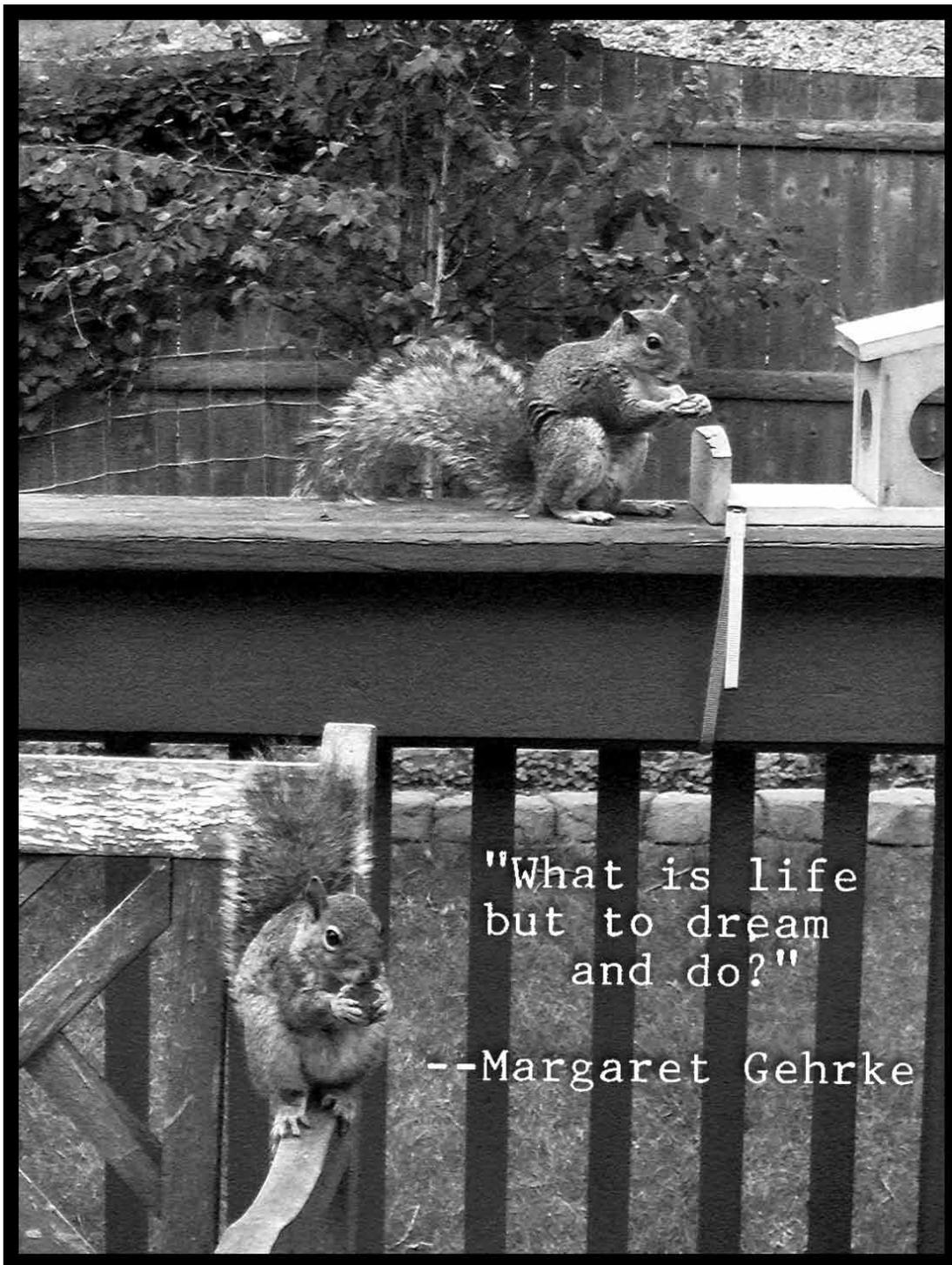


Number 116 | June 2021



"What is life
but to dream
and do?"

--Margaret Gehrke

June 30~~2021~~
10:42 p.m.
Bungalow Ge-bed
Milkrose, WA.

— It's been well over a year since most of us have travelled our local & distant places & spaces like we always had. Be that mundane as the nearest grocery store, pharmacy, or post office, or the wonderful, rarer times at favorite museum, movie theaters, parks, & the like. Been a long time.

But with the miraculous advent of COVID-19 vaccines, the pandemic is ending. Not over, but getting there. Masks are starting to come off after so long an urgent necessity. It's becoming safer again for us to walk amongst our fellow humans. Share air. Sit close with each other again.

Still, there is a slowness to this return. A hesitancy, skepticism, disbelief. Is it really OK to return to the world? This question lingers, &



it matters.

It's a somewhat unfamiliar world for me. Donald Trump no longer holds anything over it. As much as any other factor, it was the pandemic that swept him from power. When faced with a global crisis, one involving humility and an open mind to try & understand, he showed for all to see the cowardly, brutish, ignorant thing he is. He failed the world at doing his job, & was fired for this failure. Pretty much simple as that.

But on a more immediate level, closer to home, one can find businesses that are shuttered. Millions lost their jobs, savings. Nearly four million people in this world lost their lives. These losses are staggering for an event that came upon us just early last year. No Nazis to blame. No natural catastrophe we could not have stopped. Whatever COVID-19's true origins, somehow people were involved in the catastrophic failure to stop it. Many of us as individuals tried to do the right things, but we as a race failed.

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And we bring with us this sense of failure back into the world, as we make the tentative moves outward from our homes. Can something this bad happen again? Will we do as shitty a job of dealing with it?

Nobody knows, & nobody knows. It was a miracle more people did not die, by the heroicism of our doctors & nurses & other public servants. It was a miracle that our scientists came up with vaccines less than a year from when the pandemic broke.

And a year from now, even sooner, most of us will be back to some newer version of what we were doing so blithely back in early 2020. I can't wait to be back again at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, at the Metropolis, many fine movie theaters, book stores, & parks. Even riding its crazy public transit again to these places.

But if you feel like I do that the grief & trauma & fear of the past year will take more than simple return to the physical world to process, you're

-37-

right. Nothing can predict that process.

And if like me you worry that the frequent cry to "return to normal" is deep-baked with denial for all that has happened, you're right too.

The "normal" of early 2000 found us unbearably ill-prepared for the events to come, & how they compounded wildly throughout the year. Why would we want to return to such a state of things?

The point of experience, especially the hard, painful kind, is that one is tested, & learns by failures & successes how to survive it, & how to do better next time.

Whether it is another global sickness, or climate change, or aliens from the stars, or the ever lure of some of fast-talking would-be autocrats, will we do better next time? How? Maybe a miracle drug delivered in miracle time will not provide the same answer.

So, please, one & all, bring your satchel of worry & skepticism back into the world, not because

-38-

you do not want to enjoy all the old familiar places, those still around, but because you do not want them taken away again.

You do not want millions to die needlessly for the next stupid, preventable reason.

You want to believe we can learn from experience. We can do better next crisis come.

I want to believe this too. I want my museums & bookstores & movie theaters & coffee houses & parks & crappy transit back. I just do not want to forget.

Somewhere between not forgetting & not living on well as possible is a sweet spot to try & dwell. As moving, as kinetic as the world, but still findable.

If you've gotten your vaccine, rejoice, be grateful, & return to the world. It's still there, it waits, & it's as wonderful as ever!

☺ & ♥ ☺ 6/30/2021

The Cenacle

Number 116 | June 2021

Edited by Raymond Souland, Jr. ©

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Souland

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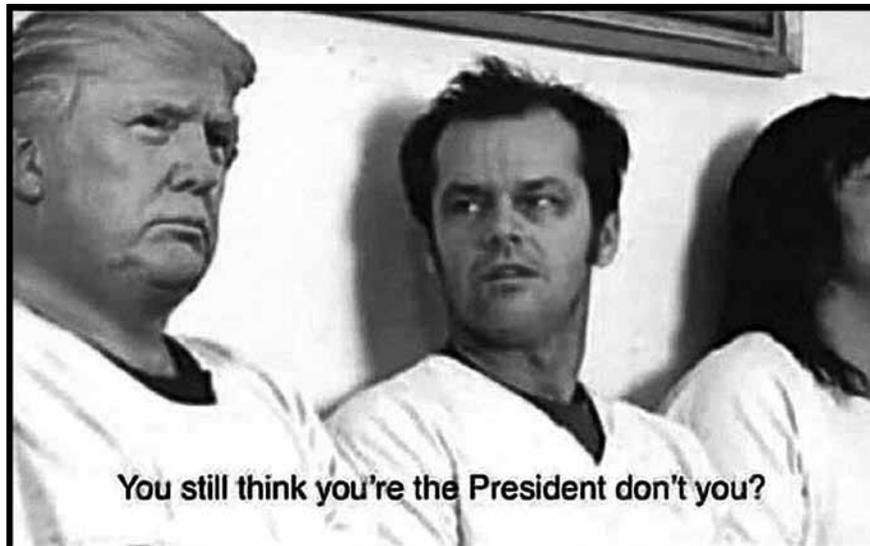
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As the US approaches 70% of its population being vaccinated for COVID-19, a deep & heartfelt thanks must be given to President Joe Biden & his administration for helping to turn a national disaster around. The work is not yet done, but so much progress has been made in so little time!



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2021

Feedback on Cenacle 115 | April 2021

From Ace Boggess:

Wow, Tamara Miles does it again. Her poems are bright spots on a dreary day. “Morning Ritual,” especially, is bright with rhythm and passion while capturing the seemingly simple art of making tea. Her poem turns this common experience into something as beautiful and precise as the traditional tea ceremony. One must read this poem many times in search of the subtleties.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

I’ve learned that when I need to escape, I need only go with Raymond Souldard, Jr. through the Tangled Gate in his *Notes from New England | Dream Raps* landscape, where “a lavender trace of something” and “the softest whisper of strange music” will bid me follow. I get on the strange spaceship, “green in its heart and multicolored everywhere,” and I am free for a while. “Everything before the spaceship is ancient history, mythopoeia, rumor, wish.”

Meanwhile, here on Earth, the ice is melting, and Tom Sheehan tell us how it starts out in his poem “The Day the Ice Starts Out”—the shattering, startling, shift, and then continual, slow movement in “moments of illusion and evasion.” This is also how social change happens, I think: a crack that can’t be quieted, a slow, repeated striving—

or Judih Haggai’s ginger cat, howling; parakeet and crow squawking in conversation; carob pods rustling, stirring something up. We are, everything is, riveting with life: “What news today?”—“May we breathe in peace”—“Dear ancestors / it’s all led up to this”—

yes, and here I am always longing to talk to my ancestors, but I guess they are right there beyond the Tangled Gate, murmuring and crackling through ice, crying the blues in a cat. Yes, they are a lavender trace of something, a strange music, a something in the sky in Timothy Vilgiate’s marvelous *Rivers of the Mind* painting, where the

cows wait and look expectantly at the mystery with us. Aren’t we holding hands in *The Cenacle*, all of us?

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

Sam Knot’s “(((the neap of hello)))” works as an unvocalized spoken-word piece. The voice can take a backseat while the mind provides the sounds: “these words are a mirroring of / the otherwise unreflective / nature of a creature / who has no creator.” Gentle flow of philosophy and cadence. I love the line: “every creation is a collaboration.”

I’d like to mention also Martina Newberry’s poem “Yellowstone Erupting,” but after reading it three or four times, I continue to get sucked into a depression each time. It’s that 3 a.m. demon thing, and the phone call, and the inevitable bad news, even though it missed its desired target. So no, I won’t talk about Martina’s so very skillful construction of this vignette.

* * * * *

From Colin James:

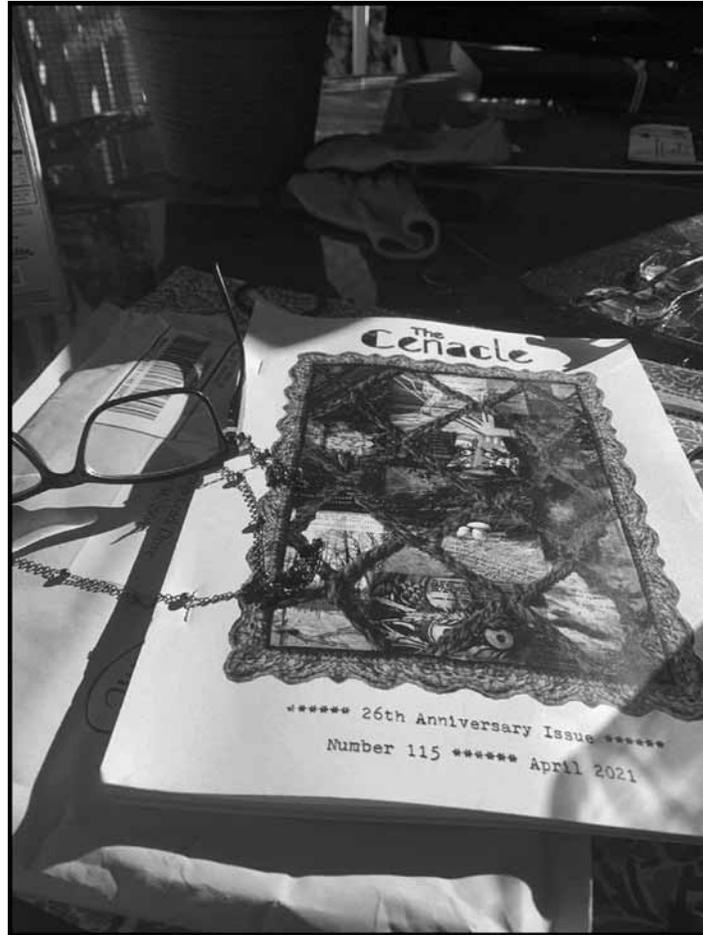
Martina Newberry’s poem “Yellowstone Erupting” is a marvel! In my humble opinion, worthy of a Pushcart Prize nomination.

I feel like phoning her at some odd hour to chat. I am not aware of any friendly therapists who take such calls. It is one of those rare poems that makes you feel you were actually there for the writing of, involved in, *present* somehow. *A gem.*

* * * * *

From Martina Newberry:

I was incredibly intrigued by, and lost in, Nathan D. Horowitz’s travel journal “Saint Paul on the Aguarico.” He continuously enchants me and pulls me into a world of such *life*, such purpose, such tangible spirituality, that I do not want to



Tamara Miles



Sam Knot

leave. I read his work as I would little bibles. They both ground me and raise me as high as if the magic of flight had been given to me. Reading his stories, I find myself closing my eyes, and seeing what I've just read, and these sights are wonderful. The visions, sounds, and tastes jump right off the page at me. I am so grateful for these five-dimensional travel notes!

* * * * *

From Charlie Beyer:

Nathan D. Horowitz brings us into the households of alien cultures where spirits surround them. It is refreshing to see human values and desires from the point of view of those who have chickens in the living room. Although no great car chases or flimflam scams are in the story, it carries you along in a kind of Paul Theroux style, each part as interesting as the next. Thanks, Nathan, for a glimpse into other worlds.

* * * * *

From Timothy Vilgiate:

Charlie Beyer's short story "The Turkey" has wonderfully relatable and human characters, and left me wanting to know more about their lives and stories. The imagined conversation between Annie's Dad and his dog made me think of me and my cat Pedro.

I also really enjoyed Tamara Miles' poetry and her accompanying artwork. The imagery of the storm and the battle flags in "Unlikely as That," and the line about "*the blink of your leaving / burnt my skin*" will stick with me.

Leia Freidman's essay on permaculture and psychedelics made me think about the ways that psychedelics—especially plant- or fungi-based psychedelics—connect to ecologies and landscapes, and ultimately how they blur the boundaries between inner and outer worlds. Our techniques for taking care of ourselves and our own souls may then extend to the relationships we form with the world at large.

* * * * *

From Nathan D. Horowitz:

Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Dream Raps* balance the strangeness of dreamlike events with grounded, vernacular language. Characters appear and disappear like dolphins: the Beloved, the Photographer, an Old Man, the Creatures. We read of a bus with no roof; a small, beautiful handmade book that may bring about the end of the world; a dry, cracked desert; the Ancienne Coffeehouse; a vast Attic; microscopic artists that paint the world with emotions; a device made of a stick and a stone that can, if used correctly, bring about peace.

We revisit some familiar geography of Raymond's Dreamland, especially the White Woods, which one can leave nowhere but at the exact point of entry. Elements of collective reality appear: working at a desk, working on digital documents, dealing with the pandemic, writing and reading, kissing.

These linked stories are masterfully constructed, never dull, always braiding (I borrow that key word consciously from the stories) new language and new images into the familiar language and images Raymond has been working with for years now. *Hmmmmmm!*

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I could not determine, while I was reading Raymond Soulard, Jr.'s *Many Musics [Twelfth Series]*, whether I was in reality or some abstract simulacrum of it, in which I could be sure of nothing, not even my own thoughts. It was as if I were in a hall of mirrors whose surfaces were all enigmas, though my image was perfectly maintained in every plane.

Soulard's *hmmm* departs and re-emerges, and paradoxically it comes back both original and transformed. What never was always is, in some netherworld of perfect Platonic archetypes. The questions are put to us: "*what is this world? / what am I in it? / will you help me seek?*"

This illustrates the paradox that has always been at the burning center of human existence, and the need either to ask Nature or God to provide guidance in finding a path through the primrose and thorns. The work ends with a hopeful beginning, which is all we can ask if we ever find ourselves emerging from the omen-riddled blackness. Lovely piece.

* * * * *

From Sam Knot:

What a bumper crop of Raymond Soulard's *Dream Raps*, so filled with humor, adventure, strange sensuality, and weird wisdoms. It's like they could go on forever in every direction, like the dream-worlds themselves might do—only this is part of the story, or stories, part of the view from *here*—in other words, it seems part of what makes the narrative possible, where, in other contexts, it might have the opposite effect?

The visual contributions in this issue I found lovely to look on: Tamara Miles' life-filled space blossoms; the vibrant impressionism of Timothy Vilgiate's rural perspectives zooming us in towards a curious UFO, a stormy mushroom cloud of sorts, such wonderful weirdness; Nathan D. Horowitz's text-tile experiment; ABDN's group's repurposed school desk-chair, now so completely funky I imagine we might learn as much from inspecting it, as from anything happening up front; and, of course, Cassandra Soulard's wonderful photographic scenes from nature filled with peace and easy-breathing . . .

* * * * *

From AbandonView:

A poor man flinches indeed, Tamara.

Where was I? Judih? In that dream state before I was myself?

A discussion continues.

Each issue of *The Cenacle* is a living entity. Thank you, everyone.

* * * * *

From the ElectroLounge Forums

In Dreams . . .

Published on electrolounge.boards.net

*In dreams I walk with you
In dreams I talk to you
In dreams you're mine all of the time
We're together in dreams, in dreams
—Roy Orbison, 1963.*

Posted by Raymond on Apr 28, 2021 at 11:16am

Hey all,

I'd like to start an open-ended discussion about dreams. They fascinate me. Permeate my art. Even guide me at times in my daytime pay-job activities. And the most visible of my dream-work are the *Dream Raps* in the April issues of *The Cenacle*.

But each of you has dreams too, is affected by them, wonders about them. So let's discuss this topic, in whatever way emerges. Talk about each other's dreams. Talk about dream theories. See what comes of it all.

Do you remember your early dreams? I remember two—

One was about sand. About the desert maybe? It was a dream of sand. Still lingers, yet just that.

The other was a Star Trek dream. Waking up, looking under my pillow. Where did that phaser go? I just had it in my hand!

* * * * *

Post by Martina on Apr 28, 2021 at 11:40am

I have the same dreams over and over again.

There is the dream in which I am at a writers' retreat and need to shower but can't find my shampoo or soap and, anyway, it's not my turn, and, when I am done showering, I have no clothes and have to walk back to my room naked with only a little hand towel to cover myself and I can't find my room, have forgotten the number.

There is the dream in which friends are visiting me; they are from far away. I want to take them to a casino I like. It is walking distance from where I live. I don't know what to wear. We go downtown where I am a little lost, but don't want anyone to know it. I see the casino I like across the alley from where we are.

Then, there is the dream in which my ex-husband decides he wants to come back to me (in reality, he's dead) but I am seeing someone and don't want to have to choose between the two men. It frightens me.

I have these same dreams, with very little variation, so many nights—I have lost count how many times per week. Everything in the dreams feels dark gray and supernatural. In them, I am very frightened, can't see very well. I rub my eyes a lot and it doesn't help. I am afraid I may be going blind and afraid I will be late going home and will make my parents upset with me (they are deceased in real life).

* * * * *

Posted by Nathan Apr 28, 2021 at 10:11pm

I'm in a city with my wife and daughter. A massive horde of orcs is going to invade and kill all us humans. I have a machete and plan to go down fighting. I think about what it will feel like to be hacked to death in battle. My wife notes that the orcs aren't due to arrive for another hour and suggests we go to an opera. (2/22/21, Light Street, Baltimore)

My most common recurrent dream is that I'm back in Ecuador, either in the jungle or in the neighborhood at the edge of Quito where I lived for maybe a year and a half. In the dreams of that neighborhood, there always comes a moment when I think to myself, *so many times I've dreamt that I'm here, and now here I really am.* And then I wake up.

Lately, I've dreamt a few times that I've moved back to Vienna and feel content.

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on Apr 28, 2021 at 10:55pm

I'm visiting a tunnel in Finland. "A tunnel to a jungle?" I ask, misunderstanding something someone said, thinking that would be cool. "No," she says. "To a hot spring." Oh, well.

It's a hole in the wall of a cliff. Probably going to be full of a lot of naked Finns, like one of their saunas. It's big and clean inside, a business, possibly state-owned, with pleasantly uniformed employees selling access to customers, and manmade tunnels branching out in various directions. Still, it's claustrophobic. An important social meeting place for people in this harsh climate. Depressing that they have to live this way.

I catch the eye of an indigenous guy from Latin America and am relieved that my wife and daughter and I, who are with me now, are not the only foreigners here. The tunnels get larger and more comfortable. In a gift shop, a smallish man in a nineteenth-century ethnic costume is singing quietly. With his assent, I lean in to listen. "Traditional Bulgarian singing," he says, and I nod, trying and failing to remember how close Bulgaria is to Finland. He takes a single word with eleven or twelve syllables and, in one breath, slowly sings it through all its vowels and consonants. His astonishing traditional singing technique adds a sound like a low stringed instrument playing along with the rest of his voice. "It's like a bass violin or a viola," I exclaim to my wife and daughter, who are skeptical of my enthusiasms and involved in buying cosmetics at the counter.

I run into my mom and go with her to watch a Finnish Bernese mountain dog show. Half a dozen of us tourists sit in comfy chairs. The walls and ceiling ahead of us are rubberized and textured. The trainer introduces himself and the two dogs, which are fluffy, pigeon-gray, and the size of bison. One dog stays lying at the trainer's feet while the other races up the wall and across the ceiling, around and around, in complete

defiance of gravity, bounding and leaping this way and that.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on Apr 29, 2021 at 9:32am

Damn, Nathan! How much of that is one vivid dream and how much is you sort of taking what you recall and expanding into it? *What a story!*

For fun, on my birthday yesterday, I looked at my dream journal for recent birthdays past. Nothing in them related. I don't have *birthday* dreams! Haha!

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on Apr 29, 2021 at 4:34pm

That was all verbatim. An unusual amount of detail to recall.

Happy Birthday!

* * * * *

Post by Sam on Apr 30, 2021 at 3:47pm

Yes, that's an action-packed account, Nathan! I do sometimes remember long sequences like that, but I suppose in recent years it's been more like vignettes. I love dreams, and dreaming—it fascinates me!

It's amazing that we have a subconscious, and/or an unconscious: this other life, in a way. I was thinking the other day: you need two I'zzz to see time. Just like you need binocular vision to see depth in space, you need at least (something like) 2 x awarenesses or even selves. I am thinking that there is one of me that doesn't know where it is in time, or is in eternity basically, and the other is my more habitual time-bound self. I sometimes think of me sending myself message backwards in time.

There is, of course, big connections between dreams and premonitions and other extraordinary events. My weirdest thing perhaps is feeling like I have a half-memory of dying in someone else's dream, one of my Mum's dreams—that was the crux of a kind of intervention in my younger daze that I will talk about some other time.

I like the idea that “everyone in your dreams is you” only insofar as a kind of taking responsibility, in the sense of not separating or distancing too much from what happens in dreams, but also in terms of having a private life or inner world—I mean: knowing there are things that the world will only ever know to the degree that you somehow manage to manifest or share them. I have had times where I didn't really feel like I had any privates—I somehow felt like I was both kind of naked/on show, and that also other people somehow had access to my subconscious contents—a bit like that other me had been off talking to people without my knowledge. So that's all a bit mad, obviously—but mad rather than insane these days I think.

