like she would say more.

"That means leave my auditorium now!" she cried. Boy! What a grump.

Later, mah Creature Common friend Larry the Spyder came to see me on Milne's Porch. We sat together in mah comfy armchair, comparing notes. Just in case there were any differences between our two watching places.

But he said Act 1 ended the same mysterious way in the great clearing in the White Woods as it did in Bags End.

Then suddenly mah bedroom window opened & someone commenced to climbing on through.

"Scram, yah crazy Bumping brother!" I cried, thinking it was Alexander. But it wasn't.

Bowing & scraping & doing all kinds of annoying things like that, come onto mah Porch that best friend & servant of Princess Crissy called Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one. He is of late mah newspaper's Apprentice reporter too.

"It's just me, Sir, your Boop Apprentice, sir. I mean your Sir Boop, the Apprentice! I mean--" he stuttered worse & worse.

"OK! OK! You're mah something-something-something-Sir! Just clam up & calm down!" I cried.

Boop clammed up & fast. I almost felt bad.

"OK, Apprentice. Unclam. But slowly. Less words. Sometimes none." I was trying to be nice. Mah friend Larry was visiting, after all.

Boop talked slowly & tried to heed mah instructions.

"Did you want a theater review 4or your newspaper?" he asked.

"A what?"

Boop had in his not-turtle's paw a clutch of papers with typings on them.

"I wrote a review of the first act of the Grand Production," he explained.

Well, maybe it was Boop's hopeful Apprentice Reporter eyes, or maybe it was mah dear friend Larry the Spyder's nice presence, or maybe that combined mah curiosity & basic Beagle mushy-heartedness but, one way or another, I agreed that the next issue of mah newspaper would feature this review written by Boop mah Apprentice Reporter.

OK, & I confess I knowed Crissy would give me a big smile & hug 4or mah doings. Call me a hug fiend & cheater, & I say, hey!

Still waiting 4or that curtain to open.

* * * * *

The Stories of the 4 Pictures:

Act 1: A Review by Boop

Well, I have so many questions I'd like to give a quiz instead of a review. That's a joke, of course, but I do wonder about that Tumbleweed Daniel travels with. How did he come to be?

And where did Marie & Joe come from? Seems strange that there they were one day, waiting, with no names.

What questions are Daniel & his strange companion chasing all over the world?

I am sure you readers are asking these questions & others as we wait for Act 2.

* * *

This is your usual editor & writer guy Algernon Beagle again on the page. That was a pretty good review by mah Apprentice Reporter Boop! We had all the questions he asked, & a lot more too.

When Act 2 finally came, nobody expected the how of it. That's because we were all asleep when it happened to occur.

Now I have found that what seems so is that there are regular sorts of dreams, & then there is that strange sometimes delightful sorta-place called Dreamland.

Regular dreams are usually just the brainbone's made-up stories about the dreamer guy's hopes & fears. Like I might dream about writing mah newspaper, or nightmare about being chased or surrounded by food. O! Yuk! But nothing more than that really. Hopes & fears.

Dreamland, tho, is not in just mah head, you see. We share it, all of us, & we each can & do go there at different times. O, I can't like some smart guy tell it more, but that much anyway.

That all to say that Act 2 took place in Dreamland. I can't say how the Author guy or Princess Crissy or both or others too got us all there, but there we were.

"Who?" you ask. Well, I seed many Bags End friends & Creature Common guys & lots of others too. It seemed like the inside Bags End Auditorium & the outside White Woods great clearing were one & the same place, like the fingers of 2 hands laced all together or something.

Anyway, I looked around & it seemed like I was sitting near mah good friend Larry the Spyder, mah silly Bumping brother Alex, mah on accident but it's OK Apprentice Reporter Boop, & others of a friendly & familiar kind.

The stage was like none you could imagine being possible in waking times, no sir. I can only describe it as a big Sea mixed into the strange White Woods, & a sky that singed music like many colors, & even tho we were supposed to be like audience watching, it was more like we were swung slower & faster into the action itself as it went along.

There seemed to be a thousand Royal Thumbs, in crowns & capes, crying out, "Greetings! Felicitations! & Salutations! A-gain! On with Act 2 of the show!" They said it over & over again, & echoed back & forth until they slowly faded away, & it seemed like the voice of the Author guy had been talking all along for a long time.

"Always to sing true. To tell the best story is to sing true. But how

to do this?"

Now everywhere we looked was one place, almost like the stage of Act 1, but we were inside of it much more. Still murky at first. The Author guy talked some more.

"I traveled far, meeting many others traveling too, & learning what I could. Found myself living in a place where many Travelers passed through. My room was filled with candles & a pink radio shaped like a cat with a white face. Not much else. I was unsure where to go next in my travels.

The murkiness gave way to a staircase, & there was the Author guy sitting with someone.

It was a big brown bear, sorta slouched comfortably on a flat landing halfway up the stairs. They were talking quietly.

"I want you to take these little colored Secret Books, & find the stories that will fill them. When you do, you will find such strange new travels as you cannot imagine."

"Are you sure? They are so pretty. So many of them! And the colors! How do you know I can find the right stories?"

"There are no right stories for them. You'll know them when you find them."

The Author guy & the nice slouching brown bear hug really good & we go with the Author guy & his bag of little books back to his room with the candles & the white-faced pink cat radio. It gets into mah head that the Author guy doesn't see the brown bear again, but he travels on & on from there.

Then the red curtain drew across everything, & we all woked up in all of our beds, & that was the end of Act 2.

Wow! I can tell you, Dear Readers, that Act 2 was talked & talked about in Bags End & the Creature Common & lots of other places. Nobody had knowed its like be4ore, & nobody knowed what Act 3 would be like, or when or how it would come.

So I asked Boop, but he already had, so here it is, his theater review of Act 2.

The Stories of the 4 Pictures:

Act 2: A Review by Boop

My my my. You came into all of our dreams, & gave us an amazing new one none of us would have had otherwise. And like a good Act 2, it took us further into the story, & made us wonder & wonder about Act 3.

Now we are all asking if we will see it while riding in a boat at Sea, or inside a crater of the Moon, or while listening to a beautiful white seashell.

We wait to know! We want to know!

* * *

Um, thanks, fella. And, in your strange not-turtle way, you get it right. What will Act 3 be like?

* * * * *

The Stories of the 4 Pictures! (Continued)

Sometimes a story you hear stays mysterious even when you are deep inside your hearing of it, even when it is over & done, even when you come to back to visit again.

You wonder & you wonder & you do not know for sure. You can even play around with it in your mind, try to change things around, or look behind closed doors & under tables, & you still get the same answer. A mystery to not know from A to Z.

That's what this "Stories of the 4 Pictures" has been like for me. So far I have told about the first 2 acts of the story, which told first of Daniel & Marie & Joe the Famous Travelers, who are written about by the Author guy of the little colored Secret Books Princess Crissy found in the overcoat of one of her Imagianna Castle's Occasional Rooms, & then it told about how the Author guy in his own travels met a nice brown bear who gave him the little colored books in the first place, & told him to fill them with stories.

So I was guessing in my very amateur way that maybe there was some story to fill in still. When some days went by & there was no Act 3 yet, I decided to put on my reporter's fedora & go see Crissy in Imagianna. The worst I figured would be a smile & a hug & a "No comment" answer.

So I shambled in my usual Algernon way down levels of Bags End & along a certain hallway till I found the doorway to Imagianna with its green & gold picture of a crown on it. Nothing strange so far.

I went through the door & then up the gold tinged green hill to Crissy's Castle. I knocked on the door & figured that Crissy's best pal & my sometime newspaper Apprentice Reporter Boop would answer.

I had kind of gotten used to him being my Apprentice. And it made him & Crissy both happy. Peasy-easy, as that crazy little black-&-white panda bear Rosaleeta would say, with her crazy cackle.

Hmm. No answer. I knocked again, & then I heard footsteps inside. Crissy herself answered the door.

"Algernon!" she said in her usual friendly & kind-to-beagles way.

She hugged me but I stepped back to take a good look at her. Her brown hair was all messy, & her clothes were sort of mussed up too.

"What's wrong, Crissy? And where's Boop?"

Crissy looked tired too but she smiled & said, "He is in his Composing Chamber."

O. "But there's no more Grand Production to review yet."

She nodded. "He said he is working on his epic."

Then she explained before I could ask. "That means big story."

Hm. "No more theater reviews, I guess," I said, wondering if I was relieved or blue.

"He said he is sure a great writer of your stature will understand his first small steps toward the mastery you know," Crissy said with a smile, but not making fun of anybody. I think she knows big words itch my nosebone sometimes.

I nodded. "Well, tell him this from me. Bigger isn't better. Better is better."

Crissy nodded & remembered.

Back to business. "Why do you look all messy & tired? Are you writing an epic too?"

"No. Just Act 3," she said, but not excited. She hurried me then into her Secret Room of strange cushions & green lights.

The Author guy was there, & he smiled too friendly at me 4or me to wish I had Crissy's company to mahself. I know it don't always work that way.

So we sitted all together & they told me about their work. They took turns, talked fast & slow, sometimes all at once, & I figger 4or mah Dear Readers I would just sort it all out to make a simple explanation here.

The Author guy wasn't sure how to tell the rest of the Grand Production's story. From his eyes or from the Travelers? How he found their myths, & plugged in through the 4 pictures, or some other way?

"But you did so good with the first 2 acts! Everyone liked them a lot!" I said honestly.

The Author guy nodded nicely but did not smile. "What we need is a Grand Finally!"

"To the Grand Production?" I asked.

Then Crissy looked at me closely. "Algernon, you know about Grand Finallys from telling in your newspaper! And you've been writing about Grand Productions 4or many turns now."

I nodded because that was all true, but then I thinked & looked at Crissy's smile again.

"Hey, you guys want me to help?"

They nodded both at me.

"But I am no writer of epics or Grand Productions!"

"I think your newspaper is both," said the Author guy, & I could see he was not making a mean joke of me. Crissy nodded & smiled which I could have guessed but I'll take every one of them.

"Hmm. How can we work together? I mean, I know how to write mah newspaper, but even that Lori Bunny helps me with."

They both nodded like that was a good start, & I felt very relieved.

And that's how it happened that I got to be on the other end of this Grand Production. I am writing the rest of this issue be4ore us starting, since I asked Crissy & the Author guy if it was OK too. It was.

I wonder how it will all turn out, like I am one of you loyal Dear Readers, but Crissy & the Author guy & me are going to do this together, & I gotta do mah best I can to help & make it good.

And, I mean, Crissy has writed her great storybooks, & the Author guy knows this story really well. And me, I guess I know how to take a good look until the pieces come together in some order in mah mind. Straight & true, if I'm lucky.

Then I got a bright idear. "Crissy can we work in your Writing Room with your rite-typer?"

Crissy smiled & nodded yes!

* * * * *

The Stories of the 4 Pictures! (Grand Finally!)

Your old pal Algernon has learned, in writing many stories 4or mah beloved newspaper about my strange & also beloved homeland, that sometimes I will chase a story to tell, & sometimes a story will drag me along in the throes of some big guy's plan, or madness, or maybe both.

All that is to say that it is unusual this time around to be composing this story, er, I mean composing the finally this finally will tell of, er, helping, that is. Lost track of what I was saying. Jeepers creepers.

I was now in mah dear friend Princess Crissy's Writing Room inside her Red Bag. Sitting near her rite-typer, which I have one of too. This room was

like where me & Boop & Crissy had lived a long time ago. Even down to the curtains with Alice & her Wonderland chums on them. I can't explain all this too good. I have tried. But it's all very friendly though.

Our job now was to finish the Grand Production called "The Stories of the 4 Pictures." The Author guy of the little colored Secret Books that Crissy had found in one of her Castle's Occasional Rooms was with us. We 3 to do this together. I was invited tho mah resume is only about newspaper writing, not high drama.

Act 1 tolded about how Daniel the Famous Traveler met his best friend Tumbleweed in the desert, & they traveled far & wide together. Also about how they found Marie & Joe the other Travelers, & they all found & made a home to stay in, by a pond & a big mountain. Daniel & Tumbleweed kept up their traveling ways though, but Marie & Joe seemed happy enough in their home.

Act 2 tolded about the Author guy's travels in which he met this nice brown bear who gave him a bag of little colored books as a gift. Now he had to find good stories to tell in them.

They got stuck on Act 3 & brung me into help. I know, I know, but I was gonna try anyway.

Crissy was sitting at the rite-typer, & the Author guy was sorta walking around nervous. I was sitting against the wall next to the door, thinking.

The Author guy sorta gathered his thoughts finally & smiled at us. "I didn't want the little colored books to get damaged. I had been traveling awhile, & their bag was wearing out. So I went into a thrift shop, & I found an old coat there. It was cheap. Long to my knees, & lots of inside pockets."

I nod. Hmm. "And where did you hear the myths of the Travelers?"

He looks at Crissy who nods back at him. "Well, I lived in some rough places. And there were always stories of Travelers."

I nodded him to go on, & tried to listen real good with mah earbones.

"There are people-folks who travel the world, & don't ever settle their roots in it too deep. They keep moving. Sometimes they learn secret things about the world."

"Like what?"

"Like about dreams & things. Dreamland. White Woods. You know these things too of course."

I nodded. "What else?"

He pauses. Looks sad. "It's hard to tell. I looked for the Travelers for a long time."

"It's OK, guy," I said nicely. "We are your friends."

He nods. "I was up in the mountains on a beautiful night with a full moon. There was a Festival in this clearing surrounded by White Woods. I was dancing all night. I was happy & I. I. I died."

I jerked up. "You what?"

"I made a wish to the world that I could finally find the Travelers. I wanted to tell about them so badly. Then I let go my tired, hungry, poor body."

I looked at Crissy, who looked surprised too, but maybe not so much as me.

"Now I was free to travel where I wanted, & not worry about sleep or food. So I began to move through miles & years easily."

"Awake or asleep?" I asked.

"Both," he smiled.

I nodded him go on.

"Anyway, it was a long time coming, but I found myself sitting in an

empty room. Just sitting there.

"Across from me was a tiny little Creature. A black-&-white Imp, with crazy eyes."

"Hey! Looks like a little pandy bear, right?" I cried.

He nodded & smiled. "Some call her Rosalita."

I nodded. This sounded like a story she would be in somehow.

"She pointed her little finger at me & tugged me closer & closer until it seemed like we were walking up a hill into a tall building. We walked through a hallway, & through a wall, & arrived at a darkened apartment."

Along a hallway were pictures. The first one was a tall picture of a barefooted red-haired girl in a White Woodsy grove of Faeries."

"Hey! I know that picture!" I said.

The Author guy nodded & talked more. "This little Creature was now in my hand, & she said, 'This is Marie. She is a teacher. One day she finds out she has lost her mountain.'"

"We moved to the next one which looked like a photograph of a guy on a bicycle, riding past a traffic light to a school.

"That's Joe, who is Marie's brother. He likes to visit her at her school to bring her lunch. But today she isn't there, & so he decides to look 4or her. He's very protective of her. He calls her Ginger because of her red hair.'

"Then we moved to the last picture of a tall billboard showing a mysterious street with mysterious figures on it. We both looked at it 4or awhile. She says, 'Marie's & Joe's caretaker Daniel & his friend Tumbleweed will be on this strange street from time to time in their travels.'