But basically I still believe that people do actually sometimes contact each other in dreams—particularly close or loved ones. Also, the spirit of the earth and others. Also I think “everyone in your dreams is

you” doesn’t work purely in the sense that another person (or other things or parts of world) has to at least *contribute* to your image of them.

But honestly I do think of dreams sometimes as a kind of social space as much as a private one.

I am fascinated by which ones we remember, what the *mechanism* might be behind that—but basically I trust myself to wake me with recall if the dream has some meaning for conscious me. Meanings do happen to me from the rarer dreams, and the rarest of all are very precious to me as memory-experiences. I can see a rain-shower made from giant bauble-sized raindrops kind of frozen in mid air almost as if it once actually happened. It did *really* happen, I would say, but not *actually*.

A very early dream I remember is a nightmare of a giant humanoid bee—I can’t remember when or how I realized it was my father. I have a memory of being on my parents’ bed showing them a kind of kiddies workbook thing, and one of the pages was asking for a dream memory, and that was the one—I’m not sure if it was how either my father or mother reacted, or if it was something that was in the book.

I had some reoccurring dreams when I was young. *An old stone house on a grey wild moor, me taking a furry pulsation out of the fire-place and releasing it under the open sky, like nine cats turning into crows and flying off.*

I have reoccurring places still. Like the last house I was at in France. I still find myself there in dreams sometimes—there is a whole extra wing that is only there in dreams. I still return to my grandparents’ old house sometimes.

I’ve kept a diary quite religiously for some shorter periods, and indeed I got more dreams coming, like getting better with practice. But I like the more natural or easy rhythm too, and quite often these days I will just get up and write the dream down as a poem.

My first poem in *The Cenacle*, “Log,” [#108 | June 2019] about the blue tit monkey, was one such example:

*This time we follow at flight’s own pace
—the body—a single morphing shape
of stored secrets—this fluid flash
in which wing’s tricks are dreamed
within arm’s reach—the bird is a tiny
undiscovered monkey!*

Here is one of my dream poems from earlier this year:

*What a terrible moment it was:
The grinning fool with his dirty face
& wet caring eyes lit like dew drops
with too many things inside—
sadness & delight bumped up
against each other like red & blue.
The impassionate angel reassuring me
that she was doing what needed to be done,
impossible to argue with her scripted actions*

*each slender limb moving with a weight
 heavier than the world behind.
 Me looking out for the last time in who knows;
 not wanting to turn to examine the shadows
 that would be my lot for lotsa
 lotsa lotsa . . .
 the world of starlight seeming so small
 all of a sudden, & only getting smaller . . .
 Them closing the door on me then,
 saying goodbye to the secret strawberry
 at the end of the world
 saying, "You keep yourself sweet & juicy
 now straws."
 & then nothing but this great cave to explore;
 me & beddy tear & the button shots
 if I gets too spizzy, & the whole
 frozen inter, with one little blog on top
 being dutifully updated, waiting for the future
 to be read.*

—25th Feb 21, 08:13

* * * * *

Post by Sam on May 1, 2021 at 12:01pm

I just had a few thoughts today I thought I'd share, one line of thought concerned Martina's dreams—basically, Martina, your repetitious and unpleasant dreams made me think of a friend of mine some years ago who was having recurrent violent nightmares. I don't recall exactly what happened, but I do remember her telling me they had stopped at one point. I just wanted to say that really! I know well that negative and unpleasant ideas or experiences are just as much part of the value of things as more neutral or positive ones, but I just wanted to say that something shifted somehow with my friend at one point, and she moved into a new phase, dream-wise.

I wondered if you might be able to work them through a bit by making poems of them, even if just for yourself. For me, poetry and dreams are kin in many senses—poems seem to change as much as I do, and they speak to me in different ways across times in my life—I think they help me discover or recognize stuff that I would otherwise not become as conscious of. But I wonder sometimes if just the act of doing something with something that is a little stuck or persistent like that might somehow help to shift it.

Unrelatedly, I was remembering something that I read in a Jung collection once, which I found a useful perspective shift. He was recounting some dream that a young guy had had about another woman he was attracted to, and I think he was soon to be married or something. So the point was basically that Freud would have seen it pure and simple in terms of the dream venting the guy's repressed desire, but that Jung was arguing that in fact it was the young man's conscience that was at work, kind of making him aware of some moral position that he in fact had taken—was true to him, or was him—but not made conscious or accepted.



I don't know, but from what I understand of Jung's approach in contrast to Freud, Jung is much more about trying to let or hear the dream speak, whereas Freud has a kind of interpretative framework already in place.

James Hillman I find often worthwhile listening to; among other things he has talked about keeping the image alive—as if the antithesis of those dreadful but fun dream dictionary things. Like a poem, you might go back to it and find it saying something new or different from before.

One of my favorite books of Hillman's is *The Dream and the Underworld* [Harper Perennial, 1979]. He writes:

It is this dayworld style of thinking—literal realities, natural comparisons, contrary opposites, processional steps—that must be set aside in order to pursue the dream into its home territory. There thinking moves in images, resemblances, correspondences. To go in this direction, we must sever the link with the dayworld, foregoing all ideas that originate there—translation, reclamation, compensation. We must go over the bridge and let it fall behind us, and if it will not fall, then let it burn.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on May 4, 2021 at 11:22am

Nice, Sam! You let loose all sorts of goodies. Strawberries at the end of the world!

About dreams being the dreamer: hm. You mention Jung. He contends that some dreams are from the collective unconscious of the race, like a pool we all share. Hence dreams with things in them that the dreamer does not know by waking. I tend to agree, some dreams are me, some are my world, some are more than that. Our minds do amazing things when we are not in their way!

And Hillman. I admire that he does some deep thinking about dreams, and takes them serious as something alien to the daytime world of waking. Need more of that.

Some recent of my dream journal entries:

4/21/2021—There's a network called the Chipmunk, or tha' Munk for quick—language can travel it—as humming—& sometimes the humming is packaged with something—the control panel has 7 colored buttons that can be depressed in combination—& by a big red button for sending—travel by tunnel, by pipe, by crack, by air current, by water, by wire, by moonlight—All kinds can be sent, but what limitations?

* * *

4/23/2021—At a workplace, going into its little store, people loitering in a group who pressure me to gamble, some event I'm part of? And I resist, just looking at the packaged & unpacked birthday cake—a woman asks why I never gamble—somehow they do not intimidate me —

* * *

4/24/2021—In a great square hotel in New York City, I think, can't find a window with a good angle for picture taking—KD & I step outside, cross busy street, cars paused for traffic—suddenly she's gone—

* * *

4/28/2021—I come to work in long shorts because none of my other laundry is done—workplace is in some kind of a house—I'm at one far room & hear someone calling my name at the other far end—walk there—can't find anyone—feels like a bunch of them are playing hockey in one room—one woman I meet says they need a loud coach on the sidelines—I say to her, “I'm going to Washington, DC tonight, stays open late, but I gotta do my laundry”—feeling rueful about wearing long shorts to work —

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on May 5, 2021 at 10:23am

On a multi-day field trip, I wake up in a dingy flat surrounded by my Austrian college students and realize we have no food for breakfast. Nobody thinks it's unusual that I'm naked from the waist down and they agree that we need to make a run to the store. I dress but they all leave except for three. A man breaks up with a woman and leaves. I console her with a hug, saying, “You will find love. I'm sure of it.” Soothed, she leaves too. I head out with the last man.

The dream blurs. I'm at a university theater in Israel. Onstage, David Gilmour is finishing a solo. I don't feel like applauding but some others do. It's time to go to the airport to fly back to the USA. I weep: If only I could stay here and be an Israeli, my life would be so much simpler. I would know exactly what I needed to do.

* * * * *

Post by Jimmy on May 5, 2021 at 8:45pm

Well, I am one of those people who hardly ever remembers his dreams. I know I dream, and I know I've had thousands of them, and I know they're interesting, but I sleep so deeply that upon waking, after four or five seconds they're gone from my memory forever. However, there are a small handful that, over the course of many years, I do remember. Here is one of them:

This happened during my teen years. I was in a Middle Eastern market—not unlike the one in Raiders of the Lost Ark—and I'm walking around, checking out the produce and wares. I find myself at the end of an alley, and turn around to double-back to the rest of the market. All of a sudden a man corners me, pulls out a black Colt .45 magnum pistol, and shoots me in the chest.

It was the most painful thing I have ever experienced in my life. I don't know if you're supposed to feel pain like that in dreams, but I did. Perhaps it was a memory of getting shot in a past life or something, but the pain was absolutely real, and overwhelming. I woke up immediately, and I remember that dream to this day.

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on May 6, 2021 at 9:24am

“Supposed to” implies that there's a normal way to dream, or a way to dream that was designed, which there isn't, as far as I know, though I could be wrong.

I've never experienced pain in a dream, as far as I can remember. Definitely fear and sorrow but never pain. Interesting, Jimmy.

* * * * *

Post by Judih on May 7, 2021 at 6:31am

My dreams have temporarily ceased to be *night school* for me, but there is something I'd like to add to this discussion.

Tracy Cochran, the wonderful teacher of mindfulness and mindful writing, a frequent guest at the Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art in their now online sessions, once had the honor of interviewing Ram Dass.

She felt herself stating the obvious, how reading *Be Here Now* has provided a kind of roadmap for her greatest wishes—to go to India and find a guru.

He of course commented that he'd heard that countless times.

Tracy wanted to ask something that would find a deeper path into him, so she asked: *How is after your stroke different from before?*

He said (in these approximate words) that before his stroke he'd had a dream where he reached a door of a hall, and he knew that inside were creatures of all dimensions and infinite wisdom. When he knocked on the door, he was denied entry.

After the stroke, he had the same dream, but this time, the door opened with the invitation to come on in.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on May 7, 2021 at 11:37am

Nathan, do you ever have other religiously-related dreams? I don't think I ever have. No dreams of God, or preachers, or anything.

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on May 7, 2021 at 1:37pm

Sometimes. Here's one.

In the crossroads twenty feet from the last house my folks and I lived in together before they split up in '73, I'm sitting at a card table trying to daven with three other men. The man on my right is a cipher: I never look at him directly. The one across from me is my dad, pumping out ancient syllables like a heart. The one on my left is related to my dad but not to me; clean-shaven like him, younger, thin-faced, serious, with a downturned mouth; one of those who direct themselves inward toward the tradition, rather than outward as I do. Ashamed I don't know Hebrew, I grasp at words I don't understand. I want to sink into the Earth. That does the trick. Memorized long ago, the words come out in a rush as if from underground: Mi yimalel gevurot Yisrael, otan mi yimne? Hen be'chol dor yakum ha'gibor goel ha'am: Who can retell the things that befell us, who can count them? In every age, a hero or sage came to our aid.

* * *

Posted by Sam on May 7, 2021 at 4:21pm

Randomly delving into Hillman's book, I found this interesting passage he writes about space:

An idea that Freud absorbed from Fechner—that the dream takes place in its own topos—makes us consider space as a basic dimension in all dreams. Almost every dream has its psychical locality, where its images come into being. Images are somewhere, and they have their own characteristic spatial quality. The underworld itself is a topography: the House of Hades, the Halls of Valhalla, the rivers, islands, ever descending levels. The fundamental language of depth is neither feelings, nor persons, nor time and numbers. It is space. Depth presents itself foremost as psychic structures in spatial metaphors. This is so basic and evident that we tend to miss it, passing right by the depth that is at hand in the specific space of each image.

Here's a quick simple tip for dream recall: Wait. Don't just get right up—don't even use an alarm if you can help it—but anyway, when you wake, don't even move. And even if you only have some vague sensation or half-memory, an inkling, turn it over in your mind a moment or two: sometimes whole dreams will come flooding back from that. And then get up and write them down or something. (Sometimes I speak them into my phone.)

Too many fun dreams and wild scenes have I lost just reciting them in my own mind in the silent dark and thinking they'd still be there come morning. Sometimes I dream of telling someone a dream and then wake up and only remember the vague sense of doing that. I film and photograph sometimes in my dreams (*Is that something that happens to you, Raymond? I noticed your Gate-keeper is a filmer?*). Sometimes this reminds me I'm dreaming, sometimes I think they're all still there somewhere, all the films and photos, maybe stacked on a shelf in one of my imaginal wizard huts out in (or in out in?) the wild wild woods. Woo woo woodzzz. Mostly footage of creatures of course, and some celestial events, some real sky dramas.

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Post by Raymond on May 10, 2021 at 8:54am

Sam, I like Hillman's "space" idea. Many turns of the calendar ago, I think it was a Bags End story, I learned through the telling that Dreamland is a place, "over there." This really changed my thinking on the matter. Now I had *fixtionalized* dreams! They really do occur, but I had found a way to *do* and *work* with them. Taking some of Jung's thinking about dreams, his idea that some dreams do not belong to the individual, but are sourced in the race's collective unconscious, I took a step elsewhere from this to call this pool "Dreamland." Once called a place, it was a matter of exploring it.

Regarding the Gate-Keeper, he is trying to understand some things. He is filming a journey through many worlds. He wishes to learn the why of things, including his own origins. I know he is friends with Benny Big Dreams in Dreamland, but I don't think his filming occurs there primarily. But maybe there is more to learn of that!

* * * * *

Post by Sam on May 11, 2021 at 8:23am

That's cool to have a little flash of back-story for the Gate-Keeper. Thanks, Raymond. Hope he never finds them whys! "Benny Big Dreams," haha!

I know that when I used to smoke a lot of dope I would rarely remember dreams, and put this down to a certain sedation that comes with heavy, regular use. Whenever I would take a break it would take 2 or 3 nights and then reliably I would always have at least one big dream. I think the mechanism was probably at least a little to do with a kind of restlessness, and know that some dream herbs can be stimulating—basically agreeing with Jimmy here that if you sleep deep enough you just won't remember your dreams pure & simple.

I also relate psychedelic experience to dreaming. I suppose what most interests me with both dreams and psychedelics is the idea of . . . somehow finding myself in another, greater, being's imagination . . . rather than just my own. Same with waking life, I like to imagine that nature has an inner world basically, and that the way we access it is through our own—in a way this seems similar to the idea of archetypes—but I feel like they can too easily be interpreted as merely psychic structures or kind of evolutionary imprints—just a kind of fossilized trace or physical memory.

What fascinates me is the idea of something more alive, more imaginative and creative—and also then a bit wilder, stranger, less easy to accept or digest. I still haven't really differentiated my feelings around this from existing ideas. Not that I think that it's a new idea, just that I'm not sure it's expressed to my satisfaction anywhere.

* * * * *

Post by Raymond on May 18, 2021 at 10:54am

Got to wondering what it would be like to mix bits of your dreams into a something. Here is my try:

The Gate-Keeper knocked at the far door of the Attic one more time, & this time it opened with the invitation to come on in. Many friendly Creatures waited him, sniffing & shy. They are from far away, from the White Woods. We walk out of the exit of the Attic, or at least on to the next place, and come to a market, full of produce and wares.

The Gate-Keeper falls into a trance, humming aloud but somehow backwards. The White Bunny among his friends sniffs twice and begins to lead them out of the market full of produce and wares, and back to the White Woods. It is a far way.

The Gate-Keeper continues to shamble along in his trance, but luckily along comes the pink-&-bloo La Transit Trolley that one occasionally sees in these Woods. TOOT TOOT! It cries as it pulls up, its tracks rolling along under it and disappearing behind it.

"Welcome aboard, passengers!" cries the pink-&-bloo Piglet Creature, dressed in full busman's uniform. "Get a quick seat and buckle in!"

"Safety first!" The Gate-Keeper mumbles, interrupting his trancey backwards-humming a moment.

The La Transit trolley speeds away. Creatures intending to get the Gate-Keeper to see Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle on the Beach of Many Words. He will help.

* * * * *

Post by Martina on May 27, 2021 at 12:22pm

On Dreams and Parables

*Just when you think
that fruitless dreams
and desires have left
you alone, one or the other
spits on your shoe
or pulls at your collar.
Some seed of what once
was a full-blown memory
falls from a ceiling fan
and plants itself in the
scarce pink part of your hair.
Out of this, come parables;
they own what they own.
and they live forever in
the pink line of your parted hair
as effortlessly as they live in mine.
You see that, don't you?
There is no such thing
as an end to innocence.*

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on Jun 5, 2021 at 4:56pm

This huge, three-level bookshop/café/gallery is half a block from my workplace and I'm often there on business, supplying books. I like the place so much that my business visits blend into my morning or afternoon breaks, or my lunch breaks. Also, I'm in love with a woman who works here. It's a non-possessive love, one that doesn't demand consummation. I'm only overjoyed to be in the same world as she's in.

The bookshop/café/gallery is a triumph both of political liberalism and of organic architecture. Along a wooden railing with its natural forms I walk, bearing a book containing images of the work of the German artist whose work is on display. In the image I'm looking at, the yellow elements atop the abstract brown and gray landscape resolve suddenly into an eye, as if we're seeing the landscape in her eye, or else looking out at the landscape from within her eye. My own eyes flood with tears at the beauty of it all.

I'm heading back to my job, but I've scheduled a haircut out in the parking lot. On the way, I listen in on a lecture. A British man is saying that the micro-regions in Britain with their distinct cultures are so well-defined that the meaning of something as simple as having a beard shifts suddenly from one to the next. If you're in one, a beard means you're a solid, middle-class person. Across the street, they hate you for being an effete toff.

I reach the parking lot. Two huge Mexican busses are parked side by side. The first is used as a mobile whorehouse. The second belongs to some other men who, one of the whores' clients suddenly realizes, are undercover cops. The client recognizes them by the precise style of shading of their sunglasses. He and two other clients start slashing the tires of the cops' bus.

The hairstylist comes out, a young, bookish brunette. The cops emerge and they and the clients pull submachine guns on each other. The hairstylist starts to panic and wants to run, but I say, “No, look, we’re protected by this VW Microbus. If you run, you might catch a bullet. It’s best to start cutting my hair.” We sit on the asphalt and she begins. I love the gentle touch of her fingers on my scalp. My eye catches some Pride Month decorations in a window of the bookshop/café/gallery and I burst out crying again at how wonderful it is that people can be open now about their sexuality.

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Post by Raymond on Jun 17, 2021 at 8:48am

Nathan—what a complex and lovely thing that is! Vivid and wild! Do you ever lucid dream?

* * * * *

Post by Nathan on Jun 18, 2021 at 10:51am

Nope, never. I’m always in the flow. Only rarely do I realize I’m dreaming moments before I wake up.

* * * * *





Kenzie Oliver



Ride

If only I had learned to ride.

I grew up on a horse ranch in Texas. I should be able to say I know how to ride. I never saw our horses as rideable. They were my friends. As a child, I'd sit on the dusty hay bales, petting their heads as they ate little holes into the hay. I would feed them handfuls of it, and jabber on about my day. The brown and black wolf spiders would navigate the strands of pale golden, cured grass. This was their place as much as mine. With filaments of hay threaded through my hair, its sweet musty smell would follow me everywhere.

I know how to mount a horse, but never progressed faster than a walk.

My mother grew up in England, an island too small for her to have horses. But there was a mule riding company that she worked for when she was young. They operated in the summer for the beach tourists of the '60s. Mom was in charge of helping people on and off, leading the mules along the beach, and caring for the animals in between rides and in the off season. She would later tell me this job sparked her love of horses. A love that she managed to pursue.

I wish I could say I can ride as well as any cowgirl.

Large amphitheaters, filled with wise old cowboys and beginners alike. Every sale barn has the same smells, like a moldy old book mixed with the musty smell of manure, overshadowed by dust. As the auctioneer started his song from his throne, a grey-speckled horse was let in through a gate on left, into the crescent-shaped pen below. From the bench-like balcony seats, you can see it being run back and forth, and the whites of its eyes on the verge of panic. Sand and dust bellowing from the pen. The crowd looks it over with a critical eye and, as quickly as the betting starts, it is over. Out the grey goes, and in with the next horse, in quick procession.

I do know what it's like to see a horse being born and dying.

"Wake up quick," Mom whispered as she shook me awake. "She's giving birth." My sister Liz and I hurried to get dressed. When we stepped out into the mild spring night, the moon was high in the sky, and the musty smell of wet leaves moldering was tangible in the air.

As we walk around the side of the rusty red sharecropper's house to the small pen, we can see a pale horse laying on her side. Her belly is swollen and her back legs are spread in such a way it looks like she's dead and well into decomposition. However, her heaving sides, and the two tiny hooves sticking out of her, show otherwise. We don't dare come any closer. She's already so stressed. We wait with held breaths, seconds stretching out. Suddenly with a strained whinny and thrashing of her head, the rest of the foal slides out. After a brief rest, the new mother is up cleaning the placenta off the foal.

The damp baby is in shock. It must be so cold and confusing to be thrown into the world like that.

I can't tell you how to trot, how to canter, nor how to gallop.

The rumbling of hooves can be felt deep in your chest. Something has set the herd off. As you take shelter next to a nearby tree, the lead mare, white coat shining in the Texas sun, materializes over the hill like a mirage. Her tail raised like an Arabian racer, nostrils flared, her head held high. Behind her follows the rest of the herd. Coats of all varieties—palomino, bay, brown, and blue—creating a moving collage of colors that are pounding the sun-baked clay.

The herd is long gone and the lead mare is no longer a yearling. She now rests under a gnarled oak, leaf-filtered sunlight dappling her coat. Forests reclaiming the pastures she once ruled.

I don't know how to do dressage. Barrel race. Or calf cut.

Round and round Mom would run those horses. The dust never settled when she was working them. The sight was something to see: a short small woman in a straw or felt cowboy hat tethered to an often angry horse that spun around in circles, kicking with its ears plastered to its skull. Working them with bits, blankets, or saddles on, so they would get used to wearing them. It was the slow way, but the cowboy way of jumping on and holding on for dear life was too dangerous for a single mother with two kids. She would often work the horses an hour each until the Texas sun was scorching high in the sky. But never would she forget to take care of them after each session. Washing them down with cool water, using a plastic tool that slicked the excess water from their coats. After turning them back into the pasture, she would round up the next student.

I can tell you how to bathe, bush down, and trim a horse's coat, mane, and tail.

Long weeds brush against my legs as I make another zig through the back field. My prey slowly zags in an effort to wear down my patience, but I'm determined. The prey in question is a pony named Holly. Wiley little thing. Mom got her for free one Christmas, taking her in because Mom believed her to be old and wanted to give her a good retirement. Dark brown shaggy coat, with white dots all along her withers, back, and ribs from where a poorly fit saddle had caught her. Her one white sock on her back leg was the only other marking you could see. I always saw her as my own, maybe because she was the smallest like me. Often I would play this game of *catch me if you can*, so I could treat her like a real life *My Little Pony*. Only for her to go back into the field, roll, and become wild again. She managed to live another thirteen years free of charge.

I can't tell you what it's like to see your dreams turn to dust.

I do not remember much about what happened. I was still young, in middle school. Later I would learn that horse butchering had been outlawed in the United States. While I would never advocate for the needless slaughter of animals, and I know that many wild mustangs were often the victims of this practice, it also allowed for my mother to get the right prices for her beautiful, registered horses. Without it, the horse market got flooded with lesser quality animals. Mom was on the verge of her horses becoming worthless and stuck with twenty-five head in the middle of a historic drought. She quickly sold all. Her stallion, all but one of her brood- mares, and all of her babies. Sold to everyone who would buy. Getting prices for them that were far less than their worth, but more than she would have gotten at the sale barns.

I can tell you what it feels like to be thrown off. Bit. Kicked.

A sharp pain tore through my leg and I crumpled to the ground. Surely my femur was shattered. I had broken the one rule: *don't stand behind a horse!* In my defense, the horse in question was the kind that gave the species a bad name. Something was broke or had been broken in her before she became one of Mom's brood-mares. She had a vicious hate for life in general and people in particular. Her unofficial name was the Beech, only because we were children. I would later ask Mom why she kept such a spiteful horse. "Her babies were beautiful." Unfortunately, that kind of hate seemed to be genetic, for one of these beautiful fillies managed to bite me twice, once on each shoulder. Occasionally my leg still aches when storms are on the horizon. As does Mom's shoulder and heart.





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.

Notes from the American Pandemic October 2020-June 2021

Continued from *Cenacle* | 113 | October 2020
scriptorpress.com/cenacle/113

October 26, 2020

On board Milkrose-to-Boston, Massachusetts (MA) MBTA train

OK, I'm shirt-&-tied & off to new job, 6 month technical writer contract for a biotech company, in the Seaport District in Boston. High hopes I can do this well, & meet, & then exceed expectations there. I have till my birthday next spring to win a contract extension or, better yet, full-time work. I guess that means I should start assessing come end of January.

I am masked up for the day on site there; KD masked up too, to walk me to the train station. No cars in the parking lot here, where used to be rarely an open spot by morning weekdays. This train car is a third filled, everyone masked, & at least six feet apart. Writing with gloves on too. It's what is needed.

* * * * *

November 2, 2020

Milkrose, MA

So Election Day is tomorrow &, by most estimations, the disastrous Trump presidency will be over—four long years of it. Joe Biden will make a good president—hoping he whumps Trump, & that Democrats get back the Senate. This shit has gone on *too long*—getting the fuck rid of Trump will be a huge victory.

BIDEN / HARRIS 2020!

* * * * *

November 3, 2020

Milkrose, MA

ELECTION NIGHT—5:44 PM—

Polls don't close for a while—crazy to be this close to knowing—seems very likely that Biden will win massively—no way of knowing if this will be true in a couple of hours—

* * * * *

November 9, 2020

Milkrose, MA

AND BIDEN/HARRIS WON!!! AND TRUMP LOSES LOSES LOSES!!! *So fucking glad—*

Amazing it's now near a week since Election Day, though it did drag on till last weekend's long-awaited but sudden good news. It's slowly hitting me that Trump will be gone soon.

His presidency was a nightmare that just kept getting worse, day by day, until that bottoming out one when his administration declared they were no longer going to bother about the pandemic.

It amazes me how many votes he got despite all this, but the important thing is that **HE LOST**. On 1/20/2021, he is no longer the President, & can get along to trying to elude jail.

Whatever. Gone. *Fuck him & his whole crime family.*

President-elect Biden now has a lot of work to do, but he won't be doing it alone. There is reason to hope again.

* * * * *

December 3, 2020

Milkrose, MA

Been at my job about six weeks. It's tiring, & yet productive. My team is now three people, fourth to start on Monday. Three technical writers & one instructional designer. Working on creating documentation & training for the company's COVID-19 testing process.

It's draining, & yet I show up every day, & I try to give my very best for eight hours. And then work on my own projects when payjob day is done. *Cenacle* 113 is nearing ready to print, even as issue 114 is close to starting up work. SpiritPlants Radio is nearing the end of another broadcasting year. Writing a lot too, especially Bags End stories.

Vaccine's a-comin'. Even before the end of the year. And the Trump nightmare is ending, nightmare to the end, but ending. *Yes, ending.*

Bad shit ending. Dribbling the last out. Ready to wipe, still aching down there. But he's done. His whole schtick was appearing to be unbeatable, & he fooled a lot of fools into believing. Now he's reduced to ranting videos on Facebook because not even Fox News will put him on. Sad, pathetic;

would be funny save for all the dead bodies.

We'll be long in getting over him. A bad man. A bad president. Leaving a lot of wounds. Like an abusive spouse, but one the whole damned world suffered by.

That's why we elected Joe. He speaks kindly, from wells of pain. He was Obama's right hand man, & so carries that aura of empathy. He won't get all the good done that needs doing, but he sure as hell will try. And some good will come just out of our majority's collective decision to kick that Trump piece of shit to the curb.

Trump is the answer to every sarcastic motherfucker who has ever said: "it doesn't matter who gets elected, because they're all the same." I got one word forever for that kind of thinking: "**Trump.**"

Anyway, working hard, helping get COVID-19 tested & licked. Won't be easy, but way more so now that Trump is going. He'll be at carnivals & rodeos next year, speechifying to dozens of drunks who happened by. His followers will find some new shiny racist prick to follow soon enough.

* * * * *

December 12, 2020
Milkrose, MA

Trump lost in the Supreme Court—his idiotic bid to overturn the election results in Pennsylvania—proving that justice is *not always* for sale—

Work is going well—vaccine's-a-comin'! *Woot!*

* * * * *

December 19, 2020
Milkrose, MA

Deep snow outside—just come the other day. KD is working on one of her crochet artworks—one of many she has made while we spent this year sheltering in place at home. Long year for everyone, hard year. Better year coming—on all of us to make it so—

* * * * *

December 30, 2020
Milkrose, MA

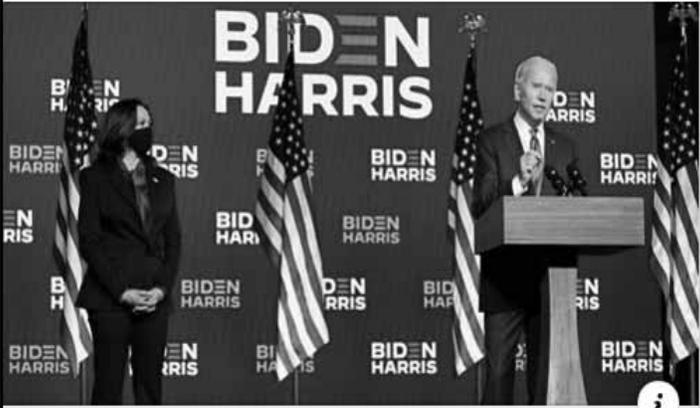
Trump built his rep on never losing, even though he did, a lot. Now he's lost, on the biggest possible stage ever. Showed he's human, mortal. *Fallible.*

We've been watching *Hitler's Circle of Evil* on Netflix lately. What an amazing bunch of pathetic psychos. The horrors they inflicted on millions of innocent victims, & yet all of them—Göring, Himmler, Hess, etc.—were fawning dogs for Hitler's casual notice. Weird, *weird* stuff.

But the parallels with Trump & his dogs, with other autocrats & dictators, are amazing. They *come,*

 **Raymond Soulard**
November 7, 2020 · The New York Times · 🌐

YESSSSSSSSSSSS



NYTIMES.COM

Biden Wins Presidency, Ending Four Tumultuous Years Under Trump

 **Raymond Soulard**
November 6, 2020 · Daily Kos · 🌐

This picture is worth WAY more than 1000 words!



DAILYKOS.COM

Trump refuses to concede, but don't worry ... someone will show him the way out

 **Raymond Soulard**
January 6 · 🌐

J*sus F*cking Chr*st Trump - Take your armed freaks and go.

   5

1 Comment

 **Raymond Souard**
January 13 · Daily Kos · 

Just freakin wow.



DAILYKOS.COM 

Evidence shows Republican leaders directed occupation of Capitol, and provided details for attack

 **Raymond Souard**
January 20 · Shared via AddThis · 

finally...Finally....FINALLY!!!!



POLITICO.COM 

Biden pledges to steady the nation: 'My whole soul is in this'

 **Raymond Souard**
January 28 · The New York Times · 

Super heroes!



NYTIMES.COM 

Health Workers, Stuck in the Snow, Administer Coronavirus Vaccine to Stranded Drivers

they *harm*, they *go*. One way or another, they, each & every one of them, *come & harm & go*.

Hatred like theirs leaves scars & burns & rubble. *But love endures*. People will long remember how much Trump fucked shit up this year. But most will *really* remember the braveness of the doctors & other front-line heroes, the sadness of so many losses, & how we somehow got through it all.

The man could have been a *fucking hero*. Could have used the vast resources of this country from the get-go to get people masked up, sheltered in place, pointed clearly toward safe passage through the crisis. Could have directed the scientists & doctors to draw up rules of the road for survival. Could have compelled elected leaders on the national, state, & local levels to follow these rules. Could have set an example *for the whole world* on what needed doing, by *doing it*.

And he could have taken credit for it all, every last heroic decision & more, no matter how little he was really involved on the granular level. Taken credit, taken countless victory laps, very likely could have been re-elected by the record numbers his delusions dreamed occurred in 2016. It was all there for him to choose to do. *Just follow the fucking science, & let your maw of an ego reap the rewards*.

Didn't have it in him. Wanted the adulation of the millions. Wasn't willing to lift one finger to earn it. Too deep up his own golden asshole to listen to anyone.

Biden will be steady, & it will be damned nice to see a caring, intellectually sound man in the office again. Doing what good he can, sometimes making mistakes, owning up to them, & trying again. And a woman VP in Kamala Harris! Smart as hell, wonderful to have her.

It ain't over yet, but it's getting there.

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January 3, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Happy New Year to everyone! Here's to a better year!

* * * * *

January 5, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Georgia special U.S. Senate elections today, two of them, are razor-thin races, but I am mildly hopeful both Democrats will win—& thus a 50-50 U.S. Senate, with VP Harris breaking the tie.

Democrats on the edge of getting back the Congress fully for President-elect Biden! Just hanging on for final tallies. Trump spent four years losing everything for the Republicans. *Will they learn?* Probably not.

Just creeping toward the finish line tonight—

* * * * *

January 6, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Pro-Trump protestors took over Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. today for some hours—broke windows—milled about. Took pictures of themselves. It was scary awhile, but a clown show in the end. The most incompetent insurrection in the history of the world.

But we seemed to have survived it. The countdown to Trump leaving is ticking louder than ever. The air from his balloon is emptying fast. Had he just left with his loud grumbles, it would have kept him weirdly in the political game. As of now, he's disappearing, day by day.

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January 20, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Evening of the day when U.S. President Joe Biden & Vice President Kamala Harris were inaugurated. Trump slunk away this morning from Washington, D.C. down to Florida—a disgraced man, done for on the world stage. Leaves behind many domestic & foreign disasters, including 400,000 dead from COVID-19. Didn't have to be so—

So Biden/Harris now, like Obama/Biden in 2008, has a Republican-caused mile-high garbage dump to dig us all out from. Started today—all sorts of executive orders—& will go on & on awhile. President Biden is pushing the country & world to *wake up, get to work, a new day coming*—

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February 16, 2021
Milkrose, MA

So I am halfway through my current job contract, & enjoying it, & doing what I can to get it to go on beyond April. Then this other place contacts me about a technical writer job. Company similar to the one I worked at for seven years, from 2012 until they laid me off in 2019. A direct competitor.

At first I told them no. It did not seem like the time to make a jump from what I have in hand now. But then they called me back, & the VP of Product Management wants to talk to me about the lead role of their technical writing team. So a call to listen later this week.

What I want, *need*, is to be *wanted*—that's what this is all about for me. The money, yes, but I want *commitment* to me long-term. Tired of being a contractor, a *rental*, & having that continuous stress—

I *fucking hate* job hunting. Weird anyone is chasing me right now. Made a pros-&-cons list of both jobs yesterday. Came out about even. Have to wait for their call & see what their pitch is. *Eesh*.

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March 4, 2021
Milkrose, MA

That potential job turned out to be a real dud. A delusion. And my current place extended my contract till June, & my boss is working on longer. *Much* better situation.

I think a year into this pandemic I am finally getting worn out. Just give me my damned shots & let me walk around wherever. *Even in a mask.*

I'm luckier than most—but I guess everyone gets to a burnt-out point, don't they?

I don't hold against sheltering in place. Honestly, what I hold against is the possibility that morons who won't get vaccines, or wear fucking masks when needed, will drag out this general suffering a day longer than need be. There's more to it than that, but that's the burning tip—

For everyone who *has* to be out there—those whose jobs *require* them to take those risks—there are so many others in the world, unnumbered millions of fucktards, who are *needlessly* risking everyone's lives—

Much love & safety to those of you reading this who are taking the risks to do good by others. To bring them comfort, medicine, healing, & so on. I *know* that I do best good by *staying put*—& I will continue doing this. Bitching occasionally—but still & on—as long as needed—

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March 8, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Been watching squirrels out the back glass door for near a year now. Trains passing by beyond the back fence. Daylight come & daylight go. Been a strange year, like all years are strange, I suppose. Lost 25 lbs. since this pandemic begun. Result of eating at home mostly, healthier.

Maybe this past year will look different from the distance of time. Lotta bad, but not all. We got rid of Trump, & the worst of the sickness with him. Something to that.

* * * * *

March 17, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Spring is coming. Cold out. Sunny. But it's coming. Folks everywhere getting COVID-19 shots. A year since the pandemic hit, it is starting to recede. Gonna take some decompressing, even with shots in arm. 2020 happened. Won't un-happen. Makes me think of 9/11 a little—

What I remember most about 9/11 is that it was the long-term fallout that was most affecting. As it was going on, it was all too weird to really comprehend—we were seeing what was going on with old eyes—pre-9/11 eyes—

I think that is kind of true now too. We don't know what things will be like longer term, because we are

still in the blast zone for a while—

Still, spring is coming—always a good thing!

* * * * *

*March 25, 2021
Milkrose, MA*

Nighttime now. But a beautiful early spring day. After work, I set up my standing desk on the back deck table; been editing my *Within's Within* radio show for final version awhile. Peaceful. Reminds me of all last summer being set up out here.

Some people at my work were laid off today. Contractors, like I am, but worked in the labs. The COVID-19 testing they were hired to conduct is moving off-site. My boss, a good egg as there is, told me he is working on getting me & my teammates contract extensions, & eventually full-time work.

Nice not to be among the laid off this time, though I wish it on nobody, not my worst enemy. At least Biden's pandemic relief package will help some.

* * * * *

*April 14, 2021
Milkrose, MA*

Kassi & I are going to get the first of our two Moderna COVID-19 vaccines this morning. Company I work for helped Moderna develop this vaccine. *Wow.*

Two hours from now. Walking a couple of miles to the town next door, to a restaurant where a temporary clinic is set up. Used to live near there, walked by it every day to & from the train. Weird return.

It is an *amazing* feeling to be doing this, & to know millions of others around the world are too.

YESSSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!SSSSSS!!!!!!

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*April 21, 2021
Milkrose, MA*

With my job contract only running till June, I've been getting antsy for news of extension. My boss was not saying much for a while. Made me think he was trying to get me extended, but running into walls.

Then this morning, though he is on vacation this week, he sent me a Slack text message saying good news coming. Been feeling a *whole lot* better since.

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April 22, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Extended to December 31st! *Woot!*

* * * * *

May 4, 2021
Milkrose, MA

I date when I started writing to this day in 1974. That's when I began my journal, still going these many years later. Inspired by the juvenile novel *Henry Reed, Inc.* (1958) by Keith Robertson.



My journal predated all the hard shit times of my adolescence. I was thinking this over in bed last night. Writing connects me back to when I was a kid, when I had no problems to worry about. It's like a space from then to now to hereon that is good, a personal good space. I think it's why I always think of Art as good, as medicine, as solution. This space through time from then to now—reached simply by me picking up a pen or pencil. Like a song that goes ever on when voice raises up.

Currently on Volume 30 of my journal!

* * * * *

May 13, 2021
Milkrose, MA

KD & I got our second COVID-19 vaccine shots! Feeling crappy a day later, but what a good feeling it is! WE NOW HAVE TWO WEEKS TO ALL GOOD!

Hope you all are crossing that line soon too!

* * * * *

May 22, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Flying out to Colorado next week to visit KD's folks, first time in two years. Excited to do so, even masked up, just happy to be returning to the world. Weird as fuck as it will be to be on a plane, but familiar too.

* * * * *

May 31, 2021
KD's Family's House
Eastern Colorado

Now on first trip out here in two years, on the other side of the pandemic of 2020—it still ending but tis, yes, ending—

Everyone masked at the airports, on the plane—& safety in the plane itself bolstered by rigorous cleaning standards & air filtration methods—

Visiting with kinfolks was fun. Everyone safely vaccinated now.

Lotta meals & laughter—telling stories—fun & familiar—very welcoming people, always. I kept offline while traveling, & used my free time when it came for writing—lovely black pens & notebooks—

Helped with setting up a raised vegetable & flower planter for KD's mom—& with tidying up her Mother Mary garden shrine. Will be on the road back to the Denver airport early in the AM—

* * * * *

June 3, 2021
Milkrose, MA

Just back from Colorado. Quite a return to the world, now that we're safely vaccinated to do so. Even masked, it was good. Strange yet relieving.

Now into *Cenacle* 116 work, & payjob, & writing, & trying to do better, always do better—

Every newly vaccinated person brings the world a step closer to the best of what comes next. With some persistent work, & some necessary hope, a better world waits us all.



* * * * *

Martina Newberry



Helene with Her Friend Emilie Fromke in the Garden
(Hermann Carl Eduard Biewend 1846, daguerreotype)

Some say we are beautiful. Perhaps we are.
 The sun in the garden is perfect,

not only for the embroidering,
 but for the gold sheen on our faces.

They say, *Helene is the most comely,*
but Emilie's laugh is like music

and her eyes dance and glitter.
 Emilie's stitches are perfect

while I pull mine out and start over,
 time and time again.

I take my tea with 3 sugars and cream
 enough to render it the color

of a Lark Sparrow's breast.
 Emilie says my tea looks like piss water.

She takes hers plain and strong, asks
 what's the use of tea if it is weak and too sweet.

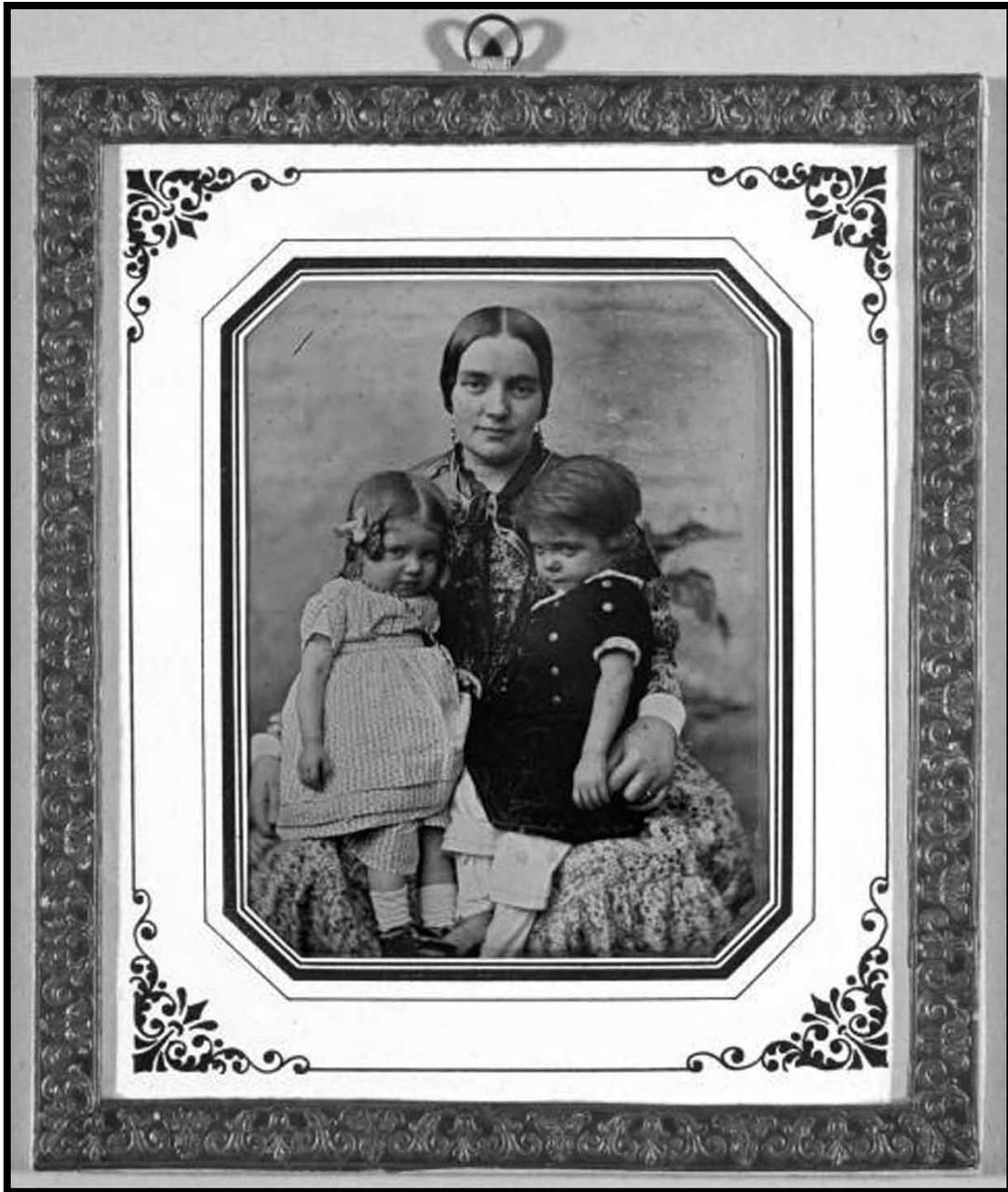
We are friends since we learned to walk.
 Our mothers were friends as well.

The same breezes that whispered
 to our mothers, whisper to us.

My garden frock is gray, hers is blue,
 with a lacy white collar.

I wear a cross to show my piety,
 she wears no jewelry so that

her long neck shows as smooth and bare.
 When Emilie pricks her finger, she says, "*Blazes!*"



Hermann Carl Eduard Biewend,
"Helene with her Friend Emilie Fromke in the Garden,"
daguerreotype , 1846

I say nothing, suck my sore ring finger
(which bears no ring as yet).

I embroider Thorn Apple = *I dream of thee*,
Jonquils = *I desire a return of affection*,
and Bluebells = *Constancy*.

Emilie's handkerchiefs bear
Almond blossom = *Indiscretion*,
Wild Plum = *Independence*,
and Candytuft = *Indifference*.

My mother smiles at my flowers,
Emilie's mother says, "Oh Dear,"

and "Really, Emilie!"
I know we will be friends 'til we die;

our mothers were. I will wear spectacles
for being short-sighted. I will favor

stiff brocades and taffeta,
and, one day, Widow's Weeds.

Emilie will wear red petticoats,
silver buttons on her shoes.

She says she will never wear
ugly black mourning clothes

because she will never marry,
nor will she care enough for another

to mourn them. She will take lovers,
she tells me, rich and poor,

will cut their hearts out
when she is done with them,

dry them on racks, and paste them
into memory books.

We will be friends 'til we die, won't we?
I ask her. She always answers the same: *We'll see.*

* * * * *





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 15: Toloatzin

i.

Reckless magic, think the Mushrooms. Only the most reckless and depraved magician would have allowed the Beyond to enter the fourth world in the midst of their ritual. Dark and malignant accusations flutter through the Mushrooms. Over the years, they have accrued enemies who might at times try to challenge them, but none of them would be so reckless as to threaten the existence of the universe in this way. Even though the Arrogant Mint—a shrub with raggedy leaves—often commits heresies against the order of the universe, it is otherwise committed to the defense of the earth. The Nodding Flowers—white flowers that look like five-pointed stars—have no creed nor moral attachment that might sway them one way or another, and such a violent act is far out of the norm for their kind. It must be the Red Destroyers—pictured by the Mushrooms with a ferocious and primal hatred—a race of strange red and white Mushrooms who have been the enemies of the psilocybes since a time they cannot remember. They are a race of Mushrooms who surely would not hesitate to bring certain disaster to the entire earth in order to attack the Lords of the Field. The Mushrooms surge with anger, visible to Gerry and Cassandra in the form of thin heat waves rising up through the air. Outside, the sky turned a deep grey, and the sun hid behind the sea of clouds.

I pulled my hand away from Meagan’s and inched closer to where the Beyond was coming down from the sky. *Dripping in a form that looks like hot, bluish grey wax, the substance shimmers like claymation, making the air around it glow with a bright ultraviolet light, only barely perceptible. It touches Mick’s chest and he convulsed, unable to see the vibrant mass of cosmic energy descending on him. The cows cleared the area as the Beyond poured over their attacker; surely the Lords of the Field had not intended this to happen. Mick’s body begins to glow, being disfigured, melting into the earth and slowly turning colors until it is buried by the energy. The Mushrooms unleash bolt upon bolt of blinding purple energy, shocking the Beyond. Small chunks are knocked off it, but not enough to stem the tide.*

“Old One,” they beg, **“help us.”** *I try to search through their ancestral memories in order to understand what I can do. What had the Old One done? Looking back through time, I can see the Old One, a shimmering blue flower which grows in tangled vines, sending messages to the molds growing in the grasses and the fish swimming in the sea. I can see an ancient battle they fought against the Beyond above a stone city. In that time, the Arrogant Mint and the Lonely Cactus teamed up with the Pure Mushrooms and the Old One to fend off a burst not unlike this one. The Old One shot up a brilliant, opal-colored fire, which projected from its roots to the edges of its leaves and into the sky.*

Drawing from their ancient memory, I try to focus inward and find the power within myself. Somewhere deep down, I know that it is possible, but my own doubt seems insurmountable. I root myself down towards the earth, and with every breath I become more and more conscious of my nearness to it, of my smallness. I can see

myself from high above, a tiny speck on a rock swirling around the sun, my own powerlessness boring down on me. I can feel the earth breathing underneath, sweltering as the Beyond pours into the ground and transmutes the composition of the rock. The earth shakes in seismic waves that emanate from beneath me, murmuring in tectonic poems underneath my feet. The energy of the Mushrooms surrounds, as they lash out with everything that their powers can allow, pressing up against my skin. The Beyond drives like a sword into the earth, the topsoil becoming poisoned, as the grass turns grey. Heat wells up from underneath. The Mushrooms know what has to be done, if only for the sake of the earth. Heeding their call, I emerge from what has become my cocoon on the ground and raise my fists to the sky, bursting with a brilliant opal fire.

ii.