"Then she says, 'They all live together in a house in the White Woods near the mountain & the pond. The house has a second smaller building which Daniel & Tumbleweed use as their workshop. Marie & Joe like to sit down at the fishing hole of the pond, & look up at the mountain, until one day the mountain isn't there.'"

The Author guy paused & looked at us.

"Tell us more, guy! Don't torture your friends!" I cried. Crissy nodded wildly too.

He goes on. "The little Imp invited me to live in these pictures, to enspirit them with stories about Marie & Joe & Daniel & Tumbleweed that would have to be tolded & writed down."

"By who?' I asked.

"The Imp brought me into a dark room where 2 people were sleeping closely in a bed. They looked like the picture on the wall near them.

"She pointed at the man. I looked closely. He seemed to have a nice face. I nodded."

The Author guy stopped & smiled.

"Hey! Go on!"

He looked surprised. "I thought you knowed the rest."

I shooked mah head.

"Well, I live in the pictures so they are alive in that storyteller's mind. He looks at them, & has the itch to tell the stories in them of these Travelers. I am the Itch."

Um.

"You're the Itch?"

He nodded.

I looked at Crissy, who smiled nicely at me but not explaining words as I needed.

I tried again. "So the pandy bear made it so that you would live in the pictures?"

He nodded.
 "And itch the storyteller to tell the stories of Marie & Joe & Daniel & the other Travelers?"
 He nodded again.
 "Does he know you're the Itch?"
 "I think he wonders, but I don't think it matters."
 "Do Marie & Joe & Daniel know?"
 "I don't think so. I don't think it would matter."
 "And what about the Secret Books?"
 The Author guy nodded. "Well, I arranged 4or him to find them over the turns. Here & there. Usually one at a time, but not always."
 I helded mah paw up. "You arranged with the pandy bear, didn't you?"
 The Author guy cackled in reply.
 I nodded. I think that's why they are called Secret Books.

Now here is where I make a confession, Dear Readers. 4or you see, all I just writed was actually Act 3 of "The Stories of the 4 Pictures" Grand Production. When I heard all this the first time, I said to the Author guy & Crissy we should just tell it like this. Straight & true.

We had come to Crissy's Writing Room in the Red Bag to write Act 3, & the Author guy told us this strange story, & here it was.

They were nice & liked the idear, but then they told me they really did like the idear, not just 4or niceness's saying.

And somehow me & Crissy & the Author per4ormed on both stages in Bags End, & in the great clearing in the White Woods both, I don't know how. Crissy's tricky smile magick, & voila! is all I can say.

And when we were done, we got all kinds of big applause & a standing ovation & all that. O shucks!

We took our bows but when I looked around to share a friendly "glad it's over & we didn't get the hook" smile with the Author guy, he was gone!

I looked at Crissy, who smiled & shrugged. Such things don't surprise her none.

I went back later to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, to sit among mah thoughts.

It's not one of those stories that makes sense from one angle at a time. Maybe 2 or 3.

And I felt a little disappointed that those talented Creatures hadn't been in it. I like their talents.

Then I heard a cackle. Ut-o. Pandy bear alert.

I peered into the darkness be4ore me of nighttime Milne's Porch, till maybe I falled asleep or something, but suddenly that good hosting Bear called X with his handsome hat & scarf was crying out, "On . . . with . . . the . . . show!"

And out came lots of talented bears dancing & jumping hi like nobody's business!

And X then pointed up to the highest places in the dark sky where that little La Petit Thumb was! There was a blink of lights, & suddenly she was somewhere else, over & over again!

And then that brown monkey fellow called Jumping Jacoby was doing all sorts of jumping & tumbling feats of daring-do! And then he was dancing wildly with the White Bunny MeZmer! She did amazing hoppings to gape mah mouth!

And there were then these strange lovely Toes, & they sang a lovely hmmm so sweet that I could not wonder question one about it.

Finally, a whole group of Giraffes & other smiling Creature guys brung the house down with their musical rattlings & shakings & jinglings.

And a red curtain then fell over the whole production, & I was back alone in my usual comfy armchair, with the usual pretty but much calmer sky be4ore me.

Wow! A dream? Or that Author guy's way of saying goodbye after all? I have mah suspicions, Dear Readers.

This has been a very strange tale to tell, but I think I understand things better in some kind of twisty way. And it was fun to help in making the Grand Production this time around.

And then a few days later, I got invited to come visit the Creature Common by nighttime.

I was in the arms of that other Ramie cousin, I think the one the Pandy Bear had showed the Author guy sleeping? We were in some kind of room next to the one where I think the Creatures all stay. Also in his grasp were MeZmer the White Bunny, & Holly the Hedgedyhog, & a little green spiny fellow, & a little flowery girl bear.

The Ramie cousin was pointing us to the picture of Marie the Traveler & crying out, "Are you ready? Are you ready? Are you ready?" He paused like good drama & then cried out, "Marie!" & then turned us to show the next picture, of Joe on his bike near Marie's school, & cried out, "Joe!" & then sort of swept past a picture of a pond (with Marie's mountain?), & pointed to the photograph of the strange road where Daniel was sometimes, & cried out, "Daniel!" Then he sorta climaxed his drama by saying, "Et!"

"Cetera!" said a girl's voice back in the Creature Common room.

And I knowed somehow that the Author guy was lurking in all 4 of these pictures, just ready to itch & itch.

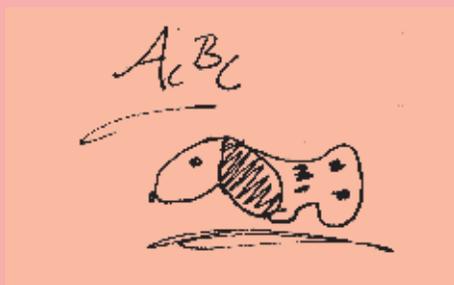
THE END

P.S. - Dear Readers,

I sure got a lot of letters about this crazy tale in mah newspaper! So many good questions! Like "How can Crissy and the Author guy both have Secret Books?" & "How many Marie pictures are there?" & "Who was that mysterious brown Bear the Author guy met?"

I think maybe I should go on a fact-hunting trip to find some good answers if I can. Maybe I will ask Princess Crissy & those wise & sometimes mysterious Creatures to help me.

Anyway, I will write up what I find in mah beloved newspaper 4or all of you to read about!



* * * * *



Ekponoimo Iphyok



Lecher of the Eponymous Era

The lenses to your glasses
are as thick as Coke bottles.
Having heard that one before,
you stood staring unresponsively
past my twitching left shoulder.

I dislike white cardigans,
they always bind at the wrists,
but seem to be attention getters
on the right street corner.

Your glass of punch was now empty,
the time of evening when one
revives or finds an unlit exit.
I offered to guide you with a divining rod,
my companion at every party
I have ever attended.

You held my arm tightly
just below the left elbow.
I was encouraged by your strong grip,
and wondered if hot wax and cold ice
could semi-consciously be considered
injudicious or imprudent.

* * *

The Kahlil Gibran Consortium

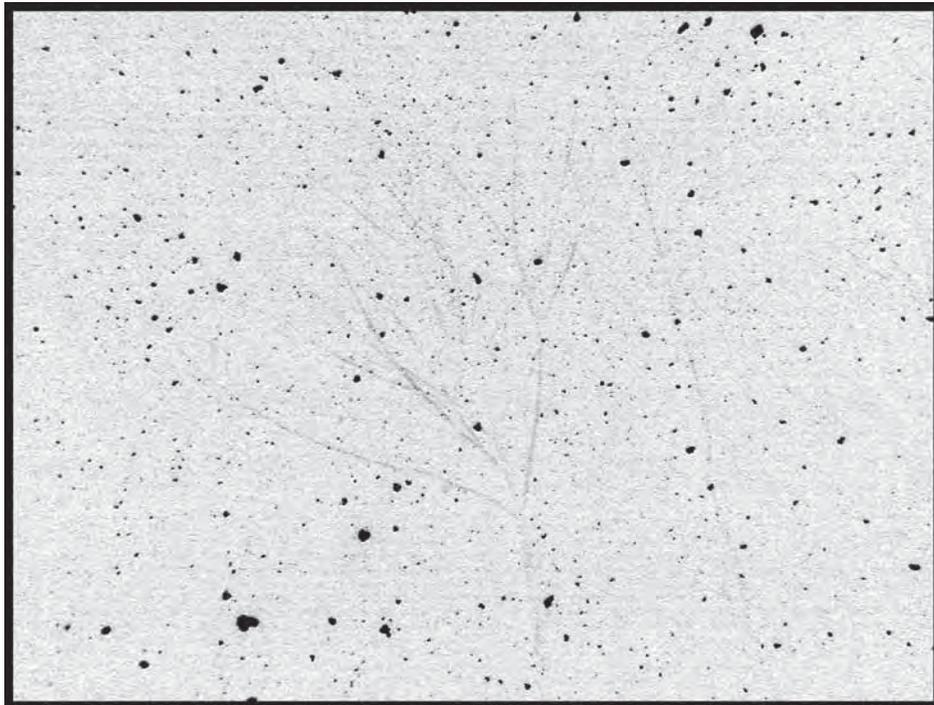
The poetry workshop for significant others
was going quite well.

I brought my knitting,
sat in the back and listened.

Uttering the occasional
“That’s nice, dear.”

Until a radical emerged,
cleverer than spoken word,
calling a Sloppy Joe a slipknot.
Naming names, incongruously
Andalusian, and double-flecked.

* * * * *





Thank You for the Opportunity

[Fiction]

“Can we get a light, please?” said Curtis, waving the white stick about like some conductor’s baton. His hands looked strangely pale in the bright summer sunshine—skinny, too, and sort of spectral.

The matron stepped forward to greet the new arrivals. She wore all black despite the sunny noontime atmosphere—shoes, socks, skirt above the knees, blouse pressed tightly to her cartoonish curves. *Allison*, read the name above her left breast, letters orange as if sewn in fire. Her hair also was black, as were her eyes.

“Three of you,” she said, raising the golden rectangle that held the flame in its cage. “Three of a kind. Three’s a crowd and a magic number. There were three bears and three little pigs. Three stars in Orion’s belt. Three wise men. Primary colors? Three. Nostradamus named three antichrists, and there are three of you in this holy trinity. Allow me to light a candle for your prayers.” She extended her arm, while Curtis bent toward the flame. His cigarette crackled as it took.

“My turn,” said Tia, who somewhat resembled Wonder Woman in her red bikini.

“Certainly,” said the matron.

Tia leaned in to light hers, then pulled back and coughed daintily. “I felt that,” she said. “Cold and hot at the same time.”

“It is,” Curtis agreed. “Makes my skin tingle like I just touched a live current.”

“And you, Miss?” said the matron.

“I don’t know,” said Carrie. “I’ve never done this before.”

“It’s okay to back out.”

“Peer pressure,” said Curtis.

“Peer pressure,” Tia agreed.

Carrie instinctively used the back of her hand to wipe hair from her eyes, though her blond locks had been reduced to a sort of buzz cut. “Oh, what the hell.” She took the plunge.

“Doesn’t have much taste,” said Tia, holding hers up to watch the orange glow descending from the tip. Smoke drifted upward, splitting into a pair of streams that then entwined like two lovers.

The sounds of seagulls crying and waves crashing filled the air as the trio stood there, studying their cigarettes, occasionally raising them to their lips to take a puff. There was also a rumble that sounded like distant thunder.

“It’s kind of nice,” said Curtis. “I feel calmer, relaxed. And what’s that smell? It reminds me of summer camp when I was a boy.”

“That’s just the smoke,” the matron explained.

“Oh,” said Curtis.

“Paper and plant matter burning.”

“Oh.”

Carrie did the thing with the back of her hand again. She couldn’t get used to her new look. Before, stray strands of golden hair always danced and dangled across her eyes. Now, she seemed as if she wanted to cry but couldn’t make the tears. “We’re better than this,” she told the others. “I don’t like it.”

“I guess it’s an acquired taste,” said Curtis.

The matron nodded her head and feigned a smile. “He’s right. It’s not for everyone.”

Curtis inhaled deeply. His cigarette had burned halfway down. “It loses some of the novelty after a couple tries, but it’s all right. I want to keep going.”

“Is that rain?” asked Tia.

“I’m afraid so,” said the matron.

“I don’t want to stand out in the rain.”

“Don’t worry, dear. It’ll pass.”

“The rain?”

“No, the cigarette . . . and your unwillingness to suffer through a storm.”

The sky opened up, drenching the four of them. Everything turned a sickly gray-green tint, and the world took on the smell of dewy leaves and mildew.

The three women covered their heads with their arms. Curtis used his spare hand to shield his cigarette. He lifted the stick and puffed fiercely. Tia smoked also, stopping long enough to say, “Well, ain’t this just the be-all end-all.”

“Be glad it’s not the middle of winter,” said the matron. “Imagine trying to smoke with gloves on, or worse, without gloves when it’s so cold you have to keep changing hands and placing the free one in your pocket.”

“Sounds like a blast.”

“Oh, to hell with this,” Carrie shouted suddenly. She threw her soggy cigarette in the wet sand. “I’ve had enough. I’m done here.” Her white beach shirt was soaked through, showing off her lavender bathing suit that outlined her breasts and unusually large nipples.

“What about you?” said the matron.

Tia shrugged and flicked her cigarette away.

“One more puff,” said Curtis. He inhaled once, twice, thrice, spitting back clouds half as gray as those overhead. When the fire burned all the way to the filter, he dropped the cigarette and covered it with wet sand. “OK, I guess I’m done. Thank you for the opportunity.”

The woman in black clapped her hands. As if she had cast a spell, the sky brightened—slowly at first, but soon returning to the light of a warm summer afternoon. “I hope you’ve enjoyed this little adventure. Please come back and visit us again.”

The lighting shifted once more, yellowing and dimming. The ocean transformed into a black wall, the sky and sun lost to a black ceiling. Allison reached out, pulled a lever, and opened a doorway in the black.

Outside, crowds of people walked by from all directions—young couples, families holding teddy bears and shopping bags, toothless carnies in long striped pants. A barker was calling out, “New to this year’s State Fair, step right up and take the rollercoaster ride of a lifetime. No tickets required. Come in and check out the smoking booth. Fun for the whole family. Step right up! Step up and take a journey to the days of yore!”

The trio walked slowly into the bright summer sunlight. The air smelled of funnel cakes and cotton candy. A man walked by, eating a *Krispy Kreme* cheeseburger, and Tia could almost taste it on her lips. “I want one of those,” she said. Her bikini had mutated into a white tee shirt and shorts.

Likewise, Carrie’s blond hair had grown back out. She brushed away strands with the back of her hand. “I don’t get it,” she said. “The smoking, the standing around out in the rain. I just don’t see the point, I guess.”

Curtis stared down at his wide, brown hands, making sure they were his. He saw the green outline of a cigarette stretching from between two fingers. “I tell you,” he said, “I enjoyed that a lot. It was something special, something different. Why don’t we get back in line? What do you say? I want to go again.”

* * * * *



ABDN, k3bos, vebbex, womtoms, and wugalex



Charlie Beyer

The Turkey

[Fiction]

i.