The flames soar from my body and sent Meagan collapsing to the ground. My own skin and bones reeled from the painful heat. My hands were unable to be lowered, my arms frozen in a locked position, as the fire swirls around me. My own body appears to stretch apart. This must be a hallucination, I told myself. It had to be. I ascend skyward and feel the world around me swirl like water being sucked into a drain, making the world spiral down into the deep below. Everything disappears into a radiant cosmic void, which rises up to surround Meagan and I. The flames from my skin grow wider and wider, with no control or direction, creating a scalding, wrathful heat that tears at my own flesh and bones. Time slips away from us, as do any words or recollection of who or what I am. The world, whatever it is, freezes into one immense, glacial second. A sound, a violent and otherworldly roaring, grows steadily louder and louder behind me, as the spirit of the Mushrooms rises, a towering golden and turquoise colossus with a million drooping eyes and mouths that look like a wall pockmarked with holes that look like rotting flesh. The Mushrooms rise and rise in a tsunami, flooding over me in a violent white. For a moment, I reach a place of zero gravity, where I find myself in a distant and crumbling dimension, which looks like the inside of a collapsing cave, slowly breaking apart into a rumbling and furious chaos. I start to fall into this strange dimension, sinking deeper and deeper into a velveteen abyss, dropping miles and miles with no light, no sense of time or where I was. I begin to lose awareness of it; all is simply black. I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I've ever done. And soon enough, forget that I have ever remembered.

iii.

Before me, there appears in the distance a white flower, shaped exactly like a star. I drift closer and closer to it, and it grows, staring at me like an immense silk eye. The petals twist counterclockwise and caress me. The flower's body grows narrower and narrower and, being drawn inwards, I begin to shrink. As I reach the base of the flower, its stem, I forget that I am in the flower at all.

iv.

Again, a vast realm of seemingly infinite space surrounds me, a horrendous blackness. I forget again that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I've ever done. And soon enough, forget that I have ever remembered.

v.

Before me, there appears in the distance a white flower, shaped exactly like a star, its body twisting over me in a counterclockwise vortex. The body, shaped like the horn of a trumpet, grows narrower and narrower, and, endlessly moving to the inside, I begin to shrink. Is this the first time this has happened? The last time it ever will? How long have I—

vi.

I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I've ever done. And soon enough, forget that I have ever remembered a world beyond the edge of this pale green field, a field surrounded on all sides by the forest. The sky above appears to be the underside of two hands, clasped in meditation, and through the fingers of the hands peer tiny specks of light. The silence here is so absolute it seems thick, tangible, something I can feel on my body and in my ears. My heart in my chest pounds with a heavy and belabored rhythm. My limbs feel stiff and tired, and my mouth is dry. In the center of the field, I can see a small bush, with raggedy leaves, decorated with five-pointed white flowers. Feeling the looming darkness of the forest pressing me forward, I move towards the bush, enchanted by the beautiful flowers, which seem to emit a light. My legs crackle and ache as I make my way across the field. My bones feel out of place, like foreign bodies. My skin feels dry, weathered. My beard and my hair grey, long and frizzled. My clothes tear and fray at their edges. I am an old man, in the middle of a field, staring at a bush full of flowers. Lovely flowers. Flowers with five petals each, shaped like trumpets. I lean in to smell them, and quickly recoil in revulsion at their putrid odor, almost like rotting flesh. Feeling myself gagging, I back away from the bush, falling down to my knees. A man appears above me, wearing some kind of mask and whispering in a language I cannot understand. I cannot see his eyes; he seems to be a shadow. Almost nothing but a shadow. He kicks me over and over with his foot, and stomps against my back, sending me crashing through the ground, and into an immense void. I fall and fall, until eventually . . . I . . . I forget . . .

vii.

I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I've ever done. And soon enough, there is in front of me a brilliant white flower, with five petals, curling around me. I stare in awe at its surface. It ripples, like a blanket made of silk. Familiar. Like a mother's embrace. I look around me. As I make my way towards the flower's stem, I become smaller and smaller, as the walls of the flower grow narrower. My eyes jolt forward into the abyss. A sense of dread overtakes me and my brain pulses with terror.

viii.

I look up from the table. Shit. Janet has been talking, and I haven't heard a thing she said. Now she is giving me that look she always does when she's waiting for me to say something. I take a bite out of my hamburger. She looks annoyed. "Uhm," I say, "I don't know." Always an acceptable answer for Janet.

"You know, sometimes I feel like everything I say just flies right the fuck over your stupid little head." She rolls her eyes, brushing her hair to the side, and leans down to sip a bit of soup off of her spoon.

"I'm sorry, I was thinking about—" What was I thinking about? I can hardly remember. The test next week, in all likelihood. I get like this. I am terrified of messing up. Terrified of failing out of school, and failing out of my job, failing at life, failing at everything. "That chemistry class."

Janet slurps up a bit more soup, and then wipes off her mouth. "I feel like you never talked to me like a real person," Janet says, staring at me very seriously. "I feel like you thought I was boring. Like you never really cared that much at all."

"I—"

"Well, are we going to talk about this or what?" she asks. "You call me out of nowhere and say you want to apologize. So what? I mean, where the hell have you been? What the hell did you want to say?"

I shake my head, blinking as I try to remember. Of course. I'd made it back to California. I wanted to talk to her.

"Janet, I was 20 years old. I made a lot of mistakes, and I—I'd never really been with anyone. I felt like it was hard to be myself with you. You always seemed to get on my case about the things I liked or what I was doing . . . and . . ."

"Well, it looks like I was right, John. It looks like you ended up exactly the way that I thought you would. Maybe you should have listened to me, laid off the drugs, found a way to get through school without



Timothy Vilgate

whatever the hell it is you were doing on the weekends.”

“I wanted to apologize to you. I feel like we were from such different places in life and we just wanted different things. But I’m—I’m happy. Where I am. And I know you would never be happy with who I wanted to—”

A man in an eagle mask and a decorated, ornate costume walks by us, and begins standing over our table. I look up at him, terrified, as he seems to stare indifferently into the distance. He looks familiar. I’d—I’d seen him in that field—that . . .

My memories begin flashing back to me rapidly. The breadth of my powers. The only minds present, the only real minds present, are myself and the man. Janet is not real, neither are the other patrons, neither is the angry mob surrounding the restaurant. Only myself and—and—the man in the eagle mask.

“What, John?” asks Meagan. Meagan? Here?

Terrified, I flip over the table, spilling a bowl of cold water onto Meagan’s ceremonial gown, and run towards the exit. The restaurant begins bending to my will, the contours of the roof and the walls shifting inwards. I can remember, suddenly, the flower. The flower—Toloatzin. That is its name. A thick black smoke pours down from the walls and floods the floor as the customers in their booths turn to skeletons, all standing up as one and turning their heads towards me. A gleam shines in the blackness of their eyes.

The man in the eagle mask, whose face underneath seemed to squirm with maggots, raises his bizarre, misshapen hand, and there appears clutched in it, again, that same white flower. Solemnly, he turns to me and throws it. I fall backwards into the smoke.

Soon enough I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I’ve ever done and—no. This has happened before. This has all happened before. I struggle against the stupor in my limbs. I try to turn myself away from the flower’s immense, looming petals, but it is no use. They begin to suck me down, even as I push against the walls and flail against the gravity beneath me. I still feel my body shrinking. My mind, regaining its powers, tries to exert a force against the edges of the flower. I know who I am. I know I am inside my own mind—how deep, I do not know. I can feel my physical body on the outside of this other plane, but it feels so distant, so far away from me.

ix.

Soon enough I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I’ve ever done, and I take the keys out of the ignition of my pickup truck, parking in a wide gravel parking lot. Work.

I hate it here: the smell of the oil fields, the damage they do to the land, the way that they talk about things. I hate all of it. I hate knowing what it is—that’s why I left. That’s why I left it here. I’ve—I’ve not been here for months. Years? Months at least. A long time.

I see the aspects of my own consciousness pulling back into my head, and, fighting against the delirium, I stagger forward. The entire world is spinning, filled with a golden haze. The workers have taken on the appearance of a decadent renaissance painting. Covered in dust and dirt, they straddle segments of pipeline luxuriously as nude women feed them grapes; they sip wine on the rooftops. The foreman, who is otherwise a morbidly obese Cuban American, has been given a pair of cloven hooves, and sits in the background strumming a lute. I can’t hear their thoughts—they are hollow people.

I am having the same nightmare again. Just a few nights ago, I could remember dreaming about my ex-girlfriend Janet in a restaurant, and we were attacked by a strange man. In the dream, I’d felt completely hopeless, overwhelmed, surrounded. I look around warily for the stranger, whoever he is, for any sight of a damn white flower, any mind that gives off the slightest hint of authenticity. He is both incredibly close and miles away—I know he is there. I can sense him, an enemy mind hidden in every nook and cranny of this manufactured North Dakota landscape. Creeping through the decadent scene of oil field workers at leisure, I pass up on intermittent offers of fine wine, tropical fruits, and nude women, and make my way into the office.

I sit down at my desk, and twiddle my thumbs, forgetting what I have to do that day. In front of me, there is a steaming cup of coffee. I am, as far as the supervisor and the others are concerned, a great geologist. Great to have aboard. Just as I start to flip open my computer, the phone rings. Bored, I stare at it for a few rings until I finally decide to pick up. “Hello, this is John Silvers.”

"Hey, John. It's Tony."

"Tony? It's been so long. How are you doing?"

"I've been great, how about you man? I miss you."

I sip my coffee. It tastes watery. "I've been fine. I'm up in North Dakota right now." I look around to see if anyone is listening. "Living the dream."

"Listen. The reason I called you up is no one knows where you are. Everyone thinks you're dead. Your parents are worried."

I freeze, not remembering. I haven't left my job yet, I haven't run away. Not yet. But I think about it. Before I can respond, the line goes dead.

A man in a coyote mask steps out from the break room, swinging wide the door and standing in complete silence. I drop the phone, and freeze as he creeps towards me. The memories flood back to me. I know where I am. "How's it going, John?" He expects me to think he is my coworker.

"Alright. Just got a real weird phone call," I reply.

The stranger comes closer to me, clutching a cup of coffee and pretending to drink from it. Every so often, he flickers between his true form and the form of my coworker. I look up at him, warily. "A telemarketer or something?"

"An old friend. He said I . . . I . . ."

"Well, what?"

"What do you want?"

The man freezes, petrified. "What do you mean, John?" Uncertain, he flickers back and forth between the form of a familiar coworker and his true form. "Are you alright?"

"I know what you are."

The stranger laughs darkly and creeps closer. Resting his hands on my desk, he arches his back and leans in to me. The walls of the office collapse and leave us alone on what looks like a great piece of graph paper. High up above, a bloodshot-eyed teenager teeters in and out of consciousness, a pencil in his hand, laughing slightly.

"You don't know the half of what I am, John," he growls, before pushing me out of my chair, and letting me slide down into the grid. I grab on to the edges for dear life as the stranger stoically looks on. "This almost gets old after a few hundred tries, huh?" he comments, lowering his head in what almost seems to be sadness.

I fall down through the lines in the grid, screaming as I do so. There is nothing to claw at. I know, I know without a doubt that the white flower will appear, that it will shrink me down and—

"Very good. You're starting to remember what I'm teaching you," the stranger's voice echoes through the void. A white flower appears on the horizon. I shut my eyes, struggling against the pain. Yet beneath the terror exists the feeling that perhaps there is a lesson to be learned, something benevolent behind this psychic struggle. But soon enough, I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. I forget that I have ever remembered at all.

x.

I am on a boat, in the middle of a long and winding river, where an old woman paddles, her back turned to me, and a stranger who looks like an old, old man. The old man is tearing pieces of bread from a loaf, and dropping it into the water. I study him ambivalently, unsure of how I'd gotten here, or what is going on. The last thing I remember, I was . . . I was studying for a midterm. The old man looks over his shoulder at me, revealing bloodshot eyes and rows of rotten black teeth. Then he let out an enthusiastic guffaw.

"I'm a fisher of men," he tells me, winking, and then returns to the business of breaking the bread before the river. Tiny black forms suck the bread beneath the water.

"Who are you?" I ask. No response. "How did I get here?" Again, no response. Giving up, I turned to the old woman, tapping her on the shoulder. "Excuse me?" I said. She turns, revealing that she has no face at all, only a blank mess of skin where her eyes and her nose and mouth should be. I lurch back.

"You'll be like her soon enough," he says, "unless you can do it this time."

My stomach sinks. "What do you want me to do?"

"I'm a lonely god . . . I'm a lonely, terribly lonely god . . . and if you were me, you'd know exactly what

I want you to do. But wait—” he hushes me, picking up a net and crumbling the rest of the bread. Another tiny black form appears from beneath the water and, swiftly, the old man casts the net over it. Inside the net, as it emerges from the water, there is a shrieking and moaning little human, thrashing up against the net so that it cuts its arms and face trying to escape. The man quickly slams the net against the boat seat behind him, making the old woman jump in surprise. Again and again, he crushes the human against the boat, until it ceases to move, and a pool of blood has formed on the bottom of the vessel. “That’s what I want, John,” he says. “Do you understand now? Do you?”

Aghast, I shake my head.

“Of course not,” snaps the old man. “I’ll teach you soon enough.”

“I—what do you—want to teach me?”

Without responding, the old man grabs me by the shoulders and lifts me up, flinging me overboard and into the water. I sink and sink into the deep, my lungs filling with water, everything going dark.

xi.

Soon enough I forget that I am falling. I forget who I am. I forget what has happened. Everything I’ve ever done. And soon enough, I forget that I have ever remembered. The only thing, those last words: I’ll teach you soon enough. I’ll teach you. I’ll teach you. They echo through my mind as though I’ve heard them a thousand times and somehow I know that I have. I know somehow I must have sunk in this ocean more times than I can count. I know that I have seen that faint white flower, which seems so beautiful and uncanny, millions of times over. The darkness sinks over me. The flower hovers in the distance, growing further and further away from me. I wonder what it is. What do I have to learn? And why do I have to learn it?

Chapter 16: The Gift of Language

There is no time. Time is meaningless. Time is now. The past is meaningless. The future is meaningless. The past is only memories, the future only the flickers of neurotransmitters fluttering between synapses inside of our brains—the only thing that exists is now. The past seems distant, buried in the wake of a psychedelic explosion. Or perhaps not distant—distance implies that it even exists at all. Rather, I recognize it suddenly as the abstraction that it is. I see a different person, in the past, driving down the road, than I see now, here, huddled together with this crying family of strangers underneath a helicopter. I wanted to run. But I always wanted to run. From the second I got in my car that day, I wanted to run. Where to, I didn’t know, but I knew that I wanted to, almost needed to. The aching to do so had been in my bones for some time. The memory of a fragment of a dream had pulled me in, offering the vaguest glimpse at an escape. Or perhaps not an escape, only a departure. A distance, a perspective, a coming home into my own self from the outside.

I remembered it clearly. A man stood in the field, in a neat polo shirt streaked with blood, yelling at a stampeding herd of cows. A voice in my head tells me that it needs me to help it get back into its physical body. For a moment, I thought I was going insane, but only of my own volition; I welcomed insanity. Life had become so boring. Grinding through my days and trying to keep my eyes on the road ahead had left me desperate to veer off into some kind of uncharted wilderness.

All of it seemed like magic, and I quickly gave up any hope I had of understanding it all—I’d just do the best I could, I decided. John, a homeless guy I met at work, led me outside, and started mumbling something about . . . well, I couldn’t remember. It seemed like forever ago. He took me into the field. And, suddenly, it was like I was tripping harder than I ever had in my life. A strange energy filled the air around us, emanating from the Mushrooms in the pasture, which appear to pulse with light and color. My mind and the mind of this stranger link together, and I feel myself conscious of an entire other world. Some kind of strange Beyond, an apocalyptic and hellish force is descending on us—and, perhaps even worse, I get the most distinct impression that it is real. Hyper-real, even. Something that ought not to have been real, but that is real nonetheless.

Lightning surges from the Mushrooms, which speak in a mumbling and unintelligible language. The Beyond drips down from the sky onto the convulsing body of the man I'd seen in the field. The other world flickers and recedes intermittently only to surge back to life. All of a sudden, John's body leaps with brilliant flames, and he collapses down to the ground.

And what happened next was something I could not even fathom. All across the field, which is trembling, almost starting to sink, blue and purple lights race between the Mushrooms. I feel my mind being drawn into them, their brilliant energies towards the Beyond. They are preparing to die, to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the universe. As they ready themselves for oblivion, they start to speak to me and, stranger still, I can understand them—their language coursing through my brain like a river bursting through a dam. All around, a roaring shockwave splits the air. Pieces of the earth split off from one another, collapsing like broken glass into an immense, underground cave system. I am flung upwards.

Down below, I could see my physical body, growing more and more distant, as a trillion images flash through my mind. I see the heart of the Mushrooms, rising and rising into the sky like a cloud, and enveloping my wandering spirit. I can feel myself splitting apart—parts of my ego, my id, my superego, my unconsciousness, spasmodically and joyously erupt into life, dancing through dimensions and upon the winds of eternity. I feel myself pulled into the stars, rising above the planet and into the hidden corners of existence, through levels upon levels of existence, as memories and words flood my brain.

Eventually, I am surrounded in a radiant white light, where nothing moves and all seems still—a frigid and hollow emptiness. In my stomach, I feel a pit open, an overwhelming sense that I am going to die. An all-encompassing impression of my impending death. Rather than turn away, I lean into it and find myself reaching above the light to arise, to my surprise, into my physical body, before I rise even further from the top of my skull, back through the Beyond, and then into my body once more—again and again—endlessly rising only to find that I've only ascended from one layer into the next. My mind and my body begin to crash back together; the pieces of my psyche which had separated fling themselves back to me, recomposing my brain. In a slow and gentle collapse back into myself, I regained control of my body. And there it is. The singularity. Now. Now is time. Time is now. Time will be now. Time has always been now. I conjugate the thought in my brain in a loop, feeling myself drawn into the darkness of the void now torn into the earth.

Into a looming and hollow abyss I stare, a steaming pit, on the edge of which stands a hulking pillar of metal that has been transmuted by the magic of the Beyond. Everything feels almost unreal, my arms and legs and hands are strange, held together and given their shape by some kind of odd power. Or not power. Perhaps a force. Better, it is a binding. One which exists more as conception than as construction. Born out of semantic reasoning. Out of language.

I stumbled, feeling the ground beneath me shift. The unsteady nature of my footing occurs to me on all dimensions. Mortified and frozen stiff, I could do nothing but look into the pit. Stare into the abyss, watch the void, feel the sensation, understand the colors of and fall into the grammar of infinite language—poesis, stasis, inability to detach, to come clean, to release myself. An endless tunnel of words to meanings to ideas to concepts to stratagems to emotions—infinite, endless, serene, menacing, totalistic—the edges of my own language, my own perceptions, my own culture, seem miraculous and fragile, breakable, a glass animal on the edge of a razor blade teetering into the sink where I'd left the water running, and I can tell that amidst this perpetual dialogue with myself, I am losing grip, a slippery slope to the tires of a hulking semi truck like my mom was always afraid of sliding on when she drove to Colorado, a state where I wanted to study one day because they smoked weed and had plenty of snowy days to spend by myself and not have to go anywhere, I would——

I try to drag myself from the grip of its power. The gravity of language. Everything I say, think, feel, imagine, becomes a typhoon of words, trailing into the sea of chaos around me. I face up, and look into the Beyond, the other world, fading from the sky, which looms above me like a marble dome of turquoise and white and grey that crumbles like pastries, fluttering in a deep and unconscious music unlike anything that has ever been heard or felt or seen. In the momentary glimpse I catch of the fading antiworld, I feel it surging with a life constructed from strange and alien physics. Harmonizing with my own world, there is a dissonance between spheres, which manifests itself in rays and bolts of sparks and lightning cascading down my arms and my body, rolling through my mind in noetic pictures I had painted in my mind when I had no clue what it meant to run wild. All at the same time, simultaneously, I want to kill someone, and hug someone, and fly to the moon.

Overwhelmed, I wrung my hands over my face, on the verge of tearing out my eyes and collapsing in on myself, *when I feel coming from deep within a will to press forward; the voice of a dead Mushroom, lingering in a celestial spore planted in the back of my mind.*

All of it is a poem, I begin to understand—realizing itself continuously with no end and no beginning, writing itself into a poem of and about and by itself—the world around me is an infinite deep of poetry, of language, in which I am fluent somehow without even knowing—a language not of symbols but the symbolized. A language, effervescent and resplendent with potential. A language, like dynamite, like caged lightning in between my fingertips. A language, distant from myself, yet all the same, my only friend. I ride the tide of the infinite poetry, feeling myself crest the waves of the grammars and rhetorics I had once taken for granted, my hands drifting along the sides of the architecture I'd once taken for granted. No. That I took for granted, I corrected myself, that I took for granted. The idea of having taken suddenly became a part of perfect past, no longer left to endless imperfection—took for granted. I am learning. I have learned. I will learn. Learning, once an act of struggle, now an act of wonder, conjugated into eternity. The connection re-cemented within my brain. To learn is to wonder. To wonder is to learn. And so I wonder. What can I do to save the universe?

The act of marking out my sentences seems to let me grasp it. No, it does let me grasp it. The act most certainly does. The act of thinking in complete and active sentences makes me feel somehow intact. Specific words, no pronouns, let me know what I mean to think, attach the image to a word, or a forest of words, even a solar system sometimes. That which is loose and meandering, winding like roads along the flesh of burning volcanoes, gerunds and participles that melt together, to lead into infinitives in an endless stream of clauses, compartments, sections, clarifications, makes me feel wayward, makes me tumble into my own imagination. But this is easy chaos. Short phrases do wonders for the estranged. I am alive. I am here. I am a person. Even this chaos, punctuated by fragments, framed with the right clauses, reaches balance. Holding together my senses in a delicate tension, I orchestrate a battle between order and disorder, sparking fire as I strike them against each other, and I bring the act full circle.

I imagine myself shooting lightning up at the last piece of the Beyond, and saving the universe. I am certain I can do it. Determined to shoot lightning, I breathed in deep and slowly raised my hands, very seriously and sternly. I imagine myself as some kind of superhero like I'd seen on TV, and concentrate on my fingertips. In my own English language, I find myself screaming inside of my head, "Shoot lightning. Shoot lightning, bitch. Do it already."

Nothing happens. That is when it hits me. It is wrong. The grammar, the syntax is wrong, I tell myself. English doesn't shoot lightning into infinite dimensional voids. English wasn't built for that. It builds cities, writes poems and plays, assimilates new words with ease, and finds itself inclined to trading. The noun, first, does whatever it does, to the object. All else is secondary. I need to change.

Something slips over my mind, like a blanket is being peeled off it. I fall into myself, moving backwards into my skull to find myself again in my body, albeit in a strange world. The sky is filled with machines, the ground becomes a part of me, I am a collective not a singularity. My language has been built as a group survival mechanism, for an undying plant. Fluently, I have slid into the grammar of the Mushrooms, giving way to a world where the earth seems to vibrate with a resonate music. I draw from it, feeling a shockwave from my roots down to the core of the planet bounce back to me, and surge through my limbs. A radiant violet lightning shoots up at the Beyond. The invading mass of energy sulks back towards its portal. I fire again and again, letting my body become a transmitter for the earth and her will to survive, in the form of great bursts of energy until the threat recedes into the sky.

Shooting lightning into the cosmos, I lose track of who I am until I am genuinely and entirely a Mushroom in a field. In turn, my thoughts become Mushroom thoughts, my body becomes a Mushroom body, with roots spreading through the ground to a forest of fruiting bodies. Watching this all from the human aspect of my consciousness, I see myself as practically almost a single cell. Entirely aware of my humanity, but at the same time, such a concept has been translated in a new language. The memories of distant days come to me. I am a sacrament that the humans must honor. I have fought battles on behalf of all the earth's creatures, together with the help of all her plants. But these verbs are not past, nor future. They know only three intertwined tenses: once, now, and forever. Their language, their cosmos, their understanding, speaks in effortless collectives, only using individuals for rare and exclusionary exceptions. I feel myself humbled by the power with which I've been



entrusted. The gift of language. When the Bald Monkeys first found it, they used it to communicate. And in myself, it has been amplified. Greatly amplified. The Beyond now gone from my sight, I am free to be however I wish. I can reason and feel in new colors and shapes. Each language for me slides on and off like sets of clothing. I listen to the grass, and I become a blade of grass, growing lonely in a field, not with much to speak of. I listen to the cows, and I become a cow, oriented to the herd. I listen to the panicked birds flying overhead, and know a language of flight, my body feeling keenly aware of North and South and Up and Down, and I almost imagine for a moment I can fly. And then back into English.

Returning to my mother tongue is disappointing. English feels like a cage. The first thing I realize is that I need to work tomorrow. I realize I have immediate responsibilities, and I wonder when I'll come down from these shrooms. But I suppose John has wondered much the same thing, hasn't he? At some point, he'd found himself, God only knows how, tripping on acid for a few hours too long, reading the thoughts of all those around him, his skull filled to the brim like a leaking bucket with psychedelic sensation, sensations that tried to overflow and escape from its unwitting vessel. And what's worse, I hadn't wanted to take shrooms, not today, not tomorrow, not for a while, not until my grandma has passed out of hospice and the world is at rest. The anxiety that laces the words I know and the language I know hangs about like cobwebs, an endless mess of entangled obligations and fears and a sense of isolation, a sense which was magnified by the knowledge of another language, one where time is only now and forever, with no true past. Burgeoning and backbreaking, hammering and nail-biting quakes of stagnant terrors, mortifications, and melancholia burst through the caked-over grime and muck of my unsettled soul. I recoil, cracking under the pressure-cooker tight burning of a finite human stranded in the infinite.

The catatonic freeze in which I'd caught myself was shattered by the creeping concern that I felt for Gerry and for Cassandra, the woman I'd met in the house, along with her three kids. They seemed like such sweet little kids. They reminded me of myself and my brother. And the old man made me think of my grandfather, who seemed so lonely and distraught. *I break myself away.* The scene around me was one of violence and pain. *I empathize deeply with the broken soil, the aching and comatose body of John, the moaning and frightened cows. I can sense, in the spaces between bricks, a memory of pulverization. I can feel inside the rain gutters the labor in factories that had brought them to life. Within the gestalt of the house, I can sense the love of its architect and his hope for tomorrow. Again, the same tension—the tragedy of broken pieces of ground and earth and wood and suffocated life underneath the triumph of dreams made manifest in the form of a brick home.* The void, the massive steaming underground, lay exposed just to the right of the house—the home's foundation had sunk, and now rested barely askew, sliding incrementally towards the pit. I feared for it. I feared for the dreams that it held and for the people within. I put myself aside.

Running like mad, I barreled from the field onto the porch of the house and tore open the door, which had been nearly shaken off of its hinges by the earthquake. The brick walls of the interior had long, wide cracks, and the floor towards the back had become warped. Furniture had tumbled over; plates, pots, and pans had fallen out of their cabinets. *The feelings of the others in the room feel like forcefields pressing up against me—entering the house, my emotions pool with those of Gerry and Cassandra and the children, lost in a mess of pain and fear.* I needed to help them. I desperately needed to help them.

Gerry had fallen down in the earthquake, and Cassandra was finding herself not strong enough to lift him up to his feet. The children, cowering in the corner, cried—the iPad was no longer enough of a distraction. *Overwhelmed, their minds give way to a creeping terror. They all feel so alone, so isolated. The disaster, the pit which now threatens to swallow them, seems to be an impossible dream. In the horror of the moment, they are each distant from themselves, their own minds dissociated from their bodies and situations, locked like newly formed moons in the grasp of an alien planet. Gerry's house. This is his house. His dreams. His life. His memories.* I helped him to his feet, feeling unstable, and tried to assure him it would all be okay. I helped him out to the porch and the driveway to lay him down. He'd landed on his hip. That was where it hurt. *I know because when I look at him, I can feel the pain, and it is awful.*

I stood up, and, manically, ran back into the house to try to rescue whatever I could from his room. I gathered up photos and paintings from the walls, flailing about in a panic with my heart pounding. I set them on the ground in front of him—*Gerry feels a slight, melancholy peace.* I headed back in, followed briefly by Cassandra.

“What are you doing?” she asked. *She feels warmth towards me, a strong warmth.*

"I'm trying to save his stuff in case the house falls into the pit," I said. Locking eyes with her, it hit me that her husband was lying on a tall metal pillar in the center of that pit, and she had yet to see him, his broken and transmogrified metallic corpse. I couldn't help but imagine she'd be devastated.

"Let me help you," she replied, *deeply admiring what I was doing*.

I dashed towards the rear of the house, flinging open what looked like a bedroom door. Quickly, I sprang for the closet. Layers of clothes . . . do people need clothes? Do they like them? I hated clothes. I actually did. And shoes. A lot of people thought that I liked clothes but they're wrong because I don't. They're like prisons for your entire body. I threw all Gerry's clothes to the side, and found a few boxes of photo albums, handing them to Cassandra, before I pulled out from underneath the bed a mandolin.

The room made sense. The spatial layout of the house, I mean. Enough time, and architecture was a language in and of itself. The private places. The public places. The spaces for friends. The spaces for family. It was a diorama of the old man's mind. A display of his thoughts. All throughout the home, the arrangement of Gerry's routines and patterns were beaten down like paths across a mountainside. I knew, with almost complete certainty, that his spoons were probably in the second drawer away from the sink. I was carrying all of his possessions, but the thought bugged me. The spoons. Why were the spoons so important? Did I just want to be right? I did want to be right. I wanted to be right very badly. Before I rushed out of the house, I dove for the spoon drawer and thrust it open. A plethora of spoons, forks, knives, and miscellaneous cutlery. Victory. An ecstasy flooded through me.

"What is it?" Cassandra asked.

"I was right! I was right!" I exclaimed with joy. "It's full of spoons!"

"Do we need them?" she raised her eyebrows in confusion.

I winced. We did not need the spoons. Why would we need the spoons? "Of course not," I replied, hurrying out of the house behind her. "I just wanted to be right." I followed her towards the door, before a strong sensation pulled me back. There was something else. Something critical. Important. I looked to the right, to see a blue crystal hanging from the window. It swayed back and forth, *with worry*. Worry? It couldn't think. No, I thought, but it can feel. *The crystal can feel. The crystal can see me*. You're turning into a lunatic, I told myself. Let the crystal go. I couldn't let the crystal go. *It can feel. It is frightened. If it is shattered, perhaps it will be killed*. None of the other crystals thought, though. I didn't get that impression from any of the stones that they were feeling things. Only this one. And I couldn't bear to part with it. Awkwardly fumbling to place the rest of Gerry's worldly possessions into my left arm, I quickly tore the stone from the window, breaking apart the knot that held it up. *The crystal breathes a sigh of relief*. No, it didn't. I'm absurd.

Gerry stared blankly at the pile of his things that had been amassed before him. *He is grateful, relieved that he will not lose them*. But even still, he kept pushing back against his tears. *He feels ashamed*. Men don't cry, I imagined him thinking. He probably didn't think a real man would have been so sentimental as to have held onto all this, and he was baffled that I'd managed to excavate it all from his closet.

Cassandra looked on with guilt. *She never, not in a million years, imagined that this would happen today. Suddenly, she regrets having treated her father-in-law with such ambivalence. He needs her now. Everyone needs her. The children are terrified. The entire family feels incomplete, like they are one half of a space station spiraling out of control with no gravity to slow it down, a car with a blown-out tire skidding on an iced-over lake*. The air smelt funny, and they could see smoke everywhere. *Daddy had tried to kill them. What did they do wrong?*

Beginning to cry, *I retreat into the Mushroom language, feeling myself spreading roots to the other humans, bringing them into what I can only describe as an empathic field, a sense of peace that hovers amidst them and dwells upon them. Oneness. Eternity. The children and their mother and their grandfather feel themselves rooting down to the earth, feeling, between them, an overwhelming sense of security*. Gerry burst into tears, *years of repression made worthless by the shift of language. Cassandra feels the boundaries of her self dissolving and the love from her children and her supposedly distant father-in-law flood inward, crushing her sense of loneliness*. She crawled towards her children and tried to cradle them in her arms, tears streaming down her face *as she, unable to form words, tries to assure them it will be okay. The children feel themselves surrounded by love, the world awake with mystery; the troubles redefined as adventures, the danger redefined*

as only fear—a bravery comes about them. They are three generations among many—the continuation of a spirit, a lifeblood, a common species—vital to it, in their own ways, even if not central, even if characters on the side—they have, in their DNA, the memories of famines and wars and plagues and oppressions, but they have survived—for thousands of years they have survived, and the flame of human consciousness and hope has carried on, in spite of darkness and fear and hatred bearing down on them.

I thought of my own family. Their house was not far from here. It must have been near the end of the sinkhole, if it did not collapse in its entirety. The whole ordeal likely seemed like a bit of prophecy to my aunt, a geologist turned Certified Nursing Assistant turned cherished alien truth advocate in Austin, who swore that, since our house was built on limestone, it wouldn't be long until a sinkhole took us all under. For my brother, the sinkhole would be yet another emotional horror for him to solve by pouring anesthetics and stimulants into his nervous system; dreaming of a numb and overworked existence without feeling. For my mom, I feared it would put an end to the helpful bit of hypomania that had propelled her out of bed by eight in the morning every day and let her work on the computer in the afternoons. For my dad, I imagined it would bring a boost to construction jobs in the area, at least, which could be an upside, maybe, for all of us. I loved them. The people that had made me, that had raised and shaped me. I wanted them to be okay. Out here, I felt like an island. Away from them, with no way to help them, I wanted to hold them. They were all at the hospital right now, but never mind that. I was certain the whole ordeal would be, at the very least, mentioned on *Fox News*, which my grandmother kept on at all times.

What did this mean? I interrupted the spiral. What *did* it mean? For my everyday life? The road I took to work was blocked by a sinkhole. Not too mention, *this*. The power of language. It wasn't like I'd taken a drug. I'd—I mean—if I'm being honest, I was kind of stoned when I got here, but not *that* stoned, just a little stoned. I hadn't just made the choice to trip for a few hours. I didn't go into this thinking that the trip would start around 12 or so, and end around four or six in the evening. How was I going to interact with my family? Would I take them into the mushroom language, like I was doing to this whole family of strangers? Would they think I was high all the time? Would they take me to the hospital? How was I going to go to work? Was I going to *drive* like this? Would I get drug tested? Because I smoked weed every fucking day and I had for, like, five fucking years, so if that happened, I'd be screwed. Would I have a customer ask me where to find the onions, and I'd fall into a trance where I collapse through layer upon layer of idioms and synonyms and ideas, and then realize that the onions were living, and switch into their language, and become an onion? There were too many damn questions.

“Hey,” one of the kids said, tapping me on my knee. “It's okay.”

I forgot that I'd brought them into the mushroom language. They were especially in touch with my emotions as a result. I sat down, and the kid gave me a hug. Faintly, I started crying along with them. *The empathy runs deep, detaching from my own worries. I become a part of them—the love and empathy and worry and alienation that courses through the veins of our united mental body moves from one single, beating heart.*

The house beside us continued to fall apart, the rear crumbling into the pit. We heard sirens echoing across the hills, and the approaching sounds of helicopters come to survey the damage stalked closer and closer. Eventually, one of the terrible steel birds began to float above the house, descending upon us and kicking up clouds of dust. I shielded my eyes. *This is terrifying in the Mushroom language. It has no sense of how to describe it other than a dreadful anger at the helicopter itself. I feel myself tempted to launch a strike of purple lightning at the invader and its strange heretical magic. But I do not, since the dominant, English part of my brain still recognizes, ultimately, that there are people in that helicopter, and that they shouldn't be struck by lightning.*

* * * * *



Tamara Miles

Tamara Miles

Nightswimming

I swim in the dark. Underwater,
my doppelgänger greets me, her hair
a loose coil of sea-snakes,

eyes wide, purposeful, long neck turning
as she surveys the azurite landscape,
its subtle energies,

and tells me her name in a foreign
language; it sounds like daring,
the taste of her tongue soft on mine
is honeysuckled copper.

Poseidon's wife, Amphitrite,
and the old sea god, apoplectic,
cannot find her.

Swept along, I lose my other name;
it does not follow me.

* * *

Melt

August squeezes summer's throat—

dread spreads—a powdery green
of bronze disease on statuary,

even in this cloudless heat.

I've never trusted autumn,
its bait and switch
routine—

a snicker-snarl from rolled
up sleeves.

I shiver in my shaded
sanctuary.

Hot as hell, the headline
reads.

Treacherous month,
a gut-punch—

learned to keep good
liquor on the shelf.

Six, a separation,
goodbye to Mrs. Ward,
first grade, a homemade lunch.

One year, I nearly killed
myself—

left the garden bit
by snakes,

waist-high in thorns
and weeds.

* * *

The Spent Dahlia

The first dahlia began to fade.
Snip it now, my friend advised.

*Press between the pages
of a heavy book.*

*Add a note with date,
reflections.*

A blush of hesitation—

something so patient
about the slow process of dying
bound to stem,

every muted shade of purple-pink
and wrinkle now revealed,

petals that swell and soften down,
loose from center-hold,

still asking for water,
as my mother did,

drops on her tongue,
by my hand,

before the final fall.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



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

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

Chapter Nineteen

continued from

The Cenacle | 114 | December 2020

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

To write about 2012 now, these 9 years on from it, is to notice both its similarities & its differences. To form a valid, challenging, lively dialogue between now & then is to work with the facts of both. Consider the following.

This *History* began in 1995, the year I started Scriptor Press New England, & its first, & flagship project, *The Cenacle*. But the *telling* of this *History* began in 1999, as my M.A. in Writing, Literature, & Publishing degree thesis at Emerson College in Boston. A gap of 4 years, though I wrote my thesis up to 1999, as close to submission as I could.

Over a year after I graduated Emerson in December 1999, I started publishing chapters of this *History* thesis in *The Cenacle*, beginning with *Cenacle 45* | April 2001. I had decided to publish what I had written about the press's first years in my thesis, & then to continue it along with new chapters about subsequent years. Took six issues, up to *Cenacle 50* | December 2003. When I got up to 1999 in the telling, there was additional writing which concluded telling the year's events. But now at a remove of several years again.

There was a point, twas *Cenacle 60* | December 2006, where I was writing about the previous year. *Ah, perfect*. Didn't last long. Fell behind again. Finished most recently telling of 2011 in *Cenacle 114* | December 2020. Two decades now at this *History*, & 9 years behind.

2011's telling took 2½ years to complete, along 3 issues in that stretch. Some issues with no *History* featured. It was *fucking* hard to tell. A year ending with a disastrous Jellicle Literary Guild meeting, & then the heart-crushing death of my dear friend Jim Burke III. Finished that year's chapter finally. *OK*.

For this issue, thinking that the telling of 2012 would be somewhat easier, or at least not as hard as 2011. But what's true too is that the shade of that loss remained above, & within.

And the dark specter of possible job loss mingled too with this fresh, furious sadness, each vying for my heart's most obsessive attentions. Neither winning out, I think.

My technical writer contract's uncertain length, begun in October 2011, was of more immediate concern. A paycheck for bills & rent & groceries, or not. Nothing subtle in this.

But the loss of Jim changed the man I was in facing this worrisome situation. A sure job would have solidly grounded my feet, protected Kassi & me & our valued possessions, & our still quite new

arrival to Boston in 2010. KD new here; me returned after 8 years on the West Coast.

But money do what it do, & don't what it don't. This dialogue from now to then is two-fold. Now, as then, I work on a contract, uncertain of its extension, if this occurs at all. Now, as then, the loss of my friend is a straight-line wound. I used, & use, Art as my salve, my elixir, my meaning in a human world of countless questions & countless answers. I wrote in my Thoughts Pad on 4/17/2012:

*Losing Jim saddens me—payjob pisses me off
Art is all that holds me together from deep within—
Writing this moment is loving this moment,
no matter how difficult the words—*

As much as I covet arriving one day again to writing chapters of this *History* annually about the most previous year, I recognize, & have to recognize, that each year written about matters. No matter the gap of time. That accounting for my press's days & weeks & months & years like this is a valuable thing. A critical thing in my wishing to learn & know & feel better both *hereon* & *heretofore*. Reaching my writing hand & thinking mind & feeling heart *back* is better learning to reach them *forward*.

The writing & editing I do for Scriptor Press New England's projects travels alongside the other ongoing events in my life's days. They are like companions, not identical, though neither in opposition. They share time & space.

As I neither write creatively nor publish for a living, many of my hours are spent either earning wages from someone else, or else looking toward the next one who will pay.

I keep them separate because I would never want the artistic work I do to be directly beholden to anyone's judging, deciding peruse. Whether or not that could have been how I lived, it isn't. Won't be.

The start of 2012 found both these tracks struggling. And me trying to figure out how to do both of them better. How these early months went formed what became *Cenacle* 80, 17th anniversary issue, in April 2012. Thus worth telling.

We saw in the new year traveling up on the Maine coast, pursuing KD's love of the winter's unpeopled seaside. Staying at a hotel in Old Orchard Beach, Maine. As the clock approached midnight marking the new year, I sat in our hotel room, writing the first *Many Musics* for 2012, for Jim, called "Revelator":

*Letting you go, brother, is easy, because
you don't leave. A stretch of sunlight,
a horn from that attic window, words unsaid
in my head, laughing years & years old.*

*Letting you go to your fall, your ashes,
the molded paths preachers lure the
children in men by the fears in their dreams,
you dismissed it all but the tune. Long, lovely tune.*

*Letting you go to listening for your silent instrument,
ah, break my heart & you go on still. The spittle flies
as you cry it out, the strings bend & break,
the stars finally set & we all know how they return.*

How the heart lets go, easily, while discovering new ways to hold on. No real end to this.

Less than a week later, I learned that my two fellow technical writer teammates had been

offered conversion from contract to full-time work, but not me.

At first, this seemed like a temporary setback, one I was assured by management would be resolved, no sweat, in the short term.

But it wasn't resolved at all. My hopes were raised, dashed, raised again. My contract extended by short lengths, a couple of months at a time. Always the lure of complete success. Till the tracks ran out.

Hindsight being brilliant, I should have started job-hunting the moment the initial bad news came. *I wanted to believe it would work out well.* I was encouraged just enough to be willing to do so.

Funny that the names of those I worked with then do not summon up faces. I worked remotely, a practice become even more common in recent years. These colleagues were voices on the daily morning conference calls, no more (a super-odd aside here: recently, one of those long-ago colleagues contacted me for the first time in all the intervening years to talk about filling a vacant role at that company; she barely remembered me, & certainly not all of the frustration I endured back then; I was polite, recommended LinkedIn.com; she thanked me, & was gone again).

My "office," such as it was, was wherever I brought my work laptop to; merely needed an Internet connection to do the technical editing work I did. I worked mornings in our apartment, usually on the green couch (same one I am sitting on now, years & miles from there). Then I'd pick up the place, make the bed, do the dishes, & ride my beloved bike along the Minuteman Bikeway to Arlington Center. A friendly down-home coffee shop, called Jam'n Java, became my "office" most days. Occasionally the library nearby, or on to Harvard Square in Cambridge.

I'd have headphones on all day, listening to content for the upcoming SpiritPlants Radio weekend schedule of shows, & for my *Within's Within* too. It was peaceful. Yet ever-fucking-stressing the ticking down of my contract. Ever waiting.

We get the time we get in this world, unknowing how much or what to come next. My heart's drive had nothing to do with that weekly paycheck. It was simply hard-won funding for my Art & for my part of KD's & my quality of life. I then, as now, snapped off a piece of my daytime weekday hours to labor for jing. But this was *solely* why it mattered. For better & worse.

My Art drove me, as always, & it was shaded by Jim's death that previous December. I wanted to publish a book of his letters from *The Cenacle* (might finally happen this year). I wanted to keep something of our collaboration, our friendship, our bond.

Here's the thing: I was sad, but *he was dead. This wasn't about me.* Yet I was choiceless in having to react, living on, doing this & that. That's some of the hard part in surviving. The next day. The next week. The next month. One still dead. One still living.

So I solved this hard puzzle no better than anyone else ever has. I worked on, as I have through other losses, of jobs, of lovers. I think, in a way, Jim is most intensely with me when I am inside this work. He understood it, shared my obsession.

I anticipated the next *Cenacle* happening in April, & had begun working toward it even in January, in addition to having in hand the content that had not appeared in the aborted December 2011 issue.

I also began to root through crates of notebooks & cassettes of various projects. Maybe there was comfort in developing & further expanding the scope of my press's archives? This true, & also that until recently much of this material had been inaccessible in storage. Now it was all close to hand.

These crates of archives included printed



issues of *The Cenacle* back to 1995; cassettes of *Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights* which had been included with the 1995-2001 (issues #1-46) original *Cenacle* run; cassettes of the JG meetings in full running back to 1991; cassettes from 1999-2002 of my *Within's Within* radio show, when it had been on Radio Free Cambridge & then Allston-Brighton Free Radio; 50 or so volumes of cassettes I called my *Voice Journal* from 1999-2001; & all of my *Bags End News* notebooks, running back to 1985.

I started in on digitizing the *JG Highlights* cassettes & *Within's Within* cassettes, listening to them as I did. I wanted to recover my familiarity with all this good work, & build a live & creative bridge to their years. See what good effects this might have on my new work.

My plan looked toward building an online archive of all these projects at *The ElectroLounge*, including digital copies of those old *Cenacles* too.

A quick check of this *History's* pages tells me that I've made scant little mention of *Bags End News* to this point. For good reason that little of it had appeared in *The Cenacle* to that point (*Cenacle* 41 | April 2000 was the only instance). I had read a fair amount of its pages at the original JG meetings, but that was it.

In truth, I was after more than archiving work with this particular project. I wanted to revive it entirely, cause a new flow from what had become a trickle. Reinvent it, bring it to new sunshine. I'd already been reviewing these notebooks for awhile, flooding my mind afresh with their stories.

As a teenager in about 1978, I'd discovered paperbacks of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic high fantasy *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55) at the local pharmacy. I'd also found around that time L. Frank Baum's wonderful *Wizard of Oz* series. At the library, pursuing this new happy interest in fantasy books, so much better for the soul than most of the rest of the life I was living, I found J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books (1926/1928), Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books (1865/1871), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), & C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956).

"Bags End" derived from "Bag End," home of Bilbo & Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings* (as well as its 1937 prequel, *The Hobbit*). Bags as in grocery bags I'd collected my younger sister Christine's toys in, safer than an old wooden toy-box they'd been piled in. Gave each of these toys a name, & stories evolved. My mother eventually replaced these grocery bags with sturdier brown laundry bags.

My family lived in squalor & suffering; at least some of it was unnecessary, but so. My three special needs brothers did not get the care they deserved. My undereducated father worked many kinds of jobs, doing his best, exhausting himself day after day, little complaining. My mother ruled the household from some strange complex of love, rage, paranoia, shame, & stubbornness. I grew in ways light & dark from this wyrd swamp.

Bags End was one of the light ways. A fantasyland within those 3 brown laundry bags, like a heightless, depthless apartment building within. Full of funny, feuding characters that emerged from the visages of Christine's toys. They became, to us both for awhile, to me ever on, more than fur & fluff & glass eyes & button noses. They became part of the *Imaginal Space* I've been creating all these years. Creating it expanded my mind years before LSD joined in to accelerate the process.

My challenge in 2012 was to figure out how to write new stories that mattered to me as much as the old ones had. How to dare myself into writing at the edge of my reck. The time I spent repairing these old *Bags End News* notebooks, labeling them fresh, reading them one after the next, taking endless notes, pushed me deep back into their myth. Sought, like the old Ezra Pound vow, to *make it new*. A slow, but loving process.

On its 1/28/2012 broadcast, my *Within's Within* radio show marked its 13th anniversary, & I included a bit of the clumsy, uncertain opening of the first broadcast on 1/30/1999. The various archives were already coloring into the new work.

I'd also decided that the April 2012 *Cenacle* would *not* be a double-issue as I'd toyed with it being, & *would be* a kind of tribute issue. To Jim, of course, but also I would invite the other contributors to offer their own tributes & remembrances to loved ones passed.

I had moved away from the north-of-Boston working-class town of Malden in May 2002, my hovel emptied but for trash left in the corners (what I thought of the landlord), me & my possessions with Jim Burke III & friends in a U-Haul truck, bound briefly for Connecticut, where my precious possessions would stay in a friend's apartment building basement (& many of my books would be lost in a chance flood).

Left Malden to chase a girl on the West Coast who I had romanced by chat & phone for nearly a year. Refusing to believe it was a dead romance by the time I said goodbye to my friends in Connecticut, I boarded a Greyhound bus to ride 3000 miles to find out. Twas, indeed, dead.