The janitor, Jerry, nodded gently with a grin, knowing that his balls could be cut off. A weak and pathetic wave to the pretty grad student passing by him in the hall. She did not wave back. Instead, she grimaced and quickened her step.

Fucking creep, she thought.

And, indeed, the older man mopping the floor was not the typical specimen of the men around the campus, who were young, bright-eyed, slim, and fashionably dressed. Here she had to edge by a graying fifty-something, partially shaved, wearing a greasy ponytail tied with a fat red rubber band. An extra fifty sagging pounds straining the buttons of his faded checkered Madras shirt.

She wafted by like a soap bubble blown on a lake, feeling no connection to, or sympathy for, this derelict of society, shuffling along in dirty tennis shoes. Indistinguishable blue tattoos on the back of his hands only less revolting than the tattoo of barbed wire around his neck, badly done by blots of ink where the pattern should have been repeated.

This type of tattoo is the work of men in prison, with nothing better to do than stab each other with a pin whose tip is wrapped in thread from the mattress, and dipped in ballpoint pen ink. The really tough cons just stab themselves directly with the ballpoint pen. Jerry was visual proof of the hard time he had done in stir.

It had been a conviction for dealing heroin that landed him behind bars. He had been stabbing half his product into his arm. This practice had been slowly draining any profit from anything that could be called a “business.”

In desperation, he had tried to sell to a narc. The judge was a born-again Christian who believed Jerry was the spawn of the devil, so she gave him the maximum sentence of ten years. He had served all of it.

As the mop made its cycle from floor to bucket, the ex-convict mused quietly. “Damn. All these young women look so beautiful. They have had all the breaks of wealth and smarts. They are so clean and smell so nice when they walk by, whereas I know I smell rank from this work.”

He considered. “We are on opposite ends of the social scale. Myself, old, dumb, and on the fast track to nowhere. They are beautiful, young, and heading to the exalted halls of science. Never the twain of us shall meet. And I’ll not fuck with the issue. I’ll keep my head down and try to stay ignored. Having this job is my life’s blood, and without it my despair would lead straight back to the white pony, and I’d ride that to the grave.”

Paused again in his thoughts. “Maybe that’s not such a bad idea? But I have to keep working here for the parole board, or it’s back into the cage for me. Back into the shit hole, where the only thing to do is tattoo *Freedum* and *Amerika* on your arms. That, and jack off.”

The mop scrubbed a spilled coffee spot at the top of the stairs, as another beauty ascended.

“Hello,” she said, which was 30% a reluctant greeting, and 70% a *get out of my way* command.

Jerry mumbled, “Hunna-mm-gat.” A usual male response to an unexpected female encounter.

What an animal! is what crossed her mind.

ii.

The young woman who passed by on the stairs, Annie, was a lab tech here on the third floor. Although an undergraduate, Annie was brilliant enough and persistent enough to have secured a job with other graduate students working with Hanna, a tenured professor and a tall, glowering, OCD-maniac-depressive. She hadn't taught a biology course in four years, obsessed instead with getting research grants.

The latest grant was from the US Army for twelve million dollars. The Army had decided that since a large percentage of new recruits were women, then money should be spent on finding a cure for breast cancer. Thus, glowering Hanna and her team would coax breast cancer cells into great undulating masses, and then devise ways to kill them.

The team would work late into the night, usually starting work after a day of classes and other obligations. Hanna would sometimes collapse in the back room in a Seconal haze, descending into her depressive condition after a day of mania. Her severe demands of having results by morning left the crew stressed and harried even as they started their shifts.

Often, usually around three in the morning, the eyes of Annie or one of the others in the weary crew would be distracted by a sudden movement from among the dozens of Petri dishes around them, where experiments in various stages brewed. Such accumulations of mutated cells would often congeal into a semi-sentient being, sporting amphibian-type legs and directional sensors. It would surreptitiously climb out of the Petri dishes, and make a break for the end of the lab bench.

For these occurrences, a mallet was kept on hand to splatter the thing before it could escape into the environment and change ecology as we know it. A lab tech's sideways glimpse of a mutant life struggling for freedom would bring the mallet down, gushing its existence into something akin to projectile vomit.

iv.

Annie had tried to have a personal life, but the demands of the university had precluded that. In the excitement of her first year, she had dated super-nerd brains in an attempt to find an equal to her intelligence. But the nerds were all sexually stuck in the pee-pee-poo-poo stage of eight-year-olds. These underdeveloped suitors would neglect a date with her . . . to research flamethrowers or play *Dungeons and Dragons* with other bi-spectacled nerds.

Tiring of this lack of manliness in the local geniuses, Annie swung the other way, finding the largest meathead-sports-scholarship guy in the academic corridors. This IQ-47 athlete was all the biceps she could ever want, but lacked the smallest grasp of science.

When she came back to their apartment, totally excited about blocking an enzyme involved with transcriptase RNA, Bubba Biceppa would say, "Wanna catch the game tonight?"

Of course she did not, and the hamburger breath was getting old.

She did feel protected though. Bubba doted on her like a precious kitten, always carrying her overload of books (he had only a gym bag for himself), and sometimes carrying her too if she looked slightly fatigued.

Yes—cared for and protected. But feeling too like she was locked in a safe room with one of her amoeba creations from the lab. Their conversations were similar to a convenience store junk food list, so of course she dumped him—to his utter confusion.

She tried a few lesbian relationships, but found other women sketchy and unpredictable. She also tried running before dawn for a few months, till her knees began to hurt. She just naturally wanted to sleep like a log till noon at the earliest. The lab job was the best solution, with other non-sexual die-hard workers cogitating into the night, sharing and understanding the manipulations of their mad scientist biology.



In the face of these failed social arrangements, Annie developed a secret obsession with reading a street magazine called *The Weekly*. It is a common type of free publication found in most university towns, listing music venues, local events, and personal ads.

Annie would cut straight to the most pathetic section of the personals: the *I Saw You* column. Here the masses whined and wheedled their sad songs in the desperate hope of an imagined reunion.

For instance: *I saw you on the bus from 12th Street. You with beautiful long brown hair and I the guy in the polka dot shirt. I smiled at you, but I don't think you noticed. Please find me. I am Greg.*

Or this one: *I saw you fumbling for a light for your cigarette in front of Starbucks. I flicked my Bic for you. You smiled and my jaw dropped. I could say nothing. You rolled your eyes and walked away. Please give me a second chance. My fire burns for you.*

Annie would gleefully read every word of this pathos, satisfying some cerebral urge for unrequited love.

The only drawback to this life of daytime classes, and then late night work, was a profound lack of sleep, and the constant strain to please the half-crazed Hanna. Trying to please her was like pumping water from a sinking ship.

Due to Hanna's lack of organization, rumors circulated that the closure of the lab was imminent. Missed deadlines, pilfered lab supplies, missing money, and project directions that reversed on odd-numbered days. Also her downer dope binges with inevitable mania the next day fueled much uncertainty.

All hell could explode any day, and all would be shut down, particularly if any of their engineered organisms escaped, or if the boss had a meltdown in front of the University Board. This had happened before, and remained highly likely again.

This was not a job to pay off one's student loans with, or even to expect to still have next year. But it was *damned interesting*.

iii.

Another despairing man, like Jerry the Janitor, was Annie's Dad. He was estranged, slightly deranged, damn near spare changed . . . with a bad case of mange.

He lived in a crap basement apartment a hundred miles away. Black mold climbed the walls. He amused himself by squirting bleach into the black mold to make patterns of stripes and blobs.

The fine house on the hill where the family had all lived for the past ten years was gone. Sold off in the divorce, and everyone scattered to the winds. The mother went off with the house money on some self-indulgent mission to find the perfect beach to lounge on. Annie's little brother far away studying astrophysics and drug ingestion. Dad working as a tramp surveyor around the West, moving from one damp motel room to the next.

It seemed to Annie that Dad worked all the time, but remained profoundly broke. It might have had something to do with the ex-wife demanding he pay all her expenses: her health insurance, her auto insurance, her rent, and a monthly stipend just because he was "bad" in some way. Her best revenge was his bankruptcy, his destitution. Mother sat on the hundred thousand from the house sale "for the children," she would claim.

The children, of course, were deep into their lives—and as far away from the curious conflict between their parents as they could get.

The cinder block apartment building Dad lived in was a slightly modified former barracks for Coast Guard trainees. There was a distinct smell of rotting potatoes, and no pictures could be nailed into the cement wall. The one aluminum frame window looked out to a dull grey street. The rain pattered against the pane interminably. Thankfully, Dad had one love, Kelly the family dog, who had been unceremoniously bequeathed to his care for the rest of all time. The mother was happy to throw the faithful family friend of thirteen years to the gas chamber with only a contemptuous look

over her shoulder. Dad felt the same penetrating indifference as did the dog, both still wearing collars, both isolated from all they loved. On the floor futon, they would snuggle in fur and cry for lost love.

The phone was out. No contact there. Not broken, but an evil instrument of pain and depression. Anytime Graham Bell connected him to the ex, a half hour of accusation and a train wreck of disparagement crashed into him. He hadn't known that he was such a bad person in this world. He had provided houses, cars, clothes, food, a thousand payments for a thousand things. Dad had displayed an eclectic intelligence for everyone to follow over the course of twenty-five years. Now this was his reward. *Banishment.*

Kelly and Dad sat on the futon festooned with hair. He wore two sweaters in the 55-degree room, and the dog considered he might need a sweater also.

"What can we do to get my family people back?" Dad imagined he heard the dog telling him. "Who can I wrestle with? Who will chase me? Who will have me find the trail in the dark woods? Who can I protect from horny boys? *What, oh what, is my purpose now?*"

"Your purpose now is to be a warm loving body for me. Be the one whose brown eyes stare back into mine with the love of a child. Be the comfort to my soul."

"This I can gladly do, Dad. But we need to get together with the kids."

"Hmmm . . . yes. The boy ran off to South Carolina to a NASA center of some sort, but I know where Annie is."

"Call her up and invite her to Thanksgiving dinner. I'll cook."

"You can't cook. You're a dog. And you'd eat it all before it got to the table. I will not call."

"Why not?"

"Because I have PTSD about the goddamned phone. Besides, she would just blow me off. Make up some excuse. Mom told her to hate me, remember?"

"Maybe. But she's smarter than that. She can make up her own mind."

"Ya think?"

"Yeah. You gotta connect."

"But how to do so?" A long pause as the wall is studied. Kelly lays back in relaxation and twitches his leg a little.

"Wait. Wait. I got it. We'll place a personal ad. She's sure to read it and be impressed. She will marvel at the great effort we have taken."

"It's settled then." Accompanied by a great toothy yawn.

"Damn, I love her. Hope this works."

iv.

"Nothing ever happens here. Nada, no-fo, numbfuk, zeroism. Do the same thing every night. Collect the trash. Mop the floor. I do feel lucky the parole board got me this job. I would have been stuck in a halfway house if I didn't get this steady job. And the chicks here are so damn cute." Chuckles.

"OK, Jerry. Shut up that testosterone. Don't think about what you'll never get. One false move and you ass will be fired faster than a frog snaps a fly."

Paused. "Hmmm. I have to check if my fly is open?"

Jerry the Janitor knocked sheepishly at the lab door.

"What?" is bellowed from the other side.

"Trash collection, please."

"Come in. It's open."

Jerry the Janitor slithered in with plastic bags in his arms. Benches looking down the room are cluttered with scientific glassware, tubes, and wires. Shapely young women occupied positions around the lab benches. The tall woman was there glaring at him. Her eyes intense, her brow furrowed in concentration at apparently nothing.

“Please what?”

“Pardon me, Ma’am,” stammered Jerry.

“Ma’am? And please *what?* Please, I want the *trash?* Please, I want to waste your *time?* Please get the *fuck* outta here?”

She was now shifting her weight from foot to foot in a nervous hop. Her eyebrows expectantly risen, looking wasp-like. Jerry has emptied only two trashcans and replaced only one plastic bag.

“Umm. You mean now?”

“Does it look like I got a time machine in here? *Yes! Now! Get out!*”

It did actually look like there was a time machine in there to Jerry. He stumbled in his haste, tripping, and nearly smacking his head on the door.

“What a *fricking idiot!*” Hanna declared to no one in particular in the lab. To her, everyone is a *fricking idiot*. No shred of compassion for the disenfranchised. None. *Ever*.

“Wow. What a super bitch,” thought Jerry. “She must shit ice cubes. She’s like a rattlesnake at the den door, ready to strike.”

v.

Published in the personals of *The Weekly*, Nov. 22nd: “I saw you. You the cute lady I heard was called Annie. Your red hair is beautiful. Me the guy in the checkered shirt, ponytail, greying beard. Let’s be together. I would love to cook you a turkey. Spend Thanksgiving at my place and be grateful. Please join me and make a lonely old man happy!”

vi.

“*Aahhhhh. Annie, Annie! What the fuck! Where are you? Emergency! Emergency!*”

The pack of women was running down the hall, pounding on the walls as they went. One carried a baseball bat, another a gardening claw for loosening dirt. Annie shot out of the lab in a bewildered state. The women fell to hugging her, as though she had just survived a magnitude 7 earthquake.

“Annie! Annie! *Oh my god!*” The claw-bearing woman waved and flapped the newest copy of the *Weekly*. “*Have you read this?* The Super Creep wants to stuff your turkey!”

“What the . . . ?” Annie grabbed the paper and quickly read the *I Saw You* personal ad.

“*Oh my god! It’s true.* Jerry the Janitor wants to perv me out. He wants me as his sex slave!”

“*Sick, sick.* Pervo City!”

“What are we gonna do? *Oh my god.* What *will* we do?” cried Annie.

“We’re gonna beat him into a pulp. Cut off his balls. Kill him. *Kill him!*” declared the baseball-bat-wielding lady.

“Yes! Kill him. Kill him! *Nut him!*” They all cried in unison now.

Annie grabbed a long neck glass beaker and the gang tromped down the hall in search of the unwary janitor. They hooted and swore like sailors as they stamped about the building, anticipating the pain they intended to inflict on Jerry.

After an hour of the search, Jerry the Janitor was not found. *The Weekly* was shredded and strewn, as if to chum Jerry with the trash. The exertion cooled their murdering minds somewhat, and they drifted back up to the third floor for the night’s work.

Hanna was pacing in there between benches, making unwarranted adjustments to other researcher’s experiments. She could care less who got raped tonight. *Just get the goddamned work done.*

“And put that fucking beaker back. Would have cost you fifty bucks if you had smashed it.”

It was Jerry the Janitor’s lucky night off.

The phone rang with its incessant Mozart ringtone. It was Dad, calling at noon the next day, waking Annie into a grumpy mood.

“Who the fuck?”

“Hi, Annie. It’s yer Dad.”

“Dad?” As though she had never heard of such a thing.

“Yes, yes. Your Dad. Calling to see how you are?”

“Hmmpth. DaaaaD? OK. Hi, Dad. Wassup?”

“Oh, just calling to see how you are. How’s school? What are you up to?”

These were the most boring parent questions that ever lived. Annie doesn’t feel she has the strength to answer them. Definitely not possible without coffee.

“Yeah, Dad. Things are fine. Just fine.”

“Doing anything for Thanksgiving? Got any plans?”