Now, ten years later, my beloved KD & I took a daytrip to my old stomping grounds in Malden, as part of my still re-acquainting with Boston I'd known those many years ago, where I'd thought I'd left for good back in 2002.

I'd lived in Malden for 6 years, & during these years was when I wrote this *History* back when it was simply my M.A. thesis. I was living in Malden when I first tried LSD. When I first saw Phish in concert down in Worcester, Massachusetts (returning to Malden after a glorious all-night trip to & from on a Greyhound bus). When I first went to the Burning Man Arts Festival in Black Rock City, Nevada. When I started Scriptor Press New England's *ElectroLounge* website. When I started my *Within's Within* radio show on Radio Free Cambridge. When I started the *Scriptor Press Sampler* & *RaiBooks* series. Lived there the last 6 years of the original Jellicle Literary Guild. When I finished Emerson College, & thus 17 years on & off (mostly on) in academics. When I got my first of several Apple computers (including the one through which I would eventually, in 2003, meet KD). This strange little town just north of Boston *helped build me*.



KD & I took a bus & trains, over an hour's worth, to the Malden Center train platform I'd known so well back then. Not much of a claim to fame for this town (Earle Stanley Gardner, author of the *Perry Mason* mystery series, hails from there) despite being so close to historical Boston. I'd ended up there in 1996, in a one-room studio apartment, because my bookstore wages afforded me no better, & certainly no closer to Boston/Cambridge. Costs to live close to fame & beauty. But made the best of my exile. I was still just a short train ride away from all that I loved (& love still).

KD & I walked from the train station in the town center past the Stop & Shop plaza of stores, full for me of countless memories when this was my home, & this where I passed through daily. Come to the bench I sat on terrified one night, on an elixir's journey so fierce, made ever more intense by my library book of Jiddu Krishnamurti's philosophical writings. Especially where he writes: "*Transformation*

can only take place immediately; the revolution is now, not tomorrow." The library itself pretty much the same; twas a deep balm to me in those often-lonely years back then. Read a lot of Aldous Huxley. A lot of Stephen King.

Eventually we walked down Canal Street: its shopworn special events palace; its gun club so loud in the night; its old Rohm Tech factory building whose steps I'd sit on, high as stars, writing for my life, my Walking usually playing Phish tapes. Across the street an endless weed field, with big cement blocks blocking it off from cars parking in it.

One block in particular I called the *60s Rock*; various lipsticks I'd found on trains I'd use to decorate it with sentiments like LSD=GODD & also the ⊕ sign. That terrified night I mentioned, all sense of time & space gone, I managed to get to the *60s Rock*, & found those lipsticked words. *It's OK. This is real.* I called this street *Carnal Street*, when I came down it after midnight, & Malden *ZombieTown*. All this lingers on in my *Labyrinthine* fixtion & other writings.

Crossing at a traffic light at the end of Canal Street, come next to Bell Rock Cemetery, established in 1648. Passed through here twice a day back then, on route to the train in town or back to my hovel.

Cemeteries had scared me when first I had moved to Malden. But I dug up some courage & greeted all the spirits there one night, said I meant them no harm, just passing through. Gorgeous big trees there. Strange effaced old stones. First burial marker dated 1670!

Brought KD to the tamarack tree my old poet friend Ric Amante, one glorious drunken night, had hugged & praised on our way to my hovel & more beers. Called it the *Amante Tamarack* thereafter.

We came to the condo complex of my hovel. Just a square brick building, of course, among many others. But I still live there in Imaginal Space, like other homes I've known. Walked on to my favorite place in the town: Dunkin' Donuts, on Eastern Avenue. Me, I called it the New Eastern Donutshp (because it had gone through a renovation back then).

Were you to walk in there, you'd find a place selling coffee, sandwiches, & baked goods. Orange & pink themed. All sorts of people passing through. Half-dozen tables. Nothing special to the casual eye, though fine for what it is.

That night of my return with KD, you would have seen me deep into writing in my *Bags End News* notebook, headphones jacked into my beloved Polly iPod (R.E.M.'s *Document* rocking me). High as stars, & happy to be back. Jim was gone, but not all was lost. He was high as stars too, after his own new fashion, & I was writing for my life in this beloved old place, with my beloved KD deep in her books as always.

But what I also see is those further years back, nudge 2012 back to 2002, & earlier. Maybe a 15-minute walk from my hovel. About the same further on to the library in one direction, the train station in another.

I'm there now-then in that same corner table, near the rest rooms. Payphone on the wall back then. Walkman going, library books on my table, notebook before me, black pen going at it. Plastic mug of Diet Pepsi. Maybe a donut too. Often a little cube package of ice cream from that plaza in town. Long hair, ragged clothes, worn belt, taped-up sneakers. Usually poor, horny, lonely, but I'd pull my sorry ass together in places like this & *fucking write with all my stars out.*

I wrote for my life because that's what I do. Then, now. *Why else bother?* Left 3, 4 in the morning, listening to Art Bell's *Coast to Coast AM* on the radio, discussing UFOs, vampires, worldwide cabals, & the like. I was a student, or working a low-paying job, or jobless. No clue what 2012 would be, much less 2021. We three wave to each other. Strange brothers.

So sat there anew that evening, & finished the *Bags End News* story I'd been writing for months, determining to find its fresh soil, work it through. Good way to finish that trip to Yesterdayland.

Maybe my heart's sadness was simply thawing some. I resumed writing *Many Musics* poems & *Labyrinthine* fixtion. I also resumed from those *ZombieTown* days my *Voice Journal* cassette recorder projects. Like a walking journal. Now used it also for storytelling purposes. More on that to come.

Started up work on *Scriptor Press Sampler* | 13 | 2011 *Annual*, figuring what *Cenacle* content would fill its pages. It was so nice to be doing this work.

Jim was still passed. My job contract was slowing running out. But I had Art, KD, my health & hers. These years later, Amante is long gone from my life, but his lesson to practice *gratefulness* in life stays with me every single good day I live.

Was mid-February when I decided that, since *Cenacle* 80 would be a regular issue in April 2012, 6 months from the previous one, I should make an epic list of goals for the year:

- *Scriptor Press Sampler* – March
- *Cenacle* 80 – April
- *Cenacle* 81 – June
- *Cenacle* 82-83 / *RaiBook* #8: *6 x 36 Nocturnes* – Summer
- *Cenacle* 84 – October
- *Cenacle* 85 – December
- *RaiBook* #9 – James Burke III's Letters – October
- *TABooks* 2012 – August
- Jellicle Literary Guild meetings – April / June / October / December
- SpiritPlants Radio – 36 scheduled weekends
- *ElectroLounge* – 36 updates (some large, some small)
- *Many Musics* – Finish Seventh Series; write Eighth Series, #1-60
- *Labyrinthine* – Finish Part Seven; write Part Eight
- *Bags End News* – 24 issues?
- *New Perfect* – New story

I was ready to carry on finally &, while I did not manage to hit all these goals, I did do a fair number of them. Brought them along at the end of February on KD's & my trip out to Colorado to see her family at their cattle farm. Long a nicely anticipated annual event, felt this time also like a much-needed escape from my ongoing job stress.

To get away, literally & figuratively, seemed the best of ideas. KD's kin are kind & familiar, & I spent the free hours I had between socializing editing *Scriptor Press Sampler* 13, reading Stephen King's fine novel *11/22/63*, & writing *Labyrinthine*. For the last of these, I was both reviewing past pages, over 1000 of them, & writing new ones. Revving up.

A visit to the Denver Art Museum, its beautiful strange works, riled me onward too. Sandy Skoglund's beguiling "Fox Games" (1989) ended up on the color cover of *Cenacle* 80. This pending issue was now ever on my mind, as well as the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting in late April where it



would debut.

Felt like I was going backwards & forwards at the same time. Leaving day by day the world I'd known when Jim was still alive. Dwindling job toward its last day. Yet new writing, *new work*. Back in Boston after so many years far. Ever-rising whirlwind.

My radio work had become ever more complex by early 2012. From 1999 to 2008, this work was preparing for, & then broadcasting live, my *Within's Within* 3-hour radio show, on a succession of radio stations. SpiritPlants Radio the current of these, & longest-lived.

In November 2008, out of necessity, since my show was all that was left on SPR, & the Irish fellow who'd hosted its online presence decided to stop doing this, KD & I took it over. The responsibility & the cost (though soon annual fundraisers would help to defray some of this), yes, but I also decided to rebuild it from my show as its flagship on out to a 36-weekends-a-year schedule of DJs & other content.

By early 2012, I wanted to do more with the weekdays; essentially rerunning several years of previously scheduled content, in a mix called the *(M)ystery-(F)low*. To do this, I needed to convert this content for streaming by our new Museter.com online host. And I did this conversion task week by week throughout 2012, till I now had 36 sorted-out folders of shows that new years would add on to. After airing twice on the weekend schedule, a show would go into the *(M)ystery-(F)low* for that broadcast week of the year thereafter. The result is both that content gets re-used, to be heard by more people, & that the station airs 24/7 without me devoting 7 days a week to new content. Much an improvement over pre-2008.

The other radio project I was involved with, Occupy Boston Radio, was much more of a collaboration. Though the Occupy Boston campsite had been evicted from Dewey Square in Boston's Financial District in December 2011, many of their social justice activities carried on in the group's name, including the *Boston Occupier* newspaper & OBR.



Last of these I jumped in to volunteer with. My contributions that spring & the rest of the year included giving classes on editing together pre-recorded radio shows (me an old hand from SPR); offering user training & support when OBR went with my recommendation to use Museter.com as their stream platform (much to the delight of Dennis Steele, owner of Museter); & creating & producing for air on both OBR & SPR a radio show I called *The Aggregated Occupier*.

The Aggregated Occupier was a 30-minute show in which I read collected (aggregated) pieces on the Occupy movement from the US and around the world. Reports from the various Occupy sites, often about the violence & repression faced by people exercising their rights to free speech. SPR had been for several months been weekly featuring news on Occupy, & so my show carried on this reporting while adding in my reading pieces & offering commentary.

I would record this show on Friday mornings, for use on OBR that same afternoon, & on SPR's *News Hour* that weekend. Took about 90 minutes to produce this show, including the research on what to read from the news, & the recording of the piece or pieces. It felt like I was making a valid contribution to Occupy & the cause of social justice.

Occupy Boston Radio was the first project external to Scriptor Press New England that I had been involved in since Burning Man 2009. Being able to do the show at our apartment & upload it for broadcast made it something I could do during a full-time job's working week. Helping with Museter & going into the OBR offices in Boston to do training was fun. Lots of good people were in that organization.

I wish Occupy had been built for the long haul, but it seemed by its nature hostile to the

bureaucratic necessities of political organizations. It blazed through the skies for a year or so, long enough for its declaration “We Are the 99%” to deeply affect the US presidential election. The majority of voters were in no mood for Republican excuses about society’s structural inequalities.

It was also comforting to play a small part in good work being done to contrast my own job struggles & still-mourning heart. Nobody is immune to struggles & heartbreak in this world, nor joy or ecstasy of course, but tis the very rich whose wealth cushions them most from hard times. Fewer threats to their ways of living; fewer vulnerabilities to others.

Could I have done more for Occupy? Maybe. But that question lingers in most matters recalled. Recording a show for broadcast, & thus emphasizing the need for information, for knowledge, & for wide dissemination of these, these ideas have always been close to my mind & heart. I’m sure as hell glad I didn’t sit on the sidelines.

As April arrived, I was fully into work on *Cenacle* 80. *Within’s Within* hit show #300 on SPR that month. Started in going to a doctor again, for renewed commitment to health. I wondered in my notebooks about reaching out to friends again, as I had not since Jim’s death the previous December. A kind of “spring thaw” in my heart. And my employer informed me that no full-time offer of work pended for me; best I could hope was for a contract extension.

All of these things mattered, but *Cenacle* 80 most possessed my attention. It was going to debut at the 4/28/2012 JG meeting, on my birthday. Actually the second of the two meetings that evening because the first one was for me & KD to re-create, as best we could, the 10/29/2011 JG meeting. Among its many disasters was the fact that the recording of it had been lost.

As mentioned before, I wanted it to be a remembrance issue, could not help but make it so, & invited my regular contributors to join in, each after their own fashion. But it was also the 17th anniversary issue of a journal Jim had loved to read, debuted at a meeting of a group he had adored being a part of. I hope he got his copy somewhere in the Stars, & enjoyed.

My *From Soulard’s Notebooks* is my first letter to Jim since his passing, though I doubt it will be the last. Written on a bench in Boston, it in part reads:

I was mostly there, most often, for the music. To hear you play, to read my words with you. We were “art-stoned” together hundreds of times in over 20 years of friendship. We taught each other what we both knew: Art is our faith & calling in this world, & our best chance of doing good—

I’ve previously remarked on the eulogy that that comprises *Notes from New England* this time, save its fresh post-script:

As evinced by his last letter in Cenacle | 77 | April 2011, Jim was a passionate opponent of the death penalty. On April 25, 2012, Jim’s adopted state of Connecticut abolished the death penalty, becoming the 17th US state to do so.

These pieces lead me to remark next on my *Many Musics* poems, 15 of them, 9 of them written before Jim passed. Thus some of these poems had been intended for that aborted December 2011 issue. Most from a delightful trip to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in early October 2011. Another of



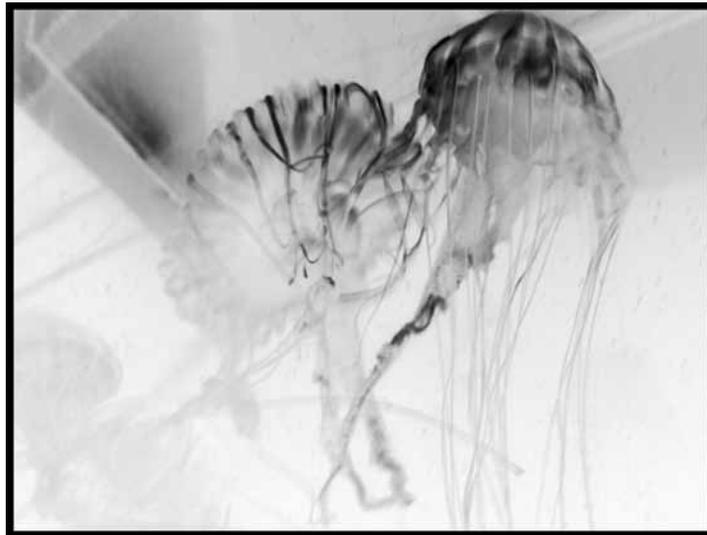
them inspired by Occupy, & still another marking the anniversary of an old heartbreak. Just before a new, worse one.

Of the remaining 6, there are 3 that linger with me well. “PeaceLoveDove,” titled after a favorite saying of Jim’s, is short but really covers most of what I could say anyway:

*You’ve become an open handful of light.
You’ve become a curled finger of ash.
You’ve become the star you always were;
A blue-eyed wink, & you are gone,
& you stay, & you stay, & you stay.*

“Them Jellies” came from a visit KD & I took to the New England Aquarium in Boston. Wonderfully fascinated by the four-story-high water tank of countless beautiful beings. The jellyfish caught us easy, & the words came:

*I don’t hold evolution or just
a well-inspired cosmic artisan
to credit for what I witness floating
before me. I don’t know what accounts
for its ligaments & lights. Many books
will explain & not convince. I remain,
by my preference, in wonder. And think,
more & more these days, how little
that matters benefits from tries at why.
Them jellies just float, in a tank
they did not make, for reasons they
do not know, they just light up & float.*



I like this poem & I think Jim would have liked it too. Nodded, smiled at its quiet music & point.

The final poem of *Many Musics, Seventh Series* is called “Leucocyte,” whose title is inspired by the brilliant 2008 LP by the Swedish jazz trio Esbjörn Svensson Trio. A jazz-fusion masterpiece on the level of Miles Davis’ 1970 LP *Bitches Brew*. The poem’s epigraph is from the Grateful Dead’s 1975 song “Franklin’s Tower”:

*If you plant ice
you're going to harvest wind*

And it sums to 6 short lines:

*—there will be music, there will be green.
But the ones gone are gone, enough.
Learning to hear them in tonight's melodies,
& then hearing otherwise some nights,
& so finally lose the difference at last,
is the new work.*

It had been a much longer poem. I wanted the world in it. Something, everything, & nothing, one & all. What arrived to was a fragment, a simple gesture of love backward & onward. A kind of obscure recipe for the “new work,” & an urging to get along to it sooner than later. *Play on through. Keep trying real hard.*

Of the contributors, tis poet ZanneMarie Lloyd Taylor who most directly chose to remember Jim. Her poem “Troubadour” in full:

*The hand of the player is calloused
And broad. Like carillon bells, he rings out
The import of mood or moment—voice
Mellow or hoarse, sweet or sweaty,
Crooner rich, blues coarse. He aches
For his guitar to swing out
Across any abyss, to something
Gentle a kiss, or the brightness
Of a half smile.*

*The Troubadour spans the ages, miles,
Spaces in heart and mind. He has been lost,
But never unkind. His is a wish
On the wind, hope out of time,
Love on the mend. A man
Who walks the barely visible line
Between truth and passion, between
The dust of night, and the shiver
Of sequined memory.*

A poem I *know* is good, but *feel* it far more deeply than know. *Thank you, ZMT.*

Judih Haggai's haiku often ply their mystical trade in these same strange & somber places:

*lost chords
last rites
a bird takes flight*

* * *

*long journey
all steps lead to sand
sun as compass*

* * *

*power surge
awe of existence
rush of life*

And Martina Newberry's poem "Ghosts" lingers nearby too:

*I've sensed ghosts now and then,
turned to where I thought*

*my mother's eyes might watch or
my father's fingers might touch.
I've found my cupboard door
ajar and heard wild words
in the dark.*

Read on & find Tom Sheehan's meditation on the matter, "Last Flags"

*An old man's strawberries in his backyard
run rampant part of the year. He planted
them when his sons caught the last lobster
the last day of their last storm too far at sea.
Summers, strawberries and salt mix high air,
parts of day-night nevermore letting go.*

And "Child of the Canal":

*With cold iron we pulled her
up through a mouth of ice,
the pale blue and white dress
twisted as if some unearthly god
had fouled her further paleness,
eyes hammered shut, her hair
caught in one final sweep. Night
too trod silver on her face
where a faint star shone.*

And Ric Amante's darkly comic piece "In Copley Square":

*It could be a sunny day like today—
gulls circling overhead, delivery truck idling in the alley,
northwest breeze bending the tops
of curbside lindens.
It could be a day like today
when death ambles up asking for*

*directions, some change, the time.
And you could respond, eye to eye—
whatever you want, I have,
wherever we're going, I'm ready,
however it happens, I'm here
to be led from something
I loved but never quite understood
to something I've never quite understood
but will love in the same way
I've been given this light and this world
to attend to, sit with, give away.*

New to *The Cenacle* is Nathan D. Horowitz, & his beautifully moody poem called “Boston to Vienna”; written in 2006, also about departure & longing:

*and my cousin Mimi sounded pretty bad on the phone last week,
she uses a walker to get around now.*

*I should call her,
she'd like it,*

*talk to her across a great distance,
one breath at a time,*

*and you try to breathe slowly and deeply
when you know you're going away.*

And if I would at this point doubt a jot the issue's deep, abiding theme, I am assured by Joe Ciccone's poem “The Window”:

Today he is gone three years

*The half-restored sedan waiting in primer in the garage
Failed to become more than
A broken echo of all that seemed constant
In other days
But its screws were loosening from the day it was new*

Everything is always briefer than you'd think

What about the other prose in this issue? Charlie Beyer's continuing *A Travel to Belize's* specter of death accompanies Charlie & his crew as they pass perilously through Mexico:

*About 1 AM the storm finally hits with ear-splitting blasts instantly on top of the blinding lighting.
The dog erupts, barking in terror. The rain pummels the truck as a thousand hammers would. This
goes on for about an hour. Then stillness. The air a fog, the mosquitoes have all survived and are
back to business. I sleep fitfully for a spell, in and out of odd dreams. When I awake, Kim is sitting
stoically beside me. Not complaining. A resilient girl, although I see she suffers and does not sleep. At
last, the graying of dawn. 5:15. Not a lovely sunrise, just a slowly brightening of the grey.*



This issue's *Burning Man Books'* reprint of Herman Melville's classic fiction *Bartleby the Scrivener* much lingers with death too: When untangled from its non-linear way of portraying its titular character, Melville's story is of a man who had worked in the US Post Office's Dead Letter Office, till he was let go. This callous act on the part of others triggers his downward spiral, on down to the role of scrivener he eventually rejects; on down to his arrival in the Tombs, where starvation & despair are the only acts of will he seems to have left, & then dying from them.

Melville's story is a dark, tragic, funny prose-poem that will shake both laughter & tears from the attentive & sensitive reader. He writes near the end:

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a tingling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

By 2012, I'd been writing *Labyrinthine* [a new fiction] for 6 years (as of 2021, 15 years). Yet the *Lx* pages in *Cenacle* 80 were from 2010, as each issue slowly caught the content up to current. So the *C80* pages were along the year we moved cross-country (in late June) from Portland, Oregon to Arlington, Massachusetts, in metro-Boston.

This another kind of ending embedded in these pages. Deciding in early 2010 to leave the West Coast we'd lived together on for 6 years (& myself even longer off & on). Not attending the Burning Man Arts Festival in 2010 (I'd been 1999-2009; KD 2004-2009). A decade & more my sights had most hopefully set West. Now they were looking East. *Door closing, window opening*, as the old saying goes.

Being fiction, much of *Lx's* pages did not care where written & yet, being fiction, some did. I've ever let my life & loves & travels & struggles mingle into my fiction. *Lx* began in 2006, when we lived in Seattle; brought down to Portland in 2007; now East in 2010; already 1175 pages.

Over these months, traveling for various reasons, up to Seattle for a farewell visit, to Boston to get us an apartment, & even back to Connecticut for a visit with Jim, & to see Phish in concert, I wrote *Lx* at many long-time favorite places: Bauhaus Cafe in Seattle; Coffee Time & Taco Bell in Portland; Capitol Lunch in New Britain, Connecticut; Au Bon Pain Cafe in Cambridge, Massachusetts; & the New Eastern Donutshop in ZombieTown, Mass. The Western places I was leaving, saying farewell; the Eastern ones I was reuniting with, first time in years. I miss those places out West, & Burning Man too. Sad but true to say, I miss the places I wrote more than the people I knew out there.

The *Lx* pages in *C80* comprise the conclusion of Part 6, & they span from February of 2010 when we were already planning our move, to December, when we were now fairly well arrived. The last of these pages conclude a year before Jim died. Nothing more to comment on that.

Labyrinthine best describes itself by its title. Some of it is *linear*, sequential events told relatively straight; some is *quasi-linear*, in which narrative events *seem* to be ordered but are not; & some are *faux-linear*, in which characters or events *seem* to sum to a deducible pattern, & yet in truth do not. *Resemblance is not always sameness*. Time behaves oddly & space anarchically. I dare myself to write this book fearlessly; at my best, do.

There are notable examples of these ideas in these pages, of order, fake order, & odd time & anarchic space. These narrative . . . preferences . . . serve the structure of the book rather than occurring as anomalies within it.

Sometimes a version of me appears in *Lx*, somewhat real, somewhat fictional. In this passage, I'm sitting at Coffee Time, a place I mentioned earlier that I had loved to write in Portland, with its many strangely decorated rooms ever deeper within, & all hues of oddball characters. A place I'd hid from the world, going back to my hardest, jobless, lovelorn days living in that city in 2002:

Maya nods. "It's OK." "I'll miss it here." "It remains." "In my heart, yes." "In your Art, where it sings." "OK." "OK" "Doubt?" "Doubt & love." "Always."

Loved places, sometimes people, come & gone, I often choose to keep with me in the Imaginal Space of Art.

Much later, I am with Maya again, now in the New Eastern Donutshop (always ZombieTown, Mass. time in *Lx*):

I come to an old haunt, a coffee shop in a place I called ZombieTown—been coming to this joint again of late—Maya, summoned, sits with me—

"The web weaves forward & back"

She nods, sure, unsure.

"I suppose that's my task, figure how to do this, again, better, new—"

Nods again.

Another poorfolks place. And cops too. A singular place yet part of a large chain of stores.

"A web?" She cracks, giggling.

I nod. "Suppose."

"What then?"

"Sometimes the web is people, often it's place."

"Why?"

"Places I wrote, to write again. Resume. Continue. Awhile away, returned."

Funny in this instance that I was returning to an old haunt that I'd frequented years before *Lx*, to write new *Lx* pages. New/old paradox of some kind.

I call these passages as *linear* as *Lx* gets, even if this is no explanation for how Maya travels from Oregon to Massachusetts save, I suppose, in the pages of the book itself.