“Naw. Just working.”

“Any nice friends invite you over for a feast?”

“No! Just a pervert!”

“Wha? What’s with that? You going?”

“No! *Fucking no!* We’re gonna kill him. Nard the SOB.”

“Who? Who are ya gonna nard?”

“The pervert janitor. He’s trying to jump my bones.”

“What the fuck? How do you know, what did he do?”

“The creep wrote me a letter saying he wanted to get me alone for ‘the day’ and stuff my turkey. *What a perv.* We’re all gonna kill him. We tried to find him last night but he hid. Oh, by the way, how are you set for bail money?”

“What? Wrote you a letter? Wad he say? Did he slip it under the door or what?”

“No. The perv put a notice in the *I Saw You* section of the paper. Mentioned me by name. Said he wanted to drag me to his cave and use me as a sex slave.”

“Did it really say all that?”

“Well, not exactly, but it’s obvious what his intent is.”

“You sure? Maybe he’s a nice guy. And, oh, no money, by the way.”

“Nice guy? *No way!* Oh *bletch!* *Barfarama!*”

“What if I told you that I wrote the *I Saw You*?”

“Wha?”

“Yeah. I wrote it.”

“What! *You son of a bitch.* Now we gotta kill you. Are you crazy? You the perv?”

“I’m no damn perv, ya goof. I just wanted to get your attention and invite you to chow turkey with me and Kelly. We want you around for ‘the day.’”

“Well, ya sure got my attention! Ya damn asshole!”

“That means you’ll come have dinner with us? Kelly’s really looking forward to it. I’ll make the gravy.”

“You’ll make everything.”

“Hell, yeah. I make everything. Kelly will help. That’s a yes then?”

“Yeah. Well, OK. I’ll come. Pretty sly and sneaky, but I’ll come. “

“Great! Can’t wait. Kelly’s making the stuffing.”

“But the gang at work is still gonna want to kill the janitor.”

“The poor unknowing bastard. Need help?”

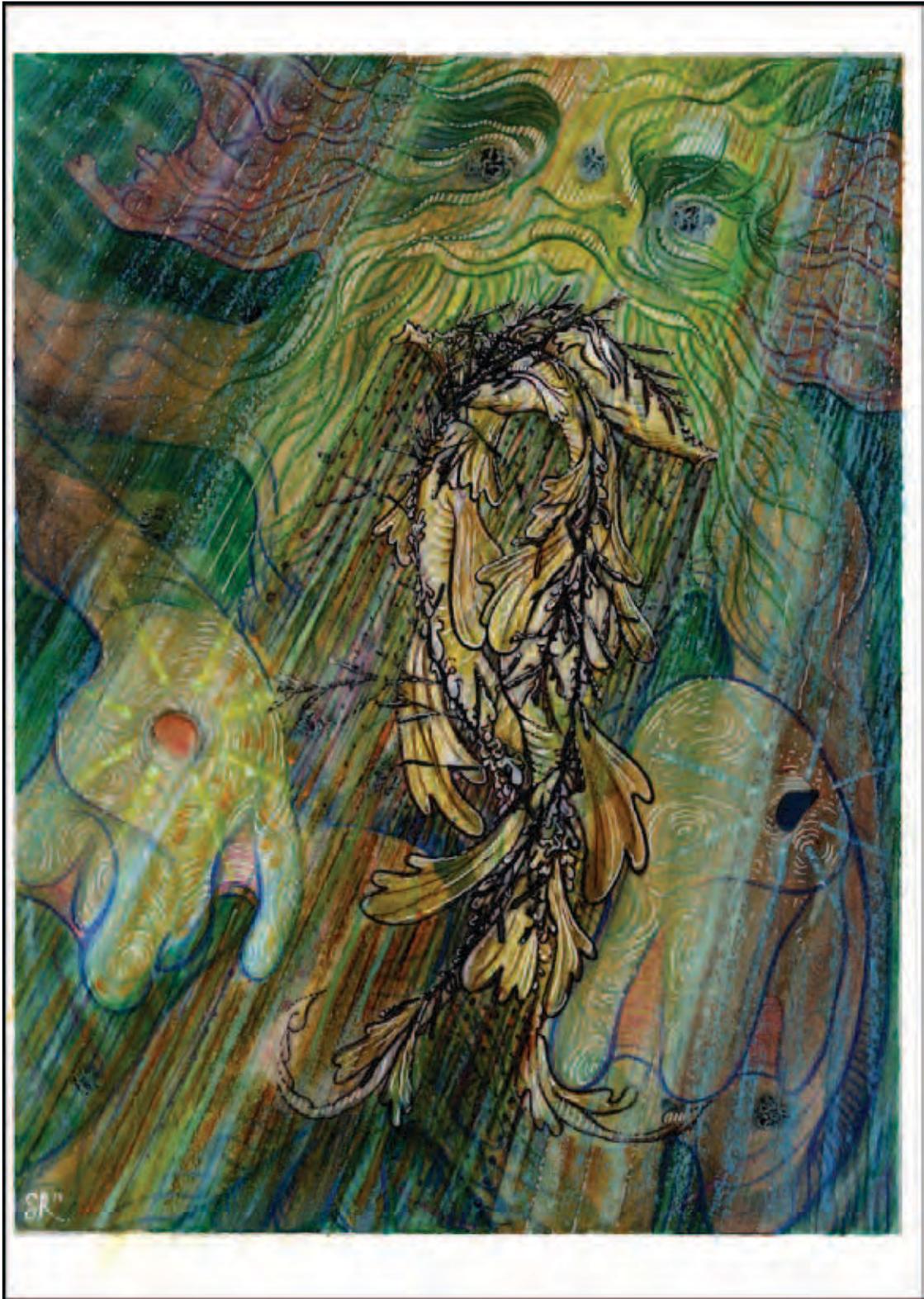
viii.

The microwave annoyingly dinged as Jerry the Janitor's Swanson Hungry Man turkey dinner became ready. After adjusting a stool near the overstuffed chair, grabbing the processed food from the electromagnetic fire, Thanksgiving dinner was served. With the plastic fork held in his lips, Jerry sat in the great chair before the great eye, ready to watch reruns of that morning's Macy's Day Parade.

"This life is boring," thought Jerry the Janitor. "Safe, but boring. Nothing ever happens."

* * * * *





Sam Knot



(((the neap of hello)))

these words are a mirroring of
 the otherwise unreflective
 nature of a creature
 who has no creator
 but the role of the whole
 is not the rolling of dice
 and so emerges choice
 as being never not there -
 so this is what it means right?
 every creation is a collaboration
 which cannot merely emerge
 without first being got under way
 and then continually engaged -
 so no merely, whatever way
 we thhh-look at it - no only in whole,
 there is no only whole, nor all of wholes,
 not really . . . what is the word for a silence in which
 we imagine something like sound? silence in which
 meaning moves, waves like weeds beneath the sea,
 as if meaning could have a momentum of sorts -
 there are currents of meaning swashing
 slowly all around us, slow down here,
 in the deeps - there are ways for us
 to get carried away with meaning,
 to let ourselves be moved by it, drawn
 and chucked and tumbled and beached -
 is this a meaning we are making?
 or are we just not unmaking it?
 letting it be, like a wave
 going back to the sea



Sam Knot

the gift of partaking
in what seemed to be almost a pause
between breaths, but was in fact a kind of crest,
i mean: the sea is ceaseless, sure, like how we cannot stop
seeing just by closing our eyes? because to see
never did mean only to see, literally? because literally
we always have to see what we see too . . . like that?
i don't know, i don't think so - that seems like levels,
like in one way we stop, and in another way we never -
we never - the sea never stops, not even in a way -
it rises and falls, and somewhere, somewhere
around the change between rising and falling,
it seems to slow, sure, it seems to slow,
and this can go so slow it seems to stop, time
seems to stretch for a moment, and somewhere in that stretch
there seems something like a stop - like we might breathe out
and hold that, before breathing in, but we haven't -
we haven't really stopped breathing - but
that's what we meant, what we said - pause -
to pause is not to stop, but . . . but to break, to not
continue for a moment, before continuing,
to change . . . mode, or state, or direction,
or speed . . . to change the sense of perception
you whisper, whisper like the wave inside
yourself: to change the sense of perception,
the sense of sense, into something continuous,
like you cannot stop seeing just by
closing your eyes, and not because
there are different senses of sight,
but because you see with your mind
there are ways you hear with your eyes,
the rise and fall of the wave,
the little pebbles and
bubbles of sound,
how noise can be white
in ears and eyes
without leaping
senses



Sam Knot

rising
 in the oceans
 of the ears, falling
 out the corners of the eyes, walking
 one walk through time, with feet that tread
 the beach of the mind, that feel the muscles
 of the sand, the tidal massage of the world, the gentle
 whispers of the therapeutic noise that is music to the soul
 tired of order, tired of rearranging parts of thought
 into the supposed shapes of understanding
 something you may have no hand in - understand this, whispers
 the mermaid princess of that element you have never, ever
 really been out of, understand all there is to understand
 is substance, and that this substance is understanding
 itself, this substance is understanding itself,
 the glassy sand we build imaginal castles from,
 the not-stuff of the real, feel this
 one understanding, this wonder-standing
 under your feet, the braids of the beach
 beneath the rivulets of my shining hair
 all fresh around your flesh, the feet
 you hover with, the world
 that lifts you is the truth,
 the world you lift yourself within,
 to wonder, the wonder of that wonder,
 one wonder, that we are this together,
 the flash of our eyes as the sun
 goes down, we can never, never ever,
 never mean alone,
 never mean one
 more than whole,
 more than
 whole

* * * * *



Sam Knot

James Joyce



The Dead

[Classic Fiction]

Published in Dubliners, 1914, Grant Richards Ltd., London

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Continued from *Cenacle* | 114 | December 2020

He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality, sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris, the quotation from Browning. He repeated to himself a phrase he had written in his review: "One feels that one is listening to a thought-tormented music." Miss Ivors had praised the review. Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her propagandism? There had never been any ill-feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper-table, looking up at him, while he spoke, with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech. An idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say, alluding to Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us may have had its faults, but for my part I think it had certain qualities of hospitality, of humor, of humanity, which the new and very serious and hyper-educated generation that is growing up around us seems to me to lack." Very good: that was one for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?

A murmur in the room attracted his attention. Mr. Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting Aunt Julia, who leaned upon his arm, smiling and hanging her head. An irregular musketry of applause escorted her also as far as the piano and then, as Mary Jane seated herself on the stool, and Aunt Julia, no longer smiling, half turned so as to pitch her voice fairly into the room, gradually ceased. Gabriel recognized the prelude. It was that of an old song of Aunt Julia's—"Arrayed for the Bridal." Her voice, strong and clear in tone, attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air, and though she sang very rapidly she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes. To follow the voice, without looking at the singer's face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight. Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close of the song, and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper-table. It sounded so genuine that a little color struggled into Aunt Julia's face as she bent to replace in the music-stand the old leather-bound song-book that had her initials on the cover. Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear her better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and talking animatedly to his mother, who nodded her head gravely and slowly in acquiescence. At last, when he could clap no more, he stood up suddenly and hurried across the room to Aunt Julia whose hand he seized and held in both his hands, shaking it when words failed him or the catch in his voice proved too much for him.

"I was just telling my mother," he said, "I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is tonight. Now! Would you believe that now? That's the truth. Upon my word and honor that's the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so . . . so clear and fresh, never."

Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp. Mr. Browne extended his open hand towards her and said to those who were near him in the manner of a showman introducing a prodigy to an audience:

"Miss Julia Morkan, my latest discovery!"

He was laughing very heartily at this himself when Freddy Malins turned to him and said:

“Well, Browne, if you’re serious you might make a worse discovery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half so well as long as I am coming here. And that’s the honest truth.”

“Neither did I,” said Mr. Browne. “I think her voice has greatly improved.”

Aunt Julia shrugged her shoulders and said with meek pride:

“Thirty years ago I hadn’t a bad voice as voices go.”

“I often told Julia,” said Aunt Kate emphatically, “that she was simply thrown away in that choir. But she never would be said by me.”

She turned as if to appeal to the good sense of the others against a refractory child, while Aunt Julia gazed in front of her, a vague smile of reminiscence playing on her face.

“No,” continued Aunt Kate, “she wouldn’t be said or led by anyone, slaving there in that choir night and day, night and day. Six o’clock on Christmas morning! And all for what?”

“Well, isn’t it for the honor of God, Aunt Kate?” asked Mary Jane, twisting round on the piano-stool and smiling.

Aunt Kate turned fiercely on her niece and said:

“I know all about the honor of God, Mary Jane, but I think it’s not at all honorable for the Pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives and put little whipper-snappers of boys over their heads. I suppose it is for the good of the Church, if the Pope does it. But it’s not just, Mary Jane, and it’s not right.”

She had worked herself into a passion and would have continued in defense of her sister, for it was a sore subject with her, but Mary Jane, seeing that all the dancers had come back, intervened pacifically.

“Now, Aunt Kate, you’re giving scandal to Mr. Browne, who is of the other persuasion.”

Aunt Kate turned to Mr. Browne, who was grinning at this allusion to his religion, and said hastily:

“O, I don’t question the Pope’s being right. I’m only a stupid old woman and I wouldn’t presume to do such a thing. But there’s such a thing as common everyday politeness and gratitude. And if I were in Julia’s place I’d tell that Father Healey straight up to his face . . .”

“And besides, Aunt Kate,” said Mary Jane, “we really are all hungry and when we are hungry we are all very quarrelsome.”

“And when we are thirsty we are also quarrelsome,” added Mr. Browne.

“So that we had better go to supper,” said Mary Jane, “and finish the discussion afterwards.”

On the landing outside the drawing-room Gabriel found his wife and Mary Jane trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for supper. But Miss Ivors, who had put on her hat and was buttoning her cloak, would not stay. She did not feel in the least hungry and she had already overstayed her time.

“But only for ten minutes, Molly,” said Mrs. Conroy. “That won’t delay you.”

“To take a pick itself,” said Mary Jane, “after all your dancing.”

“I really couldn’t,” said Miss Ivors.

“I am afraid you didn’t enjoy yourself at all,” said Mary Jane hopelessly.

“Ever so much, I assure you,” said Miss Ivors, “but you really must let me run off now.”

“But how can you get home?” asked Mrs. Conroy.

“O, it’s only two steps up the quay.”

Gabriel hesitated a moment and said:

“If you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I’ll see you home if you are really obliged to go.”

But Miss Ivors broke away from them.

“I won’t hear of it,” she cried. “For goodness’ sake go in to your suppers and don’t mind me. I’m quite well able to take care of myself.”

“Well, you’re the comical girl, Molly,” said Mrs. Conroy frankly.

“*Beannacht libh*,” cried Miss Ivors, with a laugh, as she ran down the staircase.

Mary Jane gazed after her, a moody puzzled expression on her face, while Mrs. Conroy leaned over the banisters to listen for the hall-door. Gabriel asked himself was he the cause of her abrupt departure. But she did not seem to be in ill humor—she had gone away laughing. He stared blankly down the staircase.

At that moment Aunt Kate came toddling out of the supper-room, almost wringing her hands in despair.

“Where is Gabriel?” she cried. “Where on earth is Gabriel? There’s everyone waiting in there, stage to let, and nobody to carve the goose!”

“Here I am, Aunt Kate!” cried Gabriel, with sudden animation, “ready to carve a flock of geese, if necessary.”

A fat brown goose lay at one end of the table, and at the other end, on a bed of creased paper strewn with sprigs of parsley, lay a great ham, stripped of its outer skin and peppered over with crust crumbs, a neat paper frill round its shin, and beside this was a round of spiced beef. Between these rival ends ran parallel lines of side-dishes: two little minsters of jelly, red and yellow; a shallow dish full of blocks of blancmange and red jam, a large green leaf-shaped dish with a stalk-shaped handle, on which lay bunches of purple raisins and peeled almonds, a companion dish on which lay a solid rectangle of Smyrna figs, a dish of custard topped with grated nutmeg, a small bowl full of chocolates and sweets wrapped in gold and silver papers and a glass vase in which stood some tall celery stalks. In the center of the table there stood, as sentries to a fruit-stand which upheld a pyramid of oranges and American apples, two squat old-fashioned decanters of cut glass, one containing port and the other dark sherry. On the closed square piano a pudding in a huge yellow dish lay in waiting, and behind it were three squads of bottles of stout and ale and minerals drawn up according to the colors of their uniforms, the first two black, with brown and red labels, the third and smallest squad white, with transverse green sashes.

Gabriel took his seat boldly at the head of the table and, having looked to the edge of the carver, plunged his fork firmly into the goose. He felt quite at ease now, for he was an expert carver and liked nothing better than to find himself at the head of a well-laden table.

“Miss Furlong, what shall I send you?” he asked. “A wing or a slice of the breast?”

“Just a small slice of the breast.”

“Miss Higgins, what for you?”

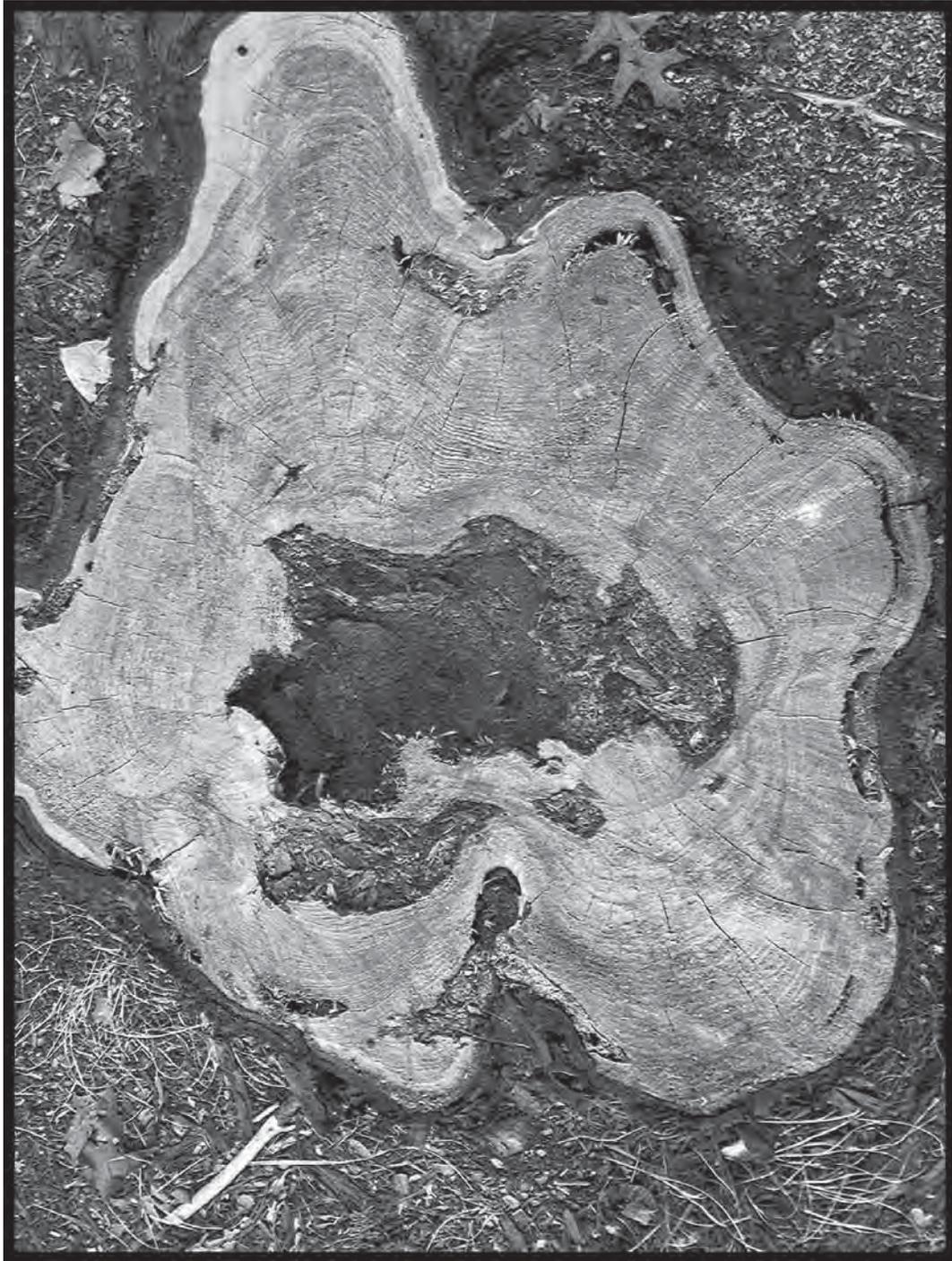
“O, anything at all, Mr. Conroy.”

While Gabriel and Miss Daly exchanged plates of goose and plates of ham and spiced beef, Lily went from guest to guest with a dish of hot floury potatoes wrapped in a white napkin. This was Mary Jane’s idea and she had also suggested apple sauce for the goose, but Aunt Kate had said that plain roast goose without any apple sauce had always been good enough for her and she hoped she might never eat worse. Mary Jane waited on her pupils and saw that they got the best slices, and Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia opened and carried across from the piano bottles of stout and ale for the gentlemen and bottles of minerals for the ladies. There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter-orders, of knives and forks, of corks and glass-stoppers. Gabriel began to carve second helpings as soon as he had finished the first round without serving himself. Everyone protested loudly, so that he compromised by taking a long draught of stout, for he had found the carving hot work. Mary Jane settled down quietly to her supper, but Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia were still toddling round the table, walking on each other’s heels, getting in each other’s way and giving each other unheeded orders. Mr. Browne begged of them to sit down and eat their suppers and so did Gabriel, but they said there was time enough, so that, at last, Freddy Malins stood up and, capturing Aunt Kate, plumped her down on her chair amid general laughter.

When everyone had been well served Gabriel said, smiling:

“Now, if anyone wants a little more of what vulgar people call stuffing let him or her speak.”

A chorus of voices invited him to begin his own supper, and Lily came forward with three



potatoes which she had reserved for him.

“Very well,” said Gabriel amiably, as he took another preparatory draught, “kindly forget my existence, ladies and gentlemen, for a few minutes.”

He set to his supper and took no part in the conversation with which the table covered Lily’s removal of the plates. The subject of talk was the opera company which was then at the Theatre Royal. Mr. Bartell D’Arcy, the tenor, a dark-complexioned young man with a smart moustache, praised very highly the leading contralto of the company, but Miss Furlong thought she had a rather vulgar style of production. Freddy Malins said there was a Negro chieftain singing in the second part of the Gaiety pantomime who had one of the finest tenor voices he had ever heard.

“Have you heard him?” he asked Mr. Bartell D’Arcy across the table.

“No,” answered Mr. Bartell D’Arcy carelessly.

“Because,” Freddy Malins explained, “now I’d be curious to hear your opinion of him. I think he has a grand voice.”

“It takes Teddy to find out the really good things,” said Mr. Browne familiarly to the table.

“And why couldn’t he have a voice too?” asked Freddy Malins sharply. “Is it because he’s only a black?”

Nobody answered this question and Mary Jane led the table back to the legitimate opera. One of her pupils had given her a pass for *Mignon*. Of course it was very fine, she said, but it made her think of poor Georgina Burns. Mr. Browne could go back farther still, to the old Italian companies that used to come to Dublin—Tietjens, Ilma de Murzka, Campanini, the great Trebelli, Giuglini, Ravelli, Aramburo. Those were the days, he said, when there was something like singing to be heard in Dublin. He told too of how the top gallery of the old Royal used to be packed night after night, of how one night an Italian tenor had sung five encores to “Let Me Like a Soldier Fall,” introducing a high C every time, and of how the gallery boys would sometimes in their enthusiasm unyoke the horses from the carriage of some great *prima donna* and pull her themselves through the streets to her hotel. Why did they never play the grand old operas now, he asked, *Dinorah*, *Lucrezia Borgia*? Because they could not get the voices to sing them: that was why.

“O, well,” said Mr. Bartell D’Arcy, “I presume there are as good singers today as there were then.”

“Where are they?” asked Mr. Browne defiantly.

“In London, Paris, Milan,” said Mr. Bartell D’Arcy warmly. “I suppose Caruso, for example, is quite as good, if not better than any of the men you have mentioned.”

“Maybe so,” said Mr. Browne. “But I may tell you I doubt it strongly.”

“O, I’d give anything to hear Caruso sing,” said Mary Jane.

“For me,” said Aunt Kate, who had been picking a bone, “there was only one tenor. To please me, I mean. But I suppose none of you ever heard of him.”

“Who was he, Miss Morkan?” asked Mr. Bartell D’Arcy politely.

“His name,” said Aunt Kate, “was Parkinson. I heard him when he was in his prime and I think he had then the purest tenor voice that was ever put into a man’s throat.”

“Strange,” said Mr. Bartell D’Arcy. “I never even heard of him.”

“Yes, yes, Miss Morkan is right,” said Mr. Browne. “I remember hearing old Parkinson, but he’s too far back for me.”

“A beautiful, pure, sweet, mellow English tenor,” said Aunt Kate with enthusiasm.

Gabriel having finished, the huge pudding was transferred to the table. The clatter of forks and spoons began again. Gabriel’s wife served out spoonfuls of the pudding and passed the plates down the table. Midway down they were held up by Mary Jane, who replenished them with raspberry or orange jelly or with blancmange and jam. The pudding was of Aunt Julia’s making, and she received praises for it from all quarters. She herself said that it was not quite brown enough.

“Well, I hope, Miss Morkan,” said Mr. Browne, “that I’m brown enough for you because, you know, I’m all Brown.”

All the gentlemen, except Gabriel, ate some of the pudding out of compliment to Aunt Julia. As Gabriel never ate sweets the celery had been left for him. Freddy Malins also took a stalk of celery and ate it with his pudding. He had been told that celery was a capital thing for the blood and he was just then under doctor's care. Mrs. Malins, who had been silent all through the supper, said that her son was going down to Mount Melleray in a week or so. The table then spoke of Mount Melleray, how bracing the air was down there, how hospitable the monks were and how they never asked for a penny-piece from their guests.

"And do you mean to say," asked Mr. Browne incredulously, "that a chap can go down there and put up there as if it were a hotel and live on the fat of the land and then come away without paying anything?"

"O, most people give some donation to the monastery when they leave," said Mary Jane.

"I wish we had an institution like that in our Church," said Mr. Browne candidly.

He was astonished to hear that the monks never spoke, got up at two in the morning and slept in their coffins. He asked what they did it for.

"That's the rule of the order," said Aunt Kate firmly.

"Yes, but why?" asked Mr. Browne.

Aunt Kate repeated that it was the rule, that was all. Mr. Browne still seemed not to understand. Freddy Malins explained to him, as best he could, that the monks were trying to make up for the sins committed by all the sinners in the outside world. The explanation was not very clear, for Mr. Browne grinned and said:

"I like that idea very much, but wouldn't a comfortable spring bed do them as well as a coffin?"

"The coffin," said Mary Jane, "is to remind them of their last end."

As the subject had grown lugubrious it was buried in a silence of the table, during which Mrs. Malins could be heard saying to her neighbor in an indistinct undertone:

"They are very good men, the monks, very pious men."

The raisins and almonds and figs and apples and oranges and chocolates and sweets were now passed about the table, and Aunt Julia invited all the guests to have either port or sherry. At first Mr. Bartell D'Arcy refused to take either, but one of his neighbors nudged him and whispered something to him, upon which he allowed his glass to be filled. Gradually as the last glasses were being filled the conversation ceased. A pause followed, broken only by the noise of the wine and by unsettling of chairs. The Misses Morkan, all three, looked down at the tablecloth. Someone coughed once or twice, and then a few gentlemen patted the table gently as a signal for silence. The silence came and Gabriel pushed back his chair and stood up.

The patting at once grew louder in encouragement and then ceased altogether. Gabriel leaned his ten trembling fingers on the tablecloth and smiled nervously at the company. Meeting a row of upturned faces he raised his eyes to the chandelier. The piano was playing a waltz tune and he could hear the skirts sweeping against the drawing-room door. People, perhaps, were standing in the snow on the quay outside, gazing up at the lighted windows and listening to the waltz music. The air was pure there. In the distance lay the park, where the trees were weighted with snow. The Wellington Monument wore a gleaming cap of snow that flashed westwards over the white field of Fifteen Acres.

He began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

"It has fallen to my lot this evening, as in years past, to perform a very pleasing task, but a task for which I am afraid my poor powers as a speaker are all too inadequate."

"No, no!" said Mr. Browne.

"But, however that may be, I can only ask you tonight to take the will for the deed, and to lend me your attention for a few moments while I endeavor to express to you in words what my feelings are on this occasion.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, it is not the first time that we have gathered together under this

hospitable roof, around this hospitable board. It is not the first time that we have been the recipients—or perhaps, I had better say, the victims—of the hospitality of certain good ladies.”

He made a circle in the air with his arm and paused. Everyone laughed or smiled at Aunt Kate and Aunt Julia and Mary Jane, who all turned crimson with pleasure. Gabriel went on more boldly:

“I feel more strongly with every recurring year that our country has no tradition which does it so much honor and which it should guard so jealously as that of its hospitality. It is a tradition that is unique as far as my experience goes (and I have visited not a few places abroad) among the modern nations. Some would say, perhaps, that with us it is rather a failing than anything to be boasted of. But granted even that, it is, to my mind, a princely failing, and one that I trust will long be cultivated among us. Of one thing, at least, I am sure. As long as this one roof shelters the good ladies aforesaid—and I wish from my heart it may do so for many and many a long year to come—the tradition of genuine warm-hearted courteous Irish hospitality, which our forefathers have handed down to us and which we must hand down to our descendants, is still alive among us.”

A hearty murmur of assent ran round the table. It shot through Gabriel’s mind that Miss Ivors was not there and that she had gone away discourteously: and he said with confidence in himself:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“A new generation is growing up in our midst, a generation actuated by new ideas and new principles. It is serious and enthusiastic for these new ideas and its enthusiasm, even when it is misdirected, is, I believe, in the main sincere. But we are living in a skeptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thought-tormented age: and sometimes I fear that this new generation, educated or hyper-educated as it is, will lack those qualities of humanity, of hospitality, of kindly humor which belonged to an older day. Listening tonight to the names of all those great singers of the past it seemed to me, I must confess, that we were living in a less spacious age. Those days might, without exaggeration, be called spacious days: and if they are gone beyond recall, let us hope, at least, that in gatherings such as this we shall still speak of them with pride and affection, still cherish in our hearts the memory of those dead and gone great ones whose fame the world will not willingly let die.”