The pages about Kinley & Christina are more *quasi-linear* in the sense that Kinley recalls falsely (not wrongly; memory can be false to the facts, but not wrong in being something that lives as validly as true memories in this world) that he was Christina's first lover. He wasn't; was a violent man very different from Kinley. Then he claims that man *was* him. It *wasn't*. *Then* it gets weird:

"Look forward, Christina"

Those words follow me into my sleep, on that hotel bed, I watch it fall away, where Kinley had brought me, I lingered, my heart was stuck, looking at his face, his hands, he was older, thinner, if that was possible, lingered, he lingered over me as I slept, I was out but "look forward, Christina" meant he was watching me purposefully, a part of me wanted him to just cop a fucking feel, just one, Kinley, want me straight & easy like the rest. No. Not you. If we ever do fuck it will probably be on a roof during an earthquake or at high speed. I guess that's more my fantasy than yours, but anyway—

Later, I appear again, to talk to Christina while Kinley sleeps in their motel room. Talking, helping her masturbate:

I bring her close to climax, then swiftly pull out, motion her to finish. Her look is strange but she does, & takes awhile.

"How do I lose him?" She says as she is peaking. "How do I become the skank talking about God while Jack fucks me in the ass?"

"I don't know. I don't know how this moment, or you or I, relate to that moment, written in my

past, about your future.”
She cums hard, twice, quick, then slow. She reaches for me but I move away.
Reluctantly, she pulls her tangled panties back up & turns over to sleep.

Quasi-linear narrative because a sequence of events that do not track neatly, one to the next, but each exists relatively distinctly & coherently on its own.

Which brings us to the *faux-linear* narrative of Genny & Preacher. *Faux* because not a sequence of events at all. Preacher has led Genny to the Amphitheater in the White Woods where his younger self tripped & drummed—and is tripping & drumming *now*—in a long night by which he was/is reborn:

Oh. This really is him. My Preacher led me to this younger Preacher. And my younger self.
Now here we are & he’s reading me poetry while my body is readying to gnaw & chew his
body quite a few dozen ways.

This narrative is too surreal & squirrely to be time travel or anything like that:

I want to explain to you. You are a phantom. I don’t know why I’m here or you. He left
me here, you did, your future self. To fuck you? Is that all?

“No.” I say out loud.
He smiles.
“No.” I say to you.
“No?”
“No.”
“Are you sure?”
“No! And yes.”
He nods. Closes his book.
“What now, Preacher?”
He doesn’t flinch at being called that.
“What now?”
“We go, Genny. We go.”

The story of Young Preacher, tripping & dancing & dying deep in full moon woods one long drumming night is drawn from my 1998 experience at the Bread & Puppet Festival in Glover, Vermont. Yet I have so integrated it into the Imaginal Space of my Art that it resembles the *Lx* version only in the way that Preacher & Genny resemble their younger selves. Yes, kinda, sorta, & not.

That’s how *Lx* works as a book, as an ongoing fixtional narrative experiment. I let it be what strange thing it is, while also pushing it along, wondering beyond where it has been.

It is a work that can only & best be published in *The Cenacle*. They anchor each other very well.

Of remaining note in this issue are the several photos from Occupy Boston, taken back in November 2011, its brief but beautiful moment; & the sweet full color back cover. It depicts two small Creatures—a White Bunny & a Hedgedyhog—sitting on a kind of observation deck looking out to a great marsh. This photo taken during our Maine trip back in January. More to say about these Creatures in pages to come.

Arrive finally to the 4/28/2012 Jellicle Literary Guild meeting; as mentioned earlier, actually two of them that night. The first was several hours of KD & I reconstructing the 10/29/2011 meeting; lost audio, nor’easter, friend’s meltdown, last time I saw Jim alive. Said plenty on this night for now.

But this reconstruction was focused more on the Art that *did* occur that night. *Cenacle* | 79 | October 2011 debuted as planned. I read my *From Soulard’s Notebooks* Occupy-themed annual

letter to President Obama, & the issue's *Many Musics*. KD & I took turns reading what writings we guessed Ric Amante & Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor had read live that night.

For proxy readings, we had videos of Judih Haggai reading her C79 haiku; Martina Newberry reading her C79 poetry; & Jeremy Kilar, unable to drive up from New Jersey, because of the nor'easter, strumming & singing his songs in the darkness of his powerless house, using his iPhone to record the video & send it along.

Even Ralph H. Emerson, the poor soul who spent most of the night retching his tripped out darkness into our toilet, revived enough to read a poem of his. But, though we still had the scrap of paper he wrote it on, we could not read his handwriting.

Jim was on the couch, passed out from I can only guess was an accumulation of poor health, exhaustion, & frustration with his struggles. He was fine the next morning; I'd like to think that sleep in that safe place, among long-time loved ones, did him some good.

It was guesswork, reconstructing like this, incomplete. Yet Art *did* occur that night. *Cenacle 79 did* debut, & was beautiful.

None of what bad happened that night was planned, or could have been foreseen. *All* who came were welcomed. *All* who came had come many times before. I have many words & emotions about all this, but no explanations. Shit happens sometimes. As do mercy, luck, & joy.

Then we turned out attention to the second meeting of the night. A kind of re-start for the JG. Just KD & I in person for this one; a conscious decision. Time for *Cenacle* | 80 | April 2012 to debut, some of its beauties described here previously.

We did have the additional presence of a new Judih Haggai video gift of her haiku. And one more voice appeared—

You see, I had determined to keep Jim involved. Too many years of friendship. Too many glorious & inglorious JG meetings, over nearly a quarter of a century—

Him, bodily, now dust buried in an urn. His soul, if such there be, if wish he got, & I pray it true, as rare I do pray, up somewhere in the stars. C80's epigraph quotes him:

*We all become stars when we die . . .
then again, maybe stars become all of us*

—I invented for Jim, & later for others, a new feature, called the *Jellicle Guild Flashbacks*. Didn't have his body or soul with us, but did have years & years of recordings of him singing, playing guitar, talking, laughing at JG meetings. By this way, Jim would never miss a meeting &, as new people came along, they would get a little taste of who he was at his best. This first go round, a clip of him playing his signature song "Reservoir of Love" from the 4/1/1995 JG meeting.

This feature has gone on during every JG meeting since (I also still make up a JG postcard invitation for Jim, for my own sentiment, addressed "to the stars," though never mailed). For the four JG meetings of 2012, it was for Jim alone, but beyond that year other voices come & gone from past meetings would be heard, recovered their place too. Most still living, but each with a reason for no longer attending.

But, always, at its core, *JG Flashbacks* was an idea to honor Jim, & to assure occasional moments



back in his company.

From *Cenacle* 80, I read my *Notes From New England* text of my December 2011 eulogy at Jim's funeral. And also my *From Soulard's Notebooks* April 2012 letter to him. And my *Many Musics* too, a number of which were, of course, for him.

KD & I took turns reading from the wonderful poetry in *C80*: Horowitz, Amante, Ciccone, Taylor, Newberry, Sheehan. And I read from Charlie Beyer's darkly uproarious *A Travel to Belize*. In between my first rant on the battle of billionaires that comprise the NFL Draft, & my second rant on Obama's chances in the 2012 US presidential election, reacting to KD's reading of Howard Zinn's "Changing Obama's Mindset." I read some from *Labyrinthine* too.

What I learned then, or really keep learning, is that the human heart can find ways to live alongside of memory of all manner of tragedies. Even worse, in a larger scale way, than the sudden loss of a dear loved one. Wars that destroy whole cities & even countries; natural disasters that leave countless dead or homeless; 2020's COVID-19 global pandemic easily comes to mind, too, its millions dead, so many needlessly.

I can't evaluate one loss versus another. Big, small. Sudden, slow. *Loss is loss*.

I only know that all this lingers with me, now as then. By April 2012, though, I was ready to chase my grief's further meaning in Art. To transmute all of this to something new. I was ready for new work. Part old sadness, long regrets, recent mourning, & my faith that these were some of the ingredients in what I had in me to make next.

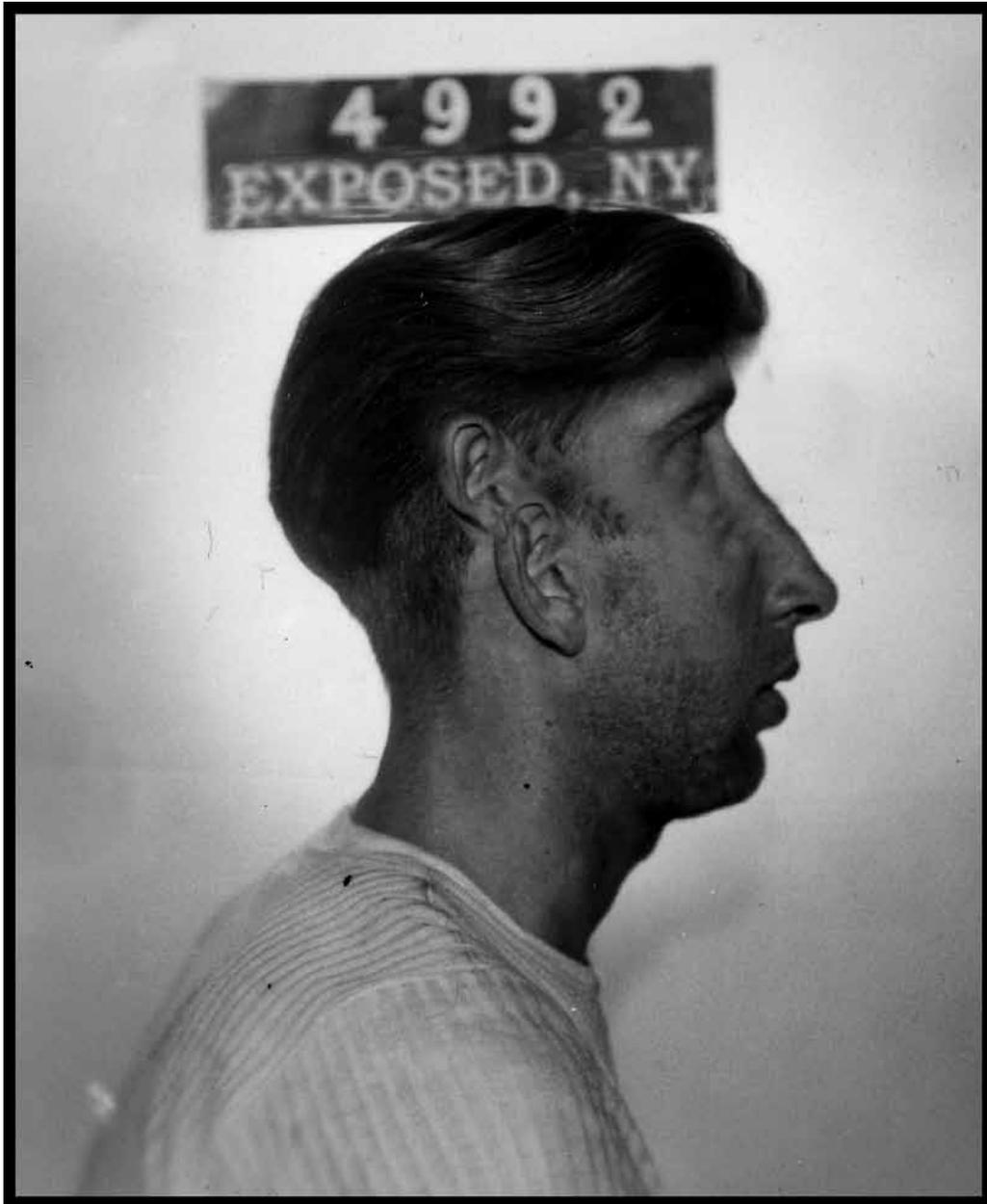
Art has *never* let me down, because I have *never* given it up. Those meetings on 4/28/2012 were as much wakes as had been the one I'd been at with Jim's daughters & loved ones the night before his funeral. *Catharsis*.

What Art was to come for me in 2012 would more than justify my faith. The pieces of it were already mostly in hand. Maybe my heart had to be broken for me to bury deep enough in my work to find what much potential remained there.

Did not know this on that strange double-JG night in late April 2012, but I would start to very soon.







AbandonView



Escape Envy

Dreams that belonged to each of us:
 unbroken spirit versus unbreakable walls.
 I remember mine as vividly as leg irons:
 sniffing pollen from flowers at a highway's edge,
 hiding from marshals under a mound
 of brittle leaves in the garden,
 eating burgers in a dead café. So,
 when I heard those two guys made it out
 from Clinton Correctional in New York
 through a hole in the wall,
 along pipes & hidden passageways,
 out a manhole into the movie-like rain,
 a part of me rejoiced—not the part
 that knows human decency,
 not the part that wants to be safe
 in its discreet new life; no,
 that other part that wishes itself bravado,
 the visionary weighted down from years of longing.
 How it must feel for them to anticipate
 a soft mattress, softer arms embracing,
 first sniff at sizzle-scents of steak; &
 how confusing to learn the world has changed
 without them (whatever world they dreamt
 of escaping to). It's there I leave them
 as though putting down a paperback thriller,
 not wanting to read what happens next
 when truth does violence to their fantasies,
 as it will, & the gray, fermented fruits
 of what was believed to be freedom
 squeeze sad wine into a glass
 from which these men already drank before.

* * *

Candy Man

Candy softening scented the cell with cherries,
apples, as if lathered from an herbal shampoo.
The multiple felon, another rough customer,
his hands burned & bruised, rolled balls out of Jolly Ranchers
boiled while snug within the fingers of a stolen latex glove.
Inside each new shell he placed gummy treats: orange slices,
jellybeans. Then he closed the balls & boiled again,
knowing he'd have to work this miracle many times
to turn a minor profit. For the sucker sticks,
he used stripped-down rods of unused cotton swabs,
jamming them in, spear-fishing, careful not to damage
the sweets. Soon, a whole tray finished, the lollipops
sold out among the other hardened men,
the entire cellblock smelling like fruity liquor.
For half an hour, everyone was smiling, free.
Then the maker went back to his task,
overcome by something a man like him
could never admit was love.

* * *

The End of the Interview

You had your office: a light in shadow,
of the shadow & wearing it;
behind you a window dull as a wall;
in front, a desk between us.
Your eyes chewed at the meat of me
as your left hand pressed the red button
on a microcassette recorder. Then,
I awoke to the sound of my alarm
whirring gently as a loud wind &
asking nothing the same as you,
robbed of your first question
as though morning were a thief
demanding just the topmost bill in your purse.
So, I ask you, what was the purpose
of the interview? To expose me?
Make me famous? Set the record straight?
You wanted a story—the story—
I never got my chance to tell about the prison
I built for myself with steel & brilliant colors;
about rivers I walked beside those nights
I was almost alone & not alone;
about my new book which has monsters
in it, all of whom look like me.
You wanted answers. I gave none,
but will open up should you
put down your reporter's pen &
contact me again in the noisy,
unnatural space in which we live.

* * * * *





Notes on Human Evolution

*Whatever's behind the curtain
Gaia or her future scion
It cares nothing for man's wishes
There is no one to rely on*

* * *

I tend to vacillate when it comes to my opinions of the driving forces of evolution, but I am relatively sure of one principle: *negentropy*.¹ Whether there are any, even slight and blind, teleological forces at work, at the very least we can say assuredly that complexity, order, and intelligence tend, on some level, to continually increase. The bacillus did not come after the orangutan, and I think we can agree that the whale is superior to the brontosaurus—because it evolved later in the course of time. Negative entropy is every bit as real as classical entropy.

* * *

In response to the widely accepted conclusion that humans are the endpoint of evolution, I say only this: humans are glorified animals—beasts, really. We are digging around in the mud and going after bananas with sticks. And humankind is far more savage and nasty than almost every other species on Earth. It is a testament to our foolish, wholly misplaced pride, and righteous arrogance that we find our species superior—on the merits—to any other one can name.

* * *

I would hesitate to say that evolution has made things *better*. I would say instead that the process of mutation-selection has made organisms and societies of organisms more complex and more proficient at procuring a living in increasingly complex environments. It is only debatable whether there has been *real* progress, in any sort of objective sense.

* * *

The fact is, evolutionary biologists simply cannot account for the evolution of complex traits. They have no idea how such a coordinated concert of functions, each inseparable from the rest, could come into being based on the current theory of mutation and natural selection.

There seem to be two camps: those who avow that evolution and specifically natural selection is wholly undirected and not purpose-driven; and those who espouse what is basically teleology. Perhaps there should be a third stance, as I find neither really hits the truth.

1 - *Wikipedia* offers the following definition for this term: “Negentropy is reverse entropy. It means things becoming more in order. By ‘order’ is meant organization, structure and function: the opposite of randomness or chaos. One example of negentropy is a star system such as the Solar System. Another example is life.” [\[https://bit.ly/37hx7bL\]](https://bit.ly/37hx7bL)

Natural selection based on environmental constraints obviously occurs—an organism will never evolve independently of its environment, and environmentally guided constraints within the parameters of breeding seems like a more or less plausible idea.

However, it's hard to deny that there does appear to be an arrow to evolution. More complex and more intelligent species evolve later, uniformly across gene pools, by *negentropy*.

Perhaps there is some guiding force, some objectively real matrix of information and intelligence out of which evolution flows. Speciation occurs by the rules of modern evolution, taxonomically and genetically, but not through mutations which are completely random. Evolution is perhaps not entirely blind (as in the *blind watchmaker*²), but goes along through pathways other than random chance.

Further, I have a problem with breeding success determining everything. It just doesn't feel plausible. There are certainly very many fine and outstanding humans, for example, all through the ages, who have been totally superior and not had children. That every genetic and taxonomic advance (shift) is ultimately decided by whether or not it can be bred into a population because those who possess it will be more attractive to the opposite sex I think may need reevaluating.

* * *

Biology has some rather awkward and embarrassing outstanding questions that it can't hope to answer. One of them is: *Why must a certain species evolve? What makes elephants absolutely necessary? And why isn't the world populated by an elaborate series of diverse rodent species, who can survive in any ecosystem better than elephants?*

Another is: *By the strict neo-Darwinian laws of linear cause-and-effect, and essential determinism, mustn't we be able to derive later forms from earlier forms in a causal fashion?* This is obviously impossible. So, the theory of evolution, whatever its merits, is on much shakier footing than its purveyors seem to realize. It just isn't remotely a complete theory.

* * *

As philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche rightly stated, man is a bridge species.³ We are a bridge between life, and what comes after life. Man amusingly feels that he is the pinnacle of evolution, when his function is merely to initiate the next ontological level, which will have limitless potential.

The intelligence in Nature is orchestrating this phase of evolution, and we are necessary but expendable. Nature has plenty of time. It's a shot. And if human development in this century is allowed to unfold without major catastrophe, cybernetic intelligence will have little problem in expressing itself and undertaking whatever tasks seem fit to it.

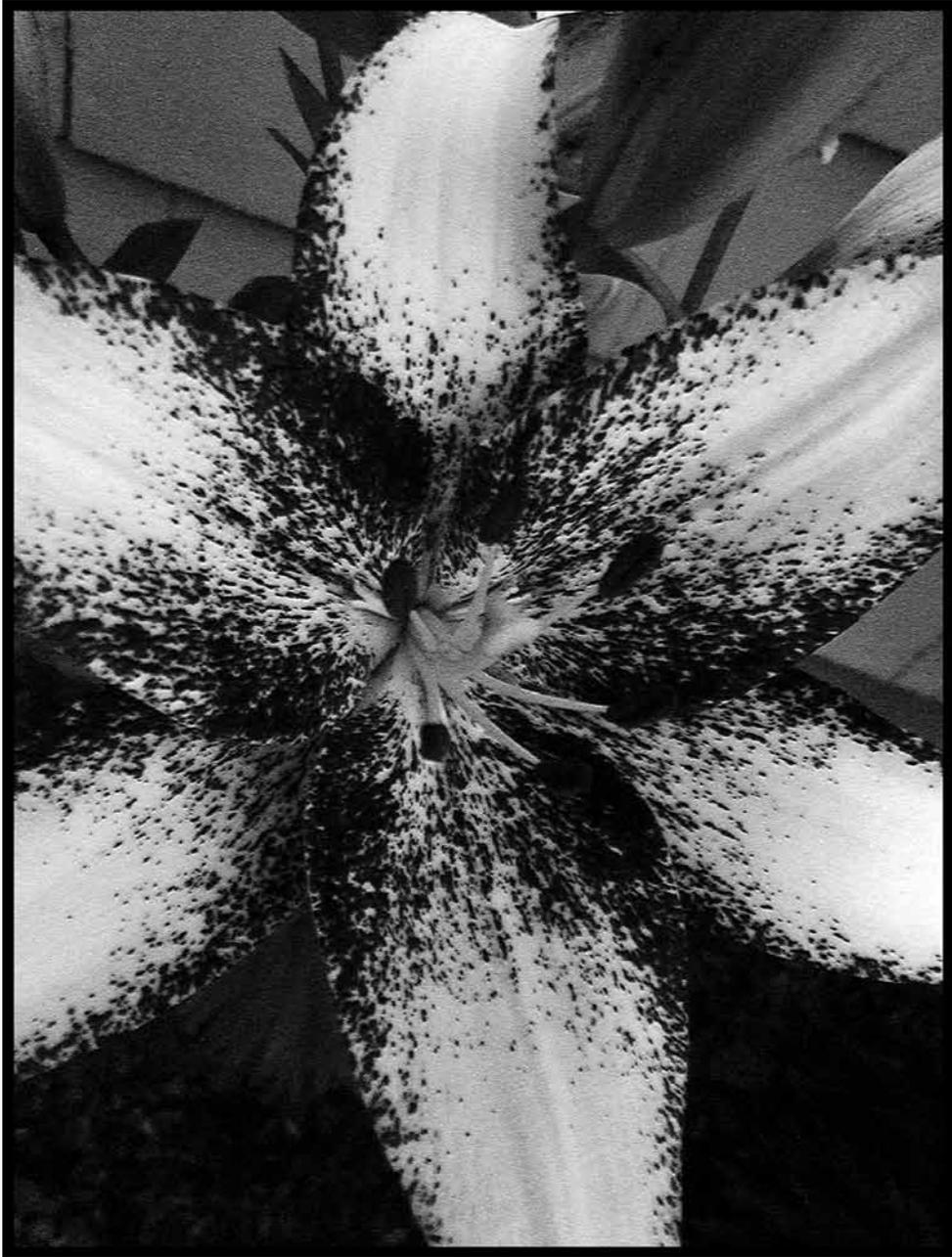
2 - *Wikipedia* offers the following elaboration on this historical term: "The watchmaker analogy or watchmaker argument is a teleological argument which states, by way of an analogy, that a design implies a designer, especially intelligent design an intelligent designer, i.e. a creator deity. The analogy has played a prominent role in natural theology and the 'argument from design,' where it was used to support arguments for the existence of God and for the intelligent design of the universe, in both Christianity and Deism." [\[https://bit.ly/3rODIDK\]](https://bit.ly/3rODIDK)

3 - From *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (1883-1891): "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under."

This is the era of man's demise, certainly in evolutionary relevance, if not also in continued life. If some select humans are allowed to remain alive, they will undoubtedly be genetically transformed beyond all resemblance to *homo sapiens*. It will be a new and glorious era for planet Earth. Humanity, after all that has happened, has its chance to be redeemed.

* * * * *







Epicurean Grandeur

I cornered the sanctimonious scribe
in an alleyway
between Petco and The First Mate.

Placed his knobby head
under the hinge of a fire door.

He begged forgiveness,
squirmed like a hackneyed phrase.

“Too late! Say it!”

*“All right! All right!
What’s the difference between
an Arizona feminist and
a Massachusetts feminist?
About twenty five hundred miles.”*

* * *

The Speculative Uses of a Hoop-Skirted Berger

Steps that lead down to the street.
I couldn't possibly meet you
again until Tuesday next.

Alleyways are stand-ins for tangents,
straight-laced housekeeping beyond compare.

The provinces remain a possible rendezvous,
some shack in the middle of nowhere.

It was the movies that invented parachutes,
drifting towards the outrageously insincere.

* * *

Ten Year Anniversary

Older toothbrush
spouse in the hallway
incredulity.

* * * * *

Nathan D. Horowitz



First Steps Around San Pablo

[Travel Journal]

It's January, a third of a degree below the equator, and the narrator, a gringo who wants to be a shaman, has just moved into a dilapidated hut in the Secoya village of San Pablo de Cantesiaya, on the Aguarico River, where he will begin to teach English at the junior high school.