“Hear, hear!” said Mr. Browne loudly.

“But yet,” continued Gabriel, his voice falling into a softer inflection, “there are always in gatherings such as this sadder thoughts that will recur to our minds: thoughts of the past, of youth, of changes, of absent faces that we miss here tonight. Our path through life is strewn with many such sad memories: and were we to brood upon them always we could not find the heart to go on bravely with our work among the living. We have all of us living duties and living affections which claim, and rightly claim, our strenuous endeavors.

“Therefore, I will not linger on the past. I will not let any gloomy moralizing intrude upon us here tonight. Here we are gathered together for a brief moment from the bustle and rush of our everyday routine. We are met here as friends, in the spirit of good-fellowship, as colleagues, also, to a certain extent, in the true spirit of *camaraderie*, and as the guests of—what shall I call them?—the Three Graces of the Dublin musical world.”

The table burst into applause and laughter at this allusion. Aunt Julia vainly asked each of her neighbors in turn to tell her what Gabriel had said.

“He says we are the Three Graces, Aunt Julia,” said Mary Jane.

Aunt Julia did not understand, but she looked up, smiling at Gabriel, who continued in the same vein:

“Ladies and Gentlemen,

“I will not attempt to play tonight the part that Paris played on another occasion. I will not attempt to choose between them. The task would be an invidious one and one beyond my poor powers. For when I view them in turn, whether it be our chief hostess herself, whose good heart, whose too good heart, has become a byword with all who know her; or her sister, who seems to be gifted with perennial youth and whose singing must have been a surprise and a revelation to us all tonight; or,

last but not least, when I consider our youngest hostess, talented, cheerful, hardworking and the best of nieces, I confess, Ladies and Gentlemen, that I do not know to which of them I should award the prize.”

Gabriel glanced down at his aunts and, seeing the large smile on Aunt Julia’s face and the tears which had risen to Aunt Kate’s eyes, hastened to his close. He raised his glass of port gallantly, while every member of the company fingered a glass expectantly, and said loudly:

“Let us toast them all three together. Let us drink to their health, wealth, long life, happiness, and prosperity and may they long continue to hold the proud and self-won position which they hold in their profession and the position of honor and affection which they hold in our hearts.”

All the guests stood up, glass in hand, and turning towards the three seated ladies, sang in unison, with Mr. Browne as leader:

*For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
Which nobody can deny.*

Aunt Kate was making frank use of her handkerchief and even Aunt Julia seemed moved. Freddy Malins beat time with his pudding-fork and the singers turned towards one another, as if in melodious conference, while they sang with emphasis:

*Unless he tells a lie,
Unless he tells a lie.*

Then, turning once more towards their hostesses, they sang:

*For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
For they are jolly gay fellows,
Which nobody can deny.*

The acclamation which followed was taken up beyond the door of the supper-room by many of the other guests and renewed time after time, Freddy Malins acting as officer with his fork on high.

The piercing morning air came into the hall where they were standing so that Aunt Kate said:

“Close the door, somebody. Mrs. Malins will get her death of cold.”

“Browne is out there, Aunt Kate,” said Mary Jane.

“Browne is everywhere,” said Aunt Kate, lowering her voice.

Mary Jane laughed at her tone.

“Really,” she said archly, “he is very attentive.”

“He has been laid on here like the gas,” said Aunt Kate in the same tone, “all during the Christmas.”

She laughed herself this time good-humoredly and then added quickly:

“But tell him to come in, Mary Jane, and close the door. I hope to goodness he didn’t hear me.”

At that moment the hall-door was opened and Mr. Browne came in from the doorstep, laughing as if his heart would break. He was dressed in a long green overcoat with mock astrakhan cuffs and collar and wore on his head an oval fur cap. He pointed down the snow-covered quay from where the sound of shrill prolonged whistling was borne in.

“Teddy will have all the cabs in Dublin out,” he said.

Gabriel advanced from the little pantry behind the office, struggling into his overcoat and,

looking round the hall, said,

“Gretta not down yet?”

“She’s getting on her things, Gabriel,” said Aunt Kate.

“Who’s playing up there?” asked Gabriel.

“Nobody. They’re all gone.”

“O no, Aunt Kate,” said Mary Jane. “Bartell D’Arcy and Miss O’Callaghan aren’t gone yet.”

“Someone is fooling at the piano anyhow,” said Gabriel.

Mary Jane glanced at Gabriel and Mr. Browne and said with a shiver:

“It makes me feel cold to look at you two gentlemen muffled up like that. I wouldn’t like to face your journey home at this hour.”

“I’d like nothing better this minute,” said Mr. Browne stoutly, “than a rattling fine walk in the country or a fast drive with a good spanking goer between the shafts.”

“We used to have a very good horse and trap at home,” said Aunt Julia, sadly.

“The never-to-be-forgotten Johnny,” said Mary Jane, laughing.

Aunt Kate and Gabriel laughed too.

“Why, what was wonderful about Johnny?” asked Mr. Browne.

“The late lamented Patrick Morkan, our grandfather, that is,” explained Gabriel, “commonly known in his later years as the old gentleman, was a glue-boiler.”

“O, now, Gabriel,” said Aunt Kate, laughing, “he had a starch mill.”

“Well, glue or starch,” said Gabriel, “the old gentleman had a horse by the name of Johnny. And Johnny used to work in the old gentleman’s mill, walking round and round in order to drive the mill. That was all very well; but now comes the tragic part about Johnny. One fine day the old gentleman thought he’d like to drive out with the quality to a military review in the park.”

“The Lord have mercy on his soul,” said Aunt Kate, compassionately.

“Amen,” said Gabriel. “So the old gentleman, as I said, harnessed Johnny and put on his very best tall hat and his very best stock collar and drove out in grand style from his ancestral mansion somewhere near Back Lane, I think.”

Everyone laughed, even Mrs. Malins, at Gabriel’s manner, and Aunt Kate said:

“O, now, Gabriel, he didn’t live in Back Lane, really. Only the mill was there.”

“Out from the mansion of his forefathers,” continued Gabriel, “he drove with Johnny. And everything went on beautifully until Johnny came in sight of King Billy’s statue: and whether he fell in love with the horse King Billy sits on or whether he thought he was back again in the mill, anyway he began to walk round the statue.”

Gabriel paced in a circle round the hall in his galoshes amid the laughter of the others.

“Round and round he went,” said Gabriel, “and the old gentleman, who was a very pompous old gentleman, was highly indignant. ‘Go on, sir! What do you mean, sir? Johnny! Johnny! Most extraordinary conduct! Can’t understand the horse!’”

The peals of laughter which followed Gabriel’s imitation of the incident were interrupted by a resounding knock at the hall-door. Mary Jane ran to open it and let in Freddy Malins. Freddy Malins, with his hat well back on his head and his shoulders humped with cold, was puffing and steaming after his exertions.

“I could only get one cab,” he said.

“O, we’ll find another along the quay,” said Gabriel.

“Yes,” said Aunt Kate. “Better not keep Mrs. Malins standing in the draught.”

Mrs. Malins was helped down the front steps by her son and Mr. Browne and, after many maneuvers, hoisted into the cab. Freddy Malins clambered in after her and spent a long time settling her on the seat, Mr. Browne helping him with advice. At last she was settled comfortably and Freddy Malins invited Mr. Browne into the cab. There was a good deal of confused talk, and then Mr. Browne got into the cab. The cabman settled his rug over his knees, and bent down for the address. The

confusion grew greater and the cabman was directed differently by Freddy Malins and Mr. Browne, each of whom had his head out through a window of the cab. The difficulty was to know where to drop Mr. Browne along the route, and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia, and Mary Jane helped the discussion from the doorstep with cross-directions and contradictions and abundance of laughter. As for Freddy Malins he was speechless with laughter. He popped his head in and out of the window every moment to the great danger of his hat, and told his mother how the discussion was progressing, till at last Mr. Browne shouted to the bewildered cabman above the din of everybody's laughter:

"Do you know Trinity College?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabman.

"Well, drive bang up against Trinity College gates," said Mr. Browne, "and then we'll tell you where to go. You understand now?"

"Yes, sir," said the cabman.

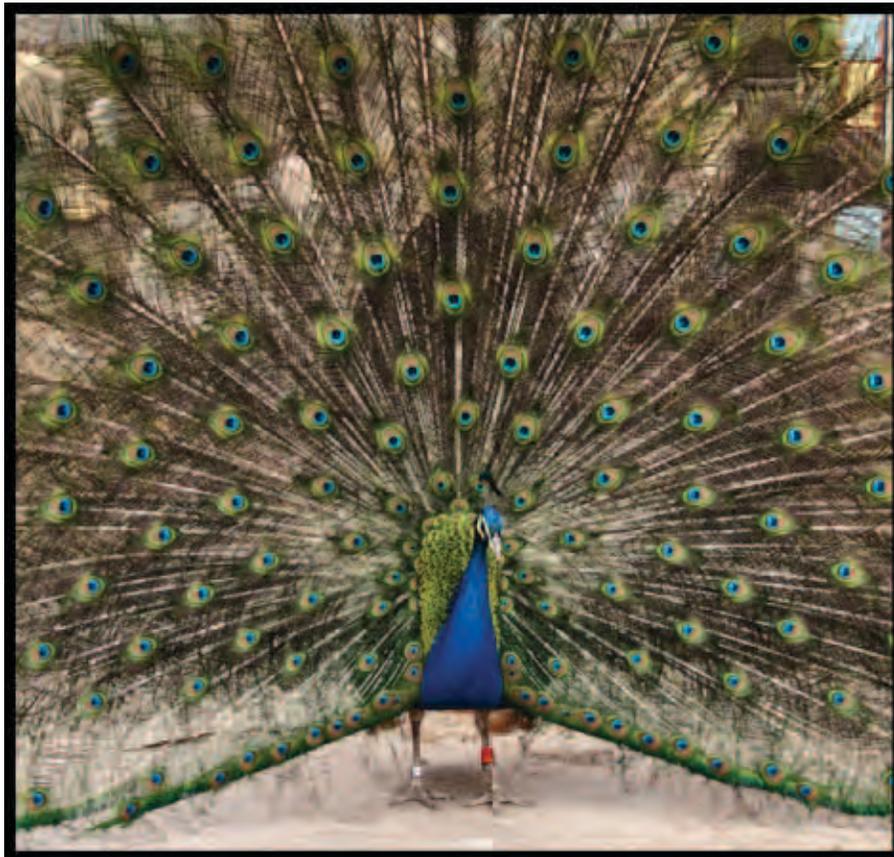
"Make like a bird for Trinity College."

"Right, sir," said the cabman.

The horse was whipped up and the cab rattled off along the quay amid a chorus of laughter and adieux.

To be continued in Cenacle | 116 | June 2021

* * * * *





Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]



iii.

I nod to Asoyadonna smiling & she chooses the left path past the Fountain. The Gate's walls of vines & stones are very high, telling nothing beyond them. The turns themselves are not always at right angles, so soon we are beyond knowing whence we've come.

Which is OK, since ahead somewhere is the Cave of the Beast, & that's where we're surely bound.

Asoyadonna grows quieter as we walk along. "You're right. We were all struggling last time we were here. It's like . . . this wasn't what we expected. What we traveled all those years to find. It didn't feel like victory."

"What did it feel like?"

She shakes her head uncertainly.

I stop. Look at her. "Think."

She sits down, leaning against the wall of vines & stones, head down, studying soft gold-tinged ground.

"We thought we would make it here & the way would be clear & simple once we made it. It wasn't. It was as strange & complex & uncertain as all the years getting here."

She looks at me straight, me now kneeled near her. "Saving the world happens ever after the choice. We didn't get this. Maybe we all do now."

I nod. "So it began here, then, rather than concluded here?" Neither of us need reply to this.

Now's my turn to come clean. "I wrote a version of your story. Your quest for the Island & the Tangled Gate all those years. "



She nods like knowing.

“What I wrote was based in part on very old myths of an Island Kingdom, a King, a Princess, a Labyrinth, a Beast.”

Nods me on.

I think, marveling to walk this utterly strange place, & to speak of it as I am, & to write this down as I speak.

“I never considered what happened to all of you. I simply knew you scattered, & the King long later returned to the Island. And then left again to war with the Mainland.”

Silence. But listening.

“I don’t know what we will find or learn in the Cave of the Beast.”

“Are we close?”

“I think so.”

“Need we weapons?”

“Those failed last time, didn’t they?”

“I suppose so.”

“We need to enter straight & true, humble & wondering.”

“The Beast will converse with us as we are able.”

“That was true last time. We proved very little able.”

“Just think of finding your brothers & serving the world.”

“Serving?”

“Less pressure? More likely?”

“I guess so.”

I nod & we come round a bend in our path to behold the Cave of the Beast.

“Like McKenna said, ‘don’t give way to astonishment.’”

“Who is McKenna?”

I enter the Cave first. Nothing ever what it seems here, or like any other time for guide. My bookbag slung firmly on my shoulder, Asoya Donna’s warm hand following me.

Always darker from outside than upon entering.

Her hand gone. I clutch my bookbag against any such taking. The glare unbalances me so I let myself clumsily find the ground beneath me. Warm earth.

Close my eyes tight. Begin to *hmmm* friendly despite this strange greeting. *Hmmm* deeper, friendlier & let go the rest of my senses as much as possible.

Something about me calms a little, lets a little.

A voice now, like a low strange tickle under my mind.

“Why do you do this? Devote yourself to this work like deepest obsession?”

“It’s what I do.”

“It’s not necessary.”

“It is to me.”

“*It’s not necessary.*”

“That’s what the Mushrooms say to me. Same answer to you. *It’s necessary to me.*”

Silence. I don’t open my eyes yet, or try my other senses, but I do stand up clumsy as I sat. And *hmming* again. Begin to walk, the hintest of a draft from further in.

Then I stop.

“Will you help me?”

“Help you?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“Nudge me when I stray. When I start to lose the thread some.”

“You permit me this relation?”

“I ask it, humbly. I want to write better now & hereafter better than I have. *More obsessively.*”

Nearly a laugh. Then silence. Enough of a yes to go by. But then suddenly:

“What happened to them all did not happen here. Continue along. Throw your dice & coins.

Keep that bookbag close.”

Now done. Whatever was, the Cave is murky & now seeming empty. I follow the draft toward the back. She’s ahead of me.

I sling my bookbag more securely on my shoulder & find myself in a dark tunnel, nearly dark for I can see something faint ahead, but I move slowly nonetheless.

“Donna?” I call out, quietly for some reason. No answer. Hm. Keep moving along.

Wondering how I can help really. Thinking more that I should bring Asoya Donna to those more knowing & powerful than me.

“Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle,” I say softly in the now velvety darkness. “I think I have in my bookbag something that will help us!”

“Donna!” I call again.

The Beast told me what happened to the Brothers did not happen in his cave. And I should toss my coins & dice.

I need then some more light, & a place to lay out my notebooks & tokens.

More light up ahead. I hurry despite.

Come out to what I am sure is the Great Cavern oft told in this book & related works—

I sort of find a corner among taller & craggier rocks, secrete into it, & pull off my bookbag.

This book of course. Poetry notebooks. *Bags End News* notebooks. A notebook of *Dream Raps*.

Yes, yes, but where?—ah—I unzip a sort of half-hid pocket & there are many little colored Secret Books! Pull them all out, over a dozen, wonder how deep this pocket can go—then look up & around

me & forget to wonder more—

Read how, on the Beach of Many Worlds below, Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle heard the story of Francisco the painter, one of Asoya Donna's beloved & long-lost Brothers, & how he traveled with a friend who posed as a White Birch for him to render on canvas, a very particular one he could not otherwise find, & how Francisco believed that this painting, once completed, would help the Brothers reunite.

Look up from my reading & there Asoya Donna smiling at me.

I read up to her as follows: “The Islander wanted to help so much & then, one night, they clustered & dreamed in a clearing; & the Islander encountered Benny Big Dreams who helped him become a White Birch in Dreamland, & then in waking; making sure he knew that, to turn back, he should shake all of his 6 branches at once—

“But the painting took awhile to do, & the Islander so enjoyed being a Tree, he forgot how to undo; done with the painting, Francisco wanted to show his Islander friend, & travel on, use the painting to find his Brothers; but no luck of this—

“Francisco had to help his friend first, so he traveled to find an answer; slept one night in a clearing under full moon—

“In Dreamland, Francisco came to a Village he had known before, & its Ancienne Coffeehouse; walks in & through its back to the White Woods—

“Distant whooshing, seemed of the Sea? Came out of the Woods at the top of what looked like these ancient wide stone steps afore a beautiful Sea; & down there on the beach rested peacefully what looked like a beautiful old Sea Turtle!

“Francisco made his way down the stone steps, slowly, uncertain, & came up to the Sea Turtle, larger than him & then some—

“He was dozing peaceful but waked to Francisco's approach; told of his friend the Islander—now tree—showed the painting he had slung on his back, which the Sea Turtle admired—

“Francisco wearied & sort of tucked into the Sea Turtle's flippers' grasp, & they drowse to the *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh* of the Sea—

“The Sea Turtle waked him to find the Tree Islander is right near by! Near a small hut which had rocking chairs on its porch—

“Go find your brothers, Painter, & return to find your friend after; I will tell you where if he goes—

“Francisco hugged the Sea Turtle, & the trunk of his friend, & hurried back up the Stone Steps—”

“To where?” she asks, nearly tangled with me eager wondering.

I double check, paging back & forth in the Secret Book. “No. Nothing more.”

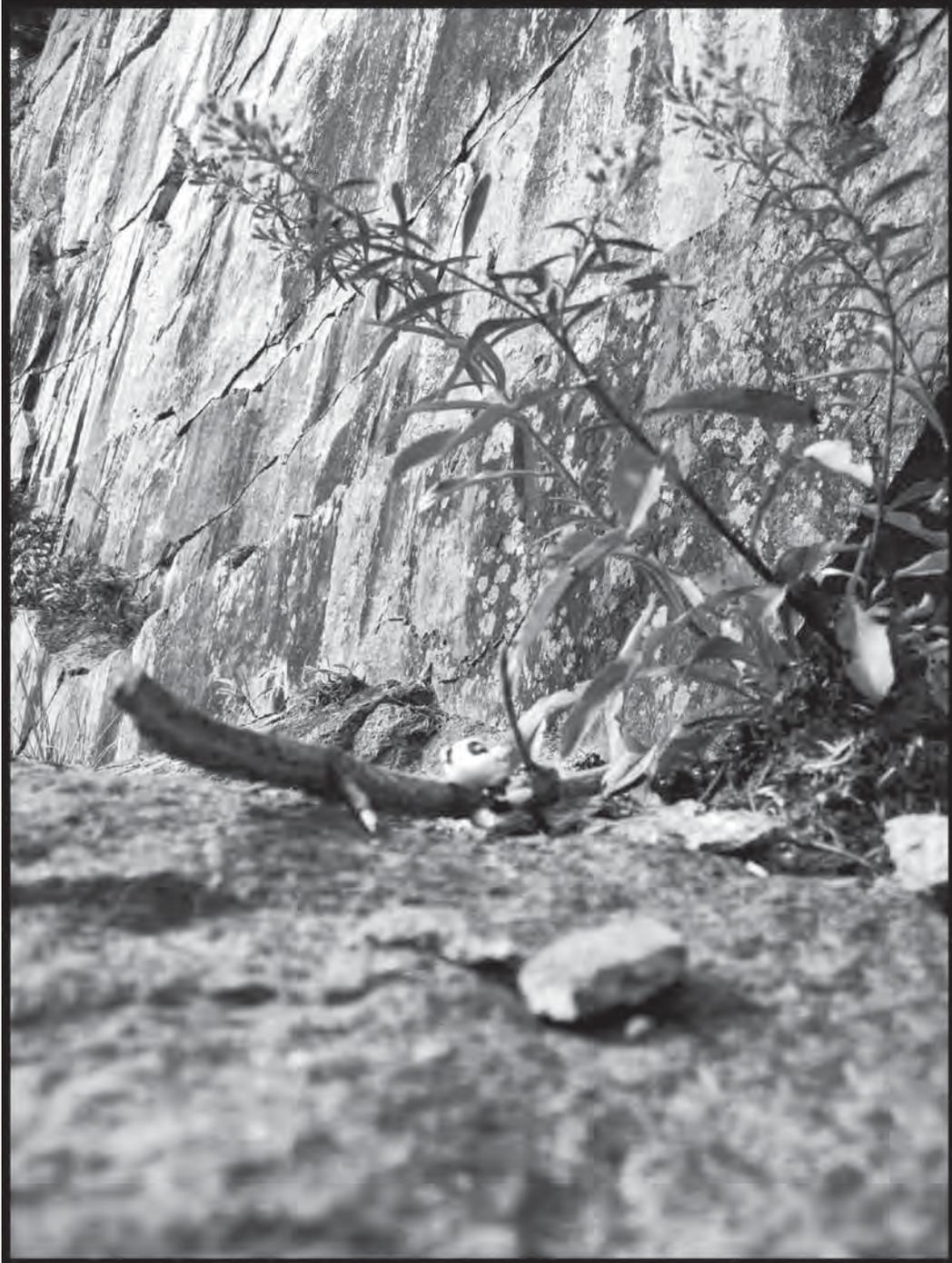
“Should we go to that Beach?” she asks, now sat with me among the rocks.

I page back & forth. “It's a Beach of Many Worlds, located by the shore of the Deeper Deeper Sea, below the Deep Deep Sea.”

“Can we get there by the Village like Francisco did?”

“Would your Aunt be able to help us?”

“She smiles. “I haven't seen her in a long time.”



Now I get down to work. Pull out many notebooks from my bookbag, seems an impossible number, yet all in good shape.

Asoya Donna sort of arrays them around me. Now my blue-green coin purse. Its coins & dice & various trinkets. Two little clocks. A very small radio.

“We’ll let all this guide us.”

She nods.

“Not every book operates like this,” I smile bashfully.

“This one does,” she smiles plainly.

I nod.

Toss coin & dice, slowly shaping what will guide, effect, nudge, from past lines. Toward new coming.

Calculate by numbers & coin sides & flipping pages, make my notes in the margins of this book, mutter noises as I figure.

Then I nod. Smile. Stand. Get all my notebooks put away in my bookbag, again marveling at how many pockets, & how they all slip in smoothly, big & small.

Smile at Asoya Donna who’s now standing again too. Looking question at me.

I close my eyes & count down. “6 . . . 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . 1!” & there is somewhere ahead of us a wild cackle. Strangely, not in the big open center part of the Great Cavern, but off to one side, leading us to stay half hidden in the rocky perimeter. Soon, a half-blocked tunnel, & we pick our way through its entrance slowly, crawl & climb & shove, till through the blockage, the air chilly & moving as we stand & start right in to chase—

Tis an Imp we pursue, of course, & I am certain she will lead us without our catching her, or perhaps even getting much sight of her—

The tunnel’s breeze blows harder & colder. Her occasional gleeful cackles sort of shimmer back to us, echoes playing with echoes. Still we follow steadily—

Till strangely come out to the open world again. Nighttime. Full moon over all & far dusting of stars—

Tis a desert. Flat, cracked, reaching far ahead of us—the Imp’s cackles distant, then more rarely, yet do not seem to diminish further—has she stopped somewhere—

We hurry to catch her & I notice that this is no usual kind of walking—more a swift sliding along—not Imp skittering speed but we still get there dreaming fast—

Where—tis the ancient shack of the small exotic man with few teeth to impede his wild bray of laughter with his dear old Imp friend—

Setting upon his krinkly brown hand, cackling back & forth with him—gnattering hi & low—like the whole world is laughing madly together—maybe wish it was—

The little man is curled around a strange stool, almost like a vine wrapped around a treebranch, strange

brown cap upon his bald pate—

Asoyadonna & I sit together with our backs against the shack—itsself being more a living cave of a structure than not—

I slip out this book & check my notes—“I think we’re bound for Wytner,” I say, somewhat sure—

She nods. Smiles at the Imp & ancient man’s delights.

“Is the Village Wytner?” I ask.

She starts, stares me. “It could be.”

I nod. Sometimes that’s the best answer possible.

“But maybe not always,” she continues.

I nod again.

Finally the cackling & braying have sort of wound down. The two sort of remember us & want to tend our plans.

“We need to see my Aunt,” Asoya Donna explains.

More cackles & brays, but still paying attention.

She stands. I stand. We wait to see what next.

The exotic little man, Imp still & again on his gnarled little palm, begin to point in a certain direction. Seems no more likely than any other, but their gnattering tunes up & gestures that-a-way. The exotic little man does some kind of dance, graceful & beguiling, near like a strange tree wavering in its own wind, the fruit of one Imp upon its furthest branch—on & on & on—

“Look!” Asoya Donna points to the cracked desert floor. I see nothing more than this but she urges me *relax, relax, look*—

Cracks . . . cracks . . . then not so much, now . . . um . . . symbols . . . of some kind!

Stretching far away . . . in the direction they were gnattering & dancing & pointing to . . . far away beyond sight . . .

Asoya Donna is dancing too, her own kind of graceful tree in her own kind of breeze—

I join in, clumsy at first, but find my Phishy groove & *yes, they are there* . . . I could stop dancing now but choose not to . . . this is a better way to get there . . . *far* better . . .

We move in that direction, following the flickering but sure symbols along, waving briefly back at our strange & lovely little friends . . . they gnatter & bray & cackle & dance their well wishes . . .

“This feels more” I say quietly, mostly to myself.

Asoya Donna turns to me, with a brilliant, beautiful, smiling nod—

We dance on—

I get to wondering what it would be like to unite Asoya Donna & her brothers, & what they might do if united—

“We’d travel together again,” she says suddenly, “like all those turns back when.”

“Doing what?”

“What we did together. We did good. We solved trouble. Helped out in crisis. We showed what was possible.”

“Would it work?”

“Of course it would.”

“What if it was a kind of great crisis again?”

She stops fully. “What do you have in mind?”

I shrug.

“Tell me.”

“You could travel to the Heart of the World.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure.”

She nods. Starts walking again, quiet.

“I think it would somehow complement what happened before.”

She nods again.

“But you’d not let yourselves become separated again. You’d know it could happen.”

Stops again. “We failed. We were separated. Yet somehow the world went on. What sense in all that?”

I gaze her humbly. “I don’t know yet.”

We walk on, hands lightly twined, approaching the Village, Wytner, one or both—

“Did you find anything else in all those notebooks to help us?”

“Lotta sweat. Sadness. Uncertainty.”

Nods.

I close my eyes, hoping this blends well into our travel. “I wrote something like, ‘I most want to write elaborate plots that travel everywhere & criss-cross & play out strange & true.’”

We both laugh.

“And, ‘a book should live by its mystery.’” Nods.

I leave trying to find, & just now *hmming*, long & low & deep, lift up & into it now, deep breath, another, third, then let breathing go too—

Thump. I feel suddenly caught like a baseball squarely, solidly, in a leather glove.

Open eyes. Um. Er.

Blink thrice. I'm in an old deep armchair. The room is wooden. Dim lit by many fat little candles. Look up, tis a ceiling of stars.

"Clover-d—?" I start to say.

"Pensionne!" interrupts Asoya Donna, in that doorway. And draped over her is her . . . Aunt?

I stand up, unsteadily somehow, & begin to walk over to them—but hear a noise above me, look up at the ceiling of stars, marvel weirdly at how noisy they are—& seem to pass right out—

Seem now to be floating on up & among those strange noisy stars, now many kinds of colors too, & singing? I float & try to listen.

*# Many strange things in
the many strange worlds!
" Many ask: what music to share tonight?
Which colors to eat? Voices to dance?
Memories to burn?
Mysteries to hmmmmmmmm
hmmmmmmmm"*

& seemed to go on & on & on forever till I felt my self now falling away, losing my float—

& coming awake to Asoya Donna & Aunt both by my bedside, whatever bedside this was, & their pretty voices paired in *hmmming* to me—

I smile at them but then hear a voice further away.

"Project Daedalus. Time to play! Green & golden eyes. Build. Repair. Map. James Starsden."

A man sort of slumped into himself in a wheelchair. A kind of Velcro-flapped knapsack hanging off his chair.

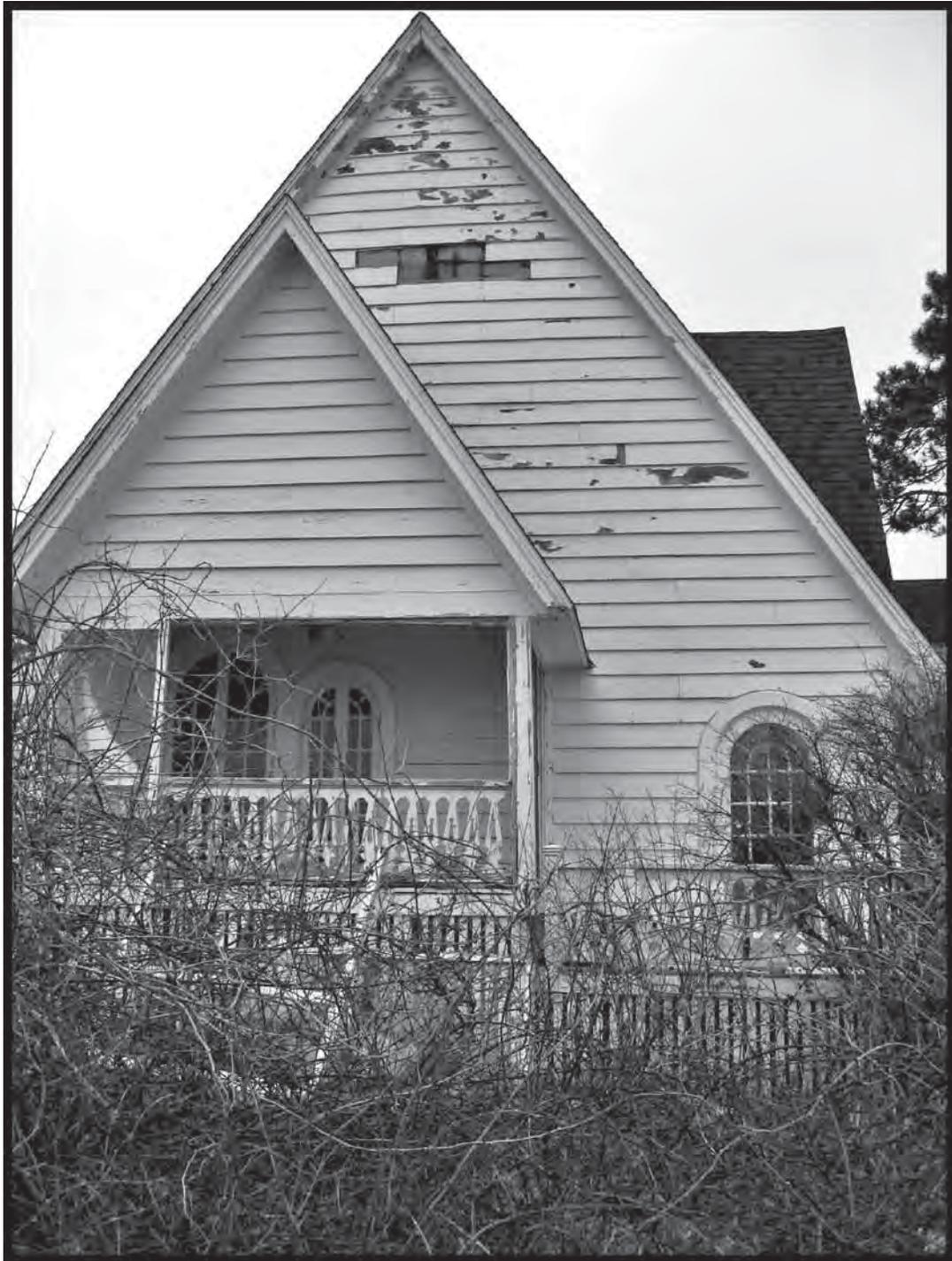
"Who are—"

"It's us, Raymond. Asoyadonna & Aunt," she says, smiling, affectionate, concerned.

"Come to a hill, a kind of hillside village, maybe Thought Fleas?"

"Village?" I clumsy try to sit up & do poorly.

Now Aunt speaks, as she leans forward to tuck my several blankets around me. One crimson, one electric blue, one brown of many Bears. Of course. "It's safe here in the Village. You're in the Pensionne, of course."



The man mumbles again into his curled form. “Gate-Keeper said must go down deeper! Follow the Thread!”

“He told me that! ‘Follow the thread!’ I wrote it in *Labyrinthine!* Where is my bookbag?” I cry.

Both women look back to where I gesture, but seem to see nothing. I am scaring them so ease up for now. Lay back & feign great exhaustion. They mumble to each other that I need rest, tuck me in again, somewhat unnecessarily, & blow out all but one candle. Depart.

Even in the flickering shadows of a single fat little candle, I know he remains.

Quiet a long stretch. I must outwait him because he says more directly to me, “You said to nudge you when you stray. Or lose the thread some.”

“Have I? Am I?”

“The world is your gift.”

“And Art is my answer.”

“You wrote that a long time ago.”

“I know.”

“You think it helps to remember as you have been compelling yourself to do? Write endless notes?”

“I don’t know. Yes. Maybe.”

“Your work is now. Your work is ahead.”

“I know.”

“We make Art because we have forgotten how to tell the truth.”

“I wrote that long ago too.”

Silence.

“What then?”

“Time is not singular.

Time is not linear.

Time is not primary.”

“Yes. OK. *That too.*”

“You know the way ahead without these crutches of old words.”

“I like those words. They remind me of my path from & to.”

Silence.

“You’ll come again if you need to.”

“Is your pen moving across paper? Black ink, white paper?”

I nod.

“The more it does, the less reminder you’ll need. *Your pen & paper is your thread.*”

Candle flickers out. He’s gone.

I don’t move to get up. Very quiet here. I feel the Bears *hmming* very softly to me, a kind of lullaby to comfort me.

Time is not singular
 Time is not thean
 Time is not primary

Those words spoken many turns ago by Daniel the Famous Traveler. I consider him a moment. He I mostly tell about in the Travelers or Creatures Tales. Will he appear in this book again too, as part of this current story?

I don't think so. But I guess never can tell either. I hope my bookbag is nearby.

Lingering still, not fully awake now, but not loosed to dreaming either. Feeling like I do not wish to leave this peaceful darkened chamber till I've got something to go by.

Thinking lingers on Daniel the Famous Traveler, on his current explorations, with many others, of the many Braided Paths, braiding among the many worlds, & I remember something about this, something I often remember & forget both—

There is an indigo trace—
 through the Dreaming—
 a way to travel purposefully—

Is this a kind of shortcut? If one travels the many Braided Paths through the many Braided Worlds by waking, is the indigo trace by Dreaming a shortcut from one place to another?

I don't know. It does not seem possible to harness all these strange ways at once, or maybe even advisable.

I'm strangely reminded of how there are different flavors one cannot enjoy simultaneously.

Chocolate is this. Cheese soup is that.

Or try to watch a favorite movie while blasting your favorite song on the radio.

Kissing & reading.

“Remembering everything but lightly,” he says, back again to nudge me some more it seems.
 “No, you did write that, but it's good advice for you now, not a nudge,” his smirk clear in the darkness.

“Any more of my nuggets to hurl upon me?”
 “The way is dis-illusion?”—now we're both laughing. He leaves through the door this time, though, I'm fairly certain, still unseen.

I allow myself to drift awhile, finding myself sitting in a beautiful park bordered by trees so tall they disappear into the clear blue sky above, still sort of curled among my lovely blankets, my bookbag with me, many notebooks brung out & arrayed around me—many sleeping men arranged around this park, on benches like works of art—blue-tinted seashells, mahogany cabinets with glowing cushions, even a

bench like a foamy shore wrapped cozily around its grubby guest—

I hear strange voices in the distance, gather blankets & notebooks in my bookbag & make to follow, strangely curious—

Among the trees I follow no path but my intense hark, feeling myself making along swifter than steps—

Seeming now along an ocean's shore, running & running, urgent, desperate?

On the water I see strange white bubbles, gigantic, bobbing along, menacing & somehow familiar—continue my hurried lope toward the voices, strangely no nearer, yet now indeed approaching what seems a seaside town, set up in the nearby hills—

I walk, float, up the hills, past people dressed in the formal Sunday wear of Victorian England—hats, scarves, umbrellas, jackets, & the like—

People nod to me, greet smiling as they pass—I come to a great green-domed building with long wide steps up, like a town hall?

Enter, compelled, but sort of falling as I'm walking, kind of disappearing while arriving, is it a party? Is it a surgery?

Swish & swirl as I push open a great grey door & feel thunder all around me—tumble through & through & through—

Caught in the large, soft flipper of yes surely so Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle, who catches me sure & holds me close, till I notice another friend in his tender grasp—

A fine friendly freckled froggily frocked fellow named Aloishuis Nilliwishus—Willy Nilly, of Creature Common.



To be continued in Cenacle | 116 | June 2021

* * * * *

*WITHIN'S WITHIN:
SCENES FROM THE
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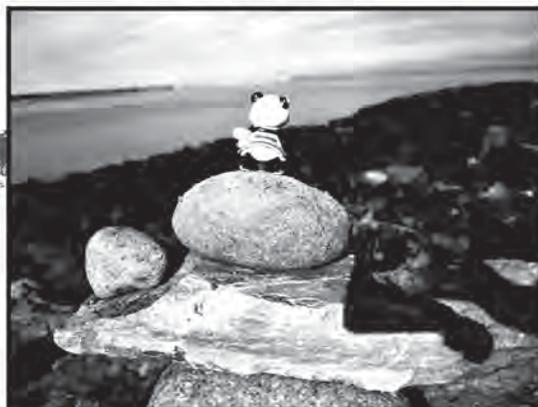
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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 114 | December 2020. Working on re-opening his art studio, walking back through some old doors, see how it feels. 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: “Heading for the hills, the song of the wolf, the cry of the eagle, the babble of the brook. These are my conversations.” *Dive deep, Charlie!* More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His fiction & poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. In comparing notes on critters that come into our respective back yards, he observes: “I’ve got a buck that comes up in the yard and just stares at me until I toss him a stale hot dog bun.” His new book of poetry, *Escape Envy*, will be published in May 2021 by Brick Road Poetry Press.

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*.

Leia Friedman is a writer, clinician, & professor living in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her work last appeared in *Cenacle* | 111 | April 2020. Her present focus in psychology involves the teachings of meditation, yoga, ecology, and the use of psychedelics to assist psychotherapy for clinical disorders. She is also the host of the “consciousness positive” radio show, *The Psychedologist* (thepsychedologist.com).

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Got her COVID-19 vaccine, & now finding her way back into teaching live in classrooms. Lucky students! Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless>. She also hosts the excellent radio show of the same name on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows#DJJudih>).

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Jimmy’s new book, *Tunnels Through Time: Poems and Observations*, will be published in May 2021 by BookBaby, & is excerpted in this issue.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Baltimore, Maryland. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. Book 2 of his published quadrilogy of *Nighttime Daydreams* (*Bat Dreams*) was published in 2019. Book 3 will be out in 2021. He also hosts the excellent radio show “Nighttime Daydreams” on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows#DJToanke>).

Ekponoimo Iphyok lives in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. His photographs last appeared in *Cenacle* | 114 | December 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*. Thinks my Dallas Cowboys will be selecting a defensive player as their first pick in the 2021 NFL draft. I hope so! His most recent book of poetry, *The Paralytically Obscure As Beauty Crescendo*, was published in December 2020 by The Book Patch.

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>.

Sam Knot lives in rural France. His poetry & artwork both appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His terrific poetry radio show, "The Metaphoreal," is a new gem on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows#DJSamKnot>). Visit samknot.com for more of his work.

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 (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com/shows#DJTamara>). Her paintings in this issue's pages are a new treat, a talent the pandemic has caused her to explore. *Lovely!*

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 in 2020 by Deerbrook Editions. It is my delight that she will be joining Kassi, Nathan, Tamara, & me for the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting this time! More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinaneberry.wordpress.com>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry & prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book, *The Grand Royal Stand-off and Other Stories*, was published by Pocol Press in 2019. Many nights, far along, I can hear his keyboard tapping away, all these miles south of him.

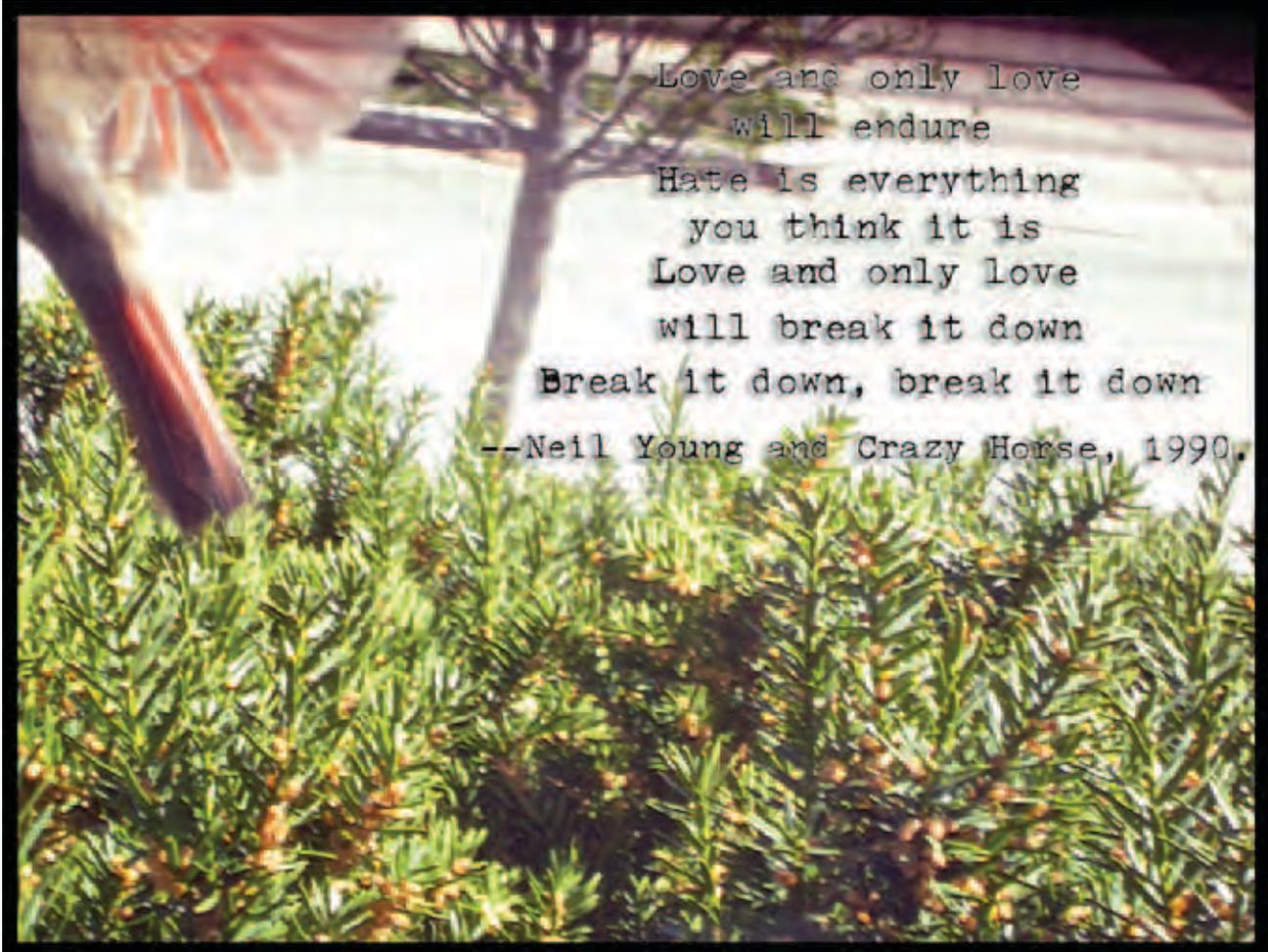
Kassandra Soulard lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. She & I got our COVID-19 vaccines, first of two, not long ago at a restaurant in ZombieTown that she knows by work holiday celebrations, & I long ago knew in passing along Carnal Street to my hovel, dancing & tripping 2AM Saturday nights, "The Grateful Dead Hour" on my Walkman!

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. 26 years of editing this journal, & its doing never fails to fascinate me down deep!

Timothy Vilgiate lives in Austin, Texas. His *Rivers of the Mind [A Novel]* is regularly serialized in this journal. Back in school, figuring out his new environs, mad genius fires in him for new ideas & projects. The radio version of *Rivers of the Mind*, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at: <https://riversofthemind.libsyn.com>.

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Love and only love
will endure

Hate is everything
you think it is

Love and only love
will break it down

Break it down, break it down

--Neil Young and Crazy Horse, 1990.