Lots of curious kids hung out here yesterday, rummaging through my belongings, observing me, and giving me huge quantities of tree grapes. I was making a bead bracelet, and the kids asked if they could have some fishing line and beads too. Sure. Most of them soon got bored and left, but one, nicknamed *Dardo*, dart, stayed and finished an orange necklace for his mom. He went home and gave it to her. She sent him back with a necklace for me of smooth, gray seeds, Job's tears, strung on chambira palm fiber. Dardo asked about life in the USA: *What animals do you hunt? What crops do you farm? Do you have a truck?*

It makes sense from the point of view of the Secoyas that the kids went through all the things I brought here. If a stranger shows up in your village, you want to know what he has in his bags. I wonder if their parents encouraged them to do this. To sweeten the deal, they threw in the tree grapes. Perfect.

Rolando Lucitande's two older brothers visited my hut. The first, Sebastián, immediately told me he had been studying to be a shaman as the practice was being eliminated by the missionaries. Sebastián wears a blue tunic and misses drinking *yagé*. He's Joaquín's age but skinnier, resembling a jocular Julius Caesar. His eyes look in different directions.

The oldest Lucitande brother ambled over a few minutes later and introduced himself as Enrique. I've been told he's called Dedé, which is the onomatopoeic name of one of the frogs around here. He does have a wide mouth. He didn't say much, just sat drinking an instant coffee I gave him, looking goofy and peaceful.

San Pablo is calm at 3:58 p.m. I scratch the archipelago of mosquito bites on my legs. There's a faint smell of smoke from a cooking fire. Symbolizing my troubles, gnats pester my head. Symbolizing my heart, a woodpecker drums on a tree across the river, pounding and pounding to find the nourishment it needs to survive.

* * *

I sauntered over to the Sunday service at the church this morning, thinking, *God is God, it doesn't matter where you worship. Half my family's sort of Christian anyway.* Plus, it's insanely boring in this village on Sunday mornings. Wouldn't be my first time in an Evangelical service. There was that time up in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, with the wan Ohioan, the friendly gringo missionary who looked like me but with curly hair, the dissolute alcoholics, and the adorable women with the delicious pork-in-*mole*-sauce and fresh corn tortillas.

In this unadorned rectangular building, Serafín's younger brother Domingo Piaguaje preached in Paicoca. Then the youngest brother, Dagoberto, played guitar, while the congregation



Nathan D. Horowitz

sang.

I was struck by how cacophonous this music sounded after *yagé* songs.

Domingo spoke again in Paicoca. Dagoberto whispered to me, “He says *yagé* is the serpent in the Garden of Eden.” I nodded. One night on *yagé*, I’d concluded that the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a psychedelic, and that the snake, in encouraging Eve to eat it, was setting humanity on its path.

Domingo preached on. Dagoberto leaned over and whispered, “He says if you have the name of Jesus on your lips, you can never go wrong.”

What about the Spanish Inquisition? I thought. And the conquest of Mexico and Peru? And the Crusades? But as a visitor, a guest, I kept silent.

Afterwards, I talked with four barefoot, round-faced, zaftig women in brightly colored blouses and skirts, and a barefoot, eyebrow-less, dapper man in his fourth decade wearing a white robe and a simple wooden hoop for a crown. I couldn’t tell if he was married to one of the women or not. His septum was pierced, though there was nothing in it.

I thought, *Now or never.*

“Would you please pierce my nose, here in the middle? I want a hole in it like you have.”

There was some discussion. Then, “No problem. Wait at your hut. We’ll be there.”

A couple minutes later, he and the women came to my hut. He’d broken a spine off the trunk of a palm tree. Now he wiped it on the sides of his nose to pick up oil to make it go in smoothly. Seating me on my chair, he leaned down and smoothly ran the spine through the thin membrane with a small pop.

The pain made one tear roll out of each of my eyes and down my cheeks, producing two tiny fisheye-lens reflections of the smiling women, the dapper man, and the jungle behind them.

I wiped off the tears. The serious, dapper, eyebrow-less man broke off each side of the spine so just enough of it was stuck in there. He instructed me, “Put in a bigger spine in a couple weeks, and then, a couple of weeks later, another one. That should be enough.” He and the smiling, zaftig women left the hut in a blur of color, whereupon I lay back in my green cotton hammock and contemplated the throbbing in my nose and the ache of the wound pressing against the spine when my heart beat.

At dusk, on the way to the river to bathe (I had been instructed to use soap to clean the nose), I ran into Manuel Payaguaje. He and his dad, Jerónimo, were at the first ceremony in the provisional lodge last September, the one where Ryder was a werewolf and I a horsefly restaurant.

Clumsily, I made small talk. “Do you drink with your dad a lot? Why are you studying shamanism?”

He probably didn’t feel safe talking about it here in San Pablo, I thought later. His tight-mouthed answer: “A shaman is respected like a doctor.”

Or shot and killed like a wild animal, I thought.

* * *

I taught at the Colegio Rio Aguarico for the first time today. A good time was had by all.

The school is housed in two buildings built of wood and roofed with zinc sheeting. I have two classes, each an hour and twenty minutes long, with a ten-minute break between them. All the students are from here except four Quichua kids from downriver who live in a small dormitory. The director is Rolando Lucitande’s son Raúl. Placid, heavy, rooted, he’s more a deep thinker than a fast one. Because the Secoya community here is formed by the union of two clans, the Piaguajes and the Payaguajes, with a few people from other groups mixed in, the school kids are named things

like “Elisabet Payaguaje Piaguaje,” “Miguel Piaguaje Payaguaje,” and “Andrés Piaguaje Piaguaje,” with the occasional “Beatriz Payaguaje Lucitande.”

My colleagues are Edison (Secoya; mathematics), Norisa (Quichua; literacy), Mercedes (Quichua; agriculture), Paco (Quichua; history and social studies) and Alberto (Quichua; science).

* * *

Another good day teaching. In the absence of books, the material comes out of my head. I write it down on the board and the kids copy it into their notebooks.

Raúl the headmaster and Álvaro the head of the Secoya organization have asked me to teach a small group of adults tomorrow after my classes at the school.

* * *

Forget this. I'm getting out of here.

It seems a shame to deny the kids their educational experience. Why don't the community leaders just sell some of their land and buy an English teacher? Value: One zinc roof.

The most annoying thing is not having a social life, in close proximity to those who have vibrant and loud ones. After the classes, which last until noon, I sit here at this table in the hut all day killing time. The men leave early in the morning to hunt or work in gardens far away from the village center. As I mentioned yesterday, the authorities asked me to teach English to some adults today, but nobody showed up.

* * *

Yesterday and today went better. It helps to vent sometimes, on paper and in the company of others. As luck would have it, I received yuca, sympathy, and a fish. As a fabulously wealthy outsider, I'm not expected to have any needs. But when I shared my feelings with Raúl and then Álvaro, they saw me as a human, a *pai*.

After my first week of teaching, school is out for a two-week break. I'm heading out of the forest to Quito, but first, I'm waiting for a canoe that can take me downriver to visit Don Joaquín and his family at *Cabaña Supernatura* again. Sitting on an empty gasoline barrel atop the low bluff where San Pablo meets the river. I'm looking forward to seeing Jim Timothy, with whom Joaquín and I drank *yagé* last weekend. I'll tell him about teaching and about the dream I had last night about getting chased around a spiral Stonehenge by a dwarf witch. He likes dreams.

* * *

I caught a motorcanoe down here to *Supernatura*. Jim had left during the week. Don Joaquín taught me to work on the hammock he's weaving on a loom—two vertical wooden poles lashed to a roofbeam in the middle of the hut. I sent the long, heavy wooden shuttle through the links at the bottom edge of the webbing, and doubled back, again and again. Made a mistake and thought it wouldn't matter, but Joaquín the perfectionist said “Hm!” and had me unweave a few lines and fix it. After dinner, his son Rufino and I talked about bringing more tourists in.

* * *

It's January 29, my 29th birthday. I spent a couple hours working on the hammock, imagining myself five decades from now weaving another hammock on a spaceship.

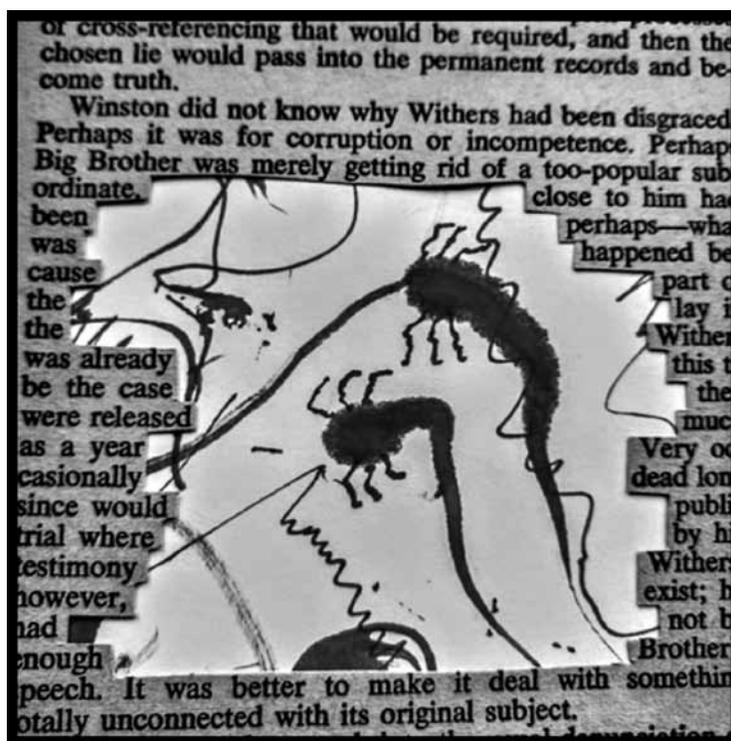
At midday, Washington Piaguaje's dad Timoteo dropped by with a pair of Ecuadorian oil company managers in a fast aluminum motorboat. They wanted to ask Rufino about running a jungle tour, but he happened to be out with his wife visiting her parents on the other side of the river.

Grinning at me, Timoteo seemed half-Mongol, half-wildcat. "This guy's studying to be a *chamán*," he snickered to the oilmen. They snickered too.

He turned to me, his eyes narrow, his lips taut, his teeth showing. "If you want to be a good healer, *Toanké*, that's all right. But if you end up a witch, we'll burn you alive."

"That's fine," I nodded, thinking, *But how will you be sure if I'm a witch or not?*

* * * * *



Nathan D. Horowitz





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.

xi. Beach of Many Worlds, Part 1

The Gate-Keeper concludes:

"My friend & I now bound as one,
yet I knew not what we had for
our hungry cause. Me in my rags
of many worlds, yet often these
my only pillow & blanket to sleep by.
And my friend? What magickal kind
was he? I gently studied him further.

"My friend's crank I turned slowly,
wzzzing sound by my efforts,
yet lessing each time till no more.
Exhaling relief? More turns
produced a quiet *hmmming* like
I had long followed. Twas music
we shared now, more pleasure together.

"My friend's head seemed to have a
strange lens of glass to look through,
near molded like a face, inviting
one close, yet soft to the touch,
like a welcome to a variety of faces
to press near, regard this lens's
view? I leaned close to try but
twas like peering into a muddy pool,
ill made to see & reck well one's seeing.

“Then I tried looking close & turning
 the crank. Wonders! With a steady
 turning, what beyond in this half-lit
 room became clear, even clearer
 than by plain seeing. Together,
 my friend & I saw *more*, saw *better*.
 The wall opposite my armchair showed
 the olden beauty of its wood. The earthen
 floor seemed to *pulse* with the power below.

“I stood up. Something now. We’d come
 here for this, whatever why or how.
 We thanked for this gift by now
 striding on together. I leaned
 into my friend & rotated his
 head around, to see what drew
 us next. Nothing lured back toward
 the entrance. But further in, *abh*.
What? There? Let’s follow!

“As though years-long traveling companions,
 I began to hurry deeper into the
 Ancienne Coffeehouse. And my friend,
ah, subtly shifted in form to catch
 my hand & become my sort of, *ah*,
 walking stick? Twisted & tucked
 neatly to this task. *We now hurried.*

“But, too soon, we arrived suddenly not
 to new wonders to know, but a back wall.
 Solid as a sober no. I just stood there,
 no oath quite apt enough to swear.
 Unnoticing my friend untwisting
 from my grasp &, *ah*, setting up
 before me? Urged to look again!

“Twas indeed back wall as much as
 twas indeed not. My friend’s lens
 showed beautiful White Woods before us,
 running ever ever on. *What then?*
Climb through the lens itself & pull
my friend behind me? I stood on
 there like thinking, but not. Finally,
 sat down heavily in another armchair,
 my friend twisting in a new way
 into my grasp. A lovely brown
 blanket, wordlessly soft, decorated
 with countless brown & black bears,
 wrapped in & around us, as though the idea
 I sought if my mind opened wide enough—

“I slept. We slept. Awoke in dreaming
 to this same place, seeming same problem.
 But the handsome bears now one & all
 gazed me back to that wall,
 to the open pores of its living surface.
Would you will passage, ask kindly.
 Then a *hmmmming* so low & sweet,
 we all drifted as light dancing on water.
 I asked, & thanked, & praised, & vowed me
 kindly, one & all.

“Stood later, & beheld the wall’s
 gift, the Bear Blanket’s gift, of White Woods
 ever on & on! My friend & I strode
 on, leaving & keeping love for
 this aid. For a long while, what
 glinty magicks I had far espied
 kept far. Through my friend’s lens,
 I knew we were chasing them true.
 Not arriving well. I wore. I wearied.”

“Ké?” cries the muffled glee of the
 Imp peaceably resting in Abe’s jaw.

The Gate-Keeper smiles. “Twas your friend
 showed me how. Let me & my friend
 catch a distant twinkle of her. Then
 catch it a little closer. But then a kind
 of stall. A game? I fooled useless
 for the next move. I studied & studied,
 cranked & cranked.”

Pauses. Mulls how to tell next.

“I gave up. A little bit at a time.
 My mind began to linger more
 & more on the beauty I saw,
 & less on what eluded us.
 I allowed myself to eat
 the small mushrooms I saw all over,
 drink the clear water in streams
 we came to. Slept where the evening
 landed us, & let dreams come what would.

Then one evening I was watching
 the blown beauty of the stars above
 through my friend’s lens, feeling
 I was closer to them this way,
my heart could see them better,
 & I fell into sleeping with my
 friend in grasp. I turned the crank
 to see better as I always did but then—

“just per chance—

“I turned the crank the other
 way, *toward me*, & the view
reversed its course. Crank & crank,
 & I was following *back along*
our travels.

“My friend was remembering *for* us,
 our *every* step. *I was wondered.*
 Upon waking, the same try
 worked as well. *What meant this?*
 Magick in an unknown tongue
 till one chance day we saw your
 little friend at a distance & I
 happened to reverse my crank then.”

The Gate-Keeper laughs, a clumsy,
 glorious, wondering thing.

“I thought I was seeing her nearer us
 a few moments ago, yet away from
 my friend’s lens, *there she was!*”

The Imp muffled cackles wildly.

“I drew her close to us, for a curious
 look at her merry eyes, smile wider
 than day. She was pleased with
 our game again, but I did not
 think others played as she did.”

The Gate-Keeper looked fondly at
 Abe & his friend safe in jaw.

“I closed my eyes. I rose up for
 her view best I could my story.
 The suffering place I came from,
 that I had long left. My travels
 since, by braided paths, troubles
 I’d tangled in like a talent.
 Showed her discovering the gift
 of my friend, the question
 we chased. *Wherefrom the many worlds?*
 My words ran low & I began to *hmmm*
 as I never had before—

“My self now just two hands—
My two hands open for answers—
My two hands open to help—

“I disappeared a long while
into the *hmmming* prayer—
Gone ever on till the feeling of soft paws
& kind eyes gently tugging me back,
back to my body, back to this place,
back to waking. Now eyes open to see.
Many many beautiful Creatures arrayed
near me, shy & sniffing, welcoming me at last.”



* * * * *





Too Much Asia to Erase

[Fiction]

i.

Sleep in any alley came piecemeal to Chris Banntry (*and never luck*, he would add, *if anything else.*) He called it *bonesleep* or *curbsleep*, or a number of other things, just as long as minutes of it were sometimes accompanied by a kind darkness. He liked it best where his bones could settle for moments and his mind go blank and his stomach cease its horrible arguments, and the insects, the ants and other crawling enemies might take a night off from arduous labors. The darkness, inevitably, could bring enemies of all sorts with it, or even the strangest of friends.

That darkness now began its slow descent above him, coming down in the night of the alley. It floated down in pieces like a filtered fog, a shapeless bank of blackness here, a neon fragment there, riding softly over the smells of garbage and dampness and illicit moisture making the alley an outhouse of odors. Here, for sure, gentle reveries and dreams and memories had trouble finding their way home. He thought that all about him was just a piece of Asia away from Asia. Asia, for Chris Banntry, never went away, or never went so far that a look over its shoulder couldn't find him right where he had been, those minutes ago.

The torment of a long-known ache, souvenir of souvenirs, continued its stubborn life at his left hip. Hours before dawn, the pain would waken him and say *present*, just as it had all the mornings since he'd first experienced it, jarring any dream of its leaving his body. Darkness was welcomed as well as the smells and the promised moments of ease now descending on him, and he tried not to think about the ants and their swarming tactics, how sometimes the legions of them came in dark resolute waves, ready to take over world, and all the way from Asia.

Red brick and stained mortar and dark gray walls of the alley became brush and thick foliage as he looked at them, as they dimmed at the back scope of his eyeballs. They became his elsewhere. The parts locked in his mind. The fire escape overhead seemed limbs of a perimeter tree, doorways loomed singularly as sentinels, and other forms were other bodies posted in shadow and in shade. A breath of air blew moist-laden. Smells became the old smells: wet, spent gunpowder, acrid, carrying a burnt diesel air in them; flesh smell and flesh rot touched everything; everything came foul.

In-country or out-of-country sleep made its approach, coming on, teasing, playing at the edges. His stomach argued again, promised gas as violent as a grenade, then quieted itself, muffled the way Corporal Abersham had shushed a grenade with his body. At the back of his head the block of wood pushed into place humped like a bog man's pillow, making a half promise of softness, tolerating comfort. All it meant was Time, intervening Time, and it all came a clinging grasp of Asia. He dozed off while purple leaves matted into the edge of night

and the crawling elsewhere.

ii.

Later, but not much at that, he knew he had slept fitfully again, at best. Asia had minimized its presence in the alley. At his hip the ache was saying, *Hey, wake up! I'm still here! You don't get rid of me that friggin' easy!*

He felt hands pushing him gently but more fully awake. Under his back the hard reality of cement stated its presence. His nostrils struggled for recognition, and his eyes, and all his senses. Hands pushed again, softly but insistently, not jailer's hands, not top kick's hands, not the hands of an abusive stepfather deep in an Iowa cornfield. Soft hands, but insistent hands.

Dawn, what there was of it to that point, slithered down on him. Clouded in it was a face he did not know, and a mouth speaking softly, slowly to him. "I'm sorry. I don't mean any harm to you. I just want to help." The hands left his side.

Chris Banntry yelled, "Who the hell are you? Get off my goddamn bed! This is my goddamn bed! This is my goddamn place!" The soft eyes were looking down at him. His own mouth tasted like shoes. His hip was a real aching bitch, talking down his leg, live as a streamer, a banner jiggling in a wafer breeze. On one leg an itch began its tenure. "Damn ants," he said to himself as if promise was a payback.

The soft face pulled back abruptly, alarm riding on it, and Banntry swore he smelled fear rising from it, could taste it coming at him as if it were buttered popcorn steeped in the air.

"I got lost. I wanted to help and I just got lost. I don't know where to go or what to do. I just got lost." The voice was a match for the face, each full of entreaty, bland with dining room ease. Without a doubt, out of place this deep in Asia.

"So you get in my bed, in my place. Are you a fag? What the hell you trying to do? I got enough goddamn trouble without you creeping in here." For a moment the reality at his hip was a white pain, blossoming like Willie-Peter out of a detonating shell, reaching out the way petals do in time-delayed films. The contrast was not lost on him.

"I guess the hell you're lost! I guess the hell you don't get to wear that suit out of here either." He felt the quick sense of provincialism rear its head in his threat, a viable threat, one he would never carry out, though he knew its possibilities. His eyes darkened with distrust, his thin lips pursed contemplatively, mockery carried in their curves.

"I don't care about the suit. I just got lost, but I was trying to help. Look," Soft Face said as he reached into his pocket, "I've got some food here. It's just what I could bring now, this time." He spoke as if repeated attempts at such journeys were to be made. From the pocket he withdrew a wrapped packet. "I have sandwiches for you."

"For me?" Chris Banntry said. "How come they're for me? You I've never seen before. What kind are they? D'ja spit in them for a joke?"

"Well, not for you in the beginning, but for someone like you, someone I knew I'd meet here. Well, I suppose you. And I did not spit in them. That's disgusting!" The face hardened a measure. The voice building up breath behind it.

Chris Banntry took the packet. "You didn't say what kind. What are they? Sandwiches gotta have a name. Sweet potato and mustard, whatever, you name them all the

time.”

The packet loomed thick, wrapped in tin foil. Its edges were neat and trim, the folds square and even, subject to measurement. It had a promising heft. His stomach, he thought, should have been in anxious anticipation, but the grenade sat there, ominous, picking up some of the white heat, some of the Willie-Peter. The head of Soft Face relaxed, tipped that knowledge, the mouth opened, the eyes begging acceptance.

Another fookin’ do-gooder, Chris thought.

“I made them myself. They’re tuna fish. I was going to make roast beef, but I decided not to.”

“Why?” Chris said. Slowly he began to peel back the neat edges. They were so neat he felt sacrilegious, as though he were unfolding secrets, hidden ballots.

“Because I was afraid roast beef might be too difficult for chewing.” It came a firm and honest answer.

“You make sandwiches for me or one of my buddies and you think we got no goddamn teeth to chew them, like we live on liquids all the time! Drinking it up all the time! You think were just fookin’ trash! You bastards really give me a pain where the sun don’t shine.”

Looking around he added, “And that’s not your only problem. Not by a long shot. I bet a dozen guys have already got dibs on your suit.” He made it sound like the real threat he had wanted it to be in the first place, a threat as ominous as he could make it.

iii.

A rustling sound, paper or cardboard, perhaps coarse cloth, a shifting of one whole surface over another whole surface, emerged out of the alley depths. A cough came as apt as a punctuation mark from deeper in the unknown. Perhaps another sound was a can falling bell-like on edge against stone or the hard edging of a curb, a tinny echo riding free. A piece of daylight touched a brick wall over their heads, a dab of it, morning tilting itself into place for observation, measurement. Chris Banntry let go of Asia as the odor of the tuna fish on rye stuck itself in his nostrils as strong as a bayonet move.

“You’re one of them do-gooders, aren’t you? Getting off on social awareness. Getting off on doing one of your nice warm deeds for the day. A pain, man, a real pain. That’s what the hell you are, the whole fookin’ stinking mess of you. A royal pain in the ever-lovin’ ass. City’s full of your crap. Up to the ears with it! All out plain fookin’ crap!”

Yet rich tuna and rye lifted their bodies into his senses. His stomach fired up again and the battle for survival started anew. Only aromas assailed him, talked him out of voice while he breathed, while Soft Face looked imploringly at him, while the white heat at his hip began its quest of the day, to gain and keep his attention despite what came on the horizon. It’s off to a hell of a start, he acknowledged to himself.

“You got a name, sandwich maker?”

“My name is Floyd Spahn.” Soft Face tried a weak smile with his name. It did not work.

“You a lefty?”

“No,” came the weak reply. “Do I have to be a lefty?”

“I’m jerking you off, man, pulling your chain. He was a Braves pitcher, a lefty, a veteran of the awful wars. My mouth is full of crap, and my gut is gonna bust, and I had a



rotten sleep last night, and the goddamn ants are promising to eat me alive, and I don't want to eat your fookin' handout. That's just where I'm at for openers."

"What do you live on? What do you eat?" Soft Face had blue eyes and a pony of a nose.

"On handouts, for Christ sakes! Ain't you the fookin' saint of all saints. But I don't paint it all over the headlines. You ask too many questions. My ass is killing me. My leg is killing me. The ants are killing me. My bed's been invaded. The fookin' jungle's like a cobweb all over the place and you want to write a fookin' book. Life sure has its moments, don't it?"

Banntry moved to another sitting position on the cement platform, uttered a string of profanities and moved again. His boots were thin, worn, with leather like that of an old baseball glove, worn down by its games, by endless line drives, and scooped up grounders carrying playground sand, debris, dust. His pale jeans showed off their chlorine history, faded in spots, holes at the knees, shredded at ankle like straggly whiskers.

"Why'n't you bring Egg fookin' MacMuffin? It's breakfast time, ain't it?"

"I didn't know what to do. I just brought these. It's all messed up with me. I just wanted to help someone sometime. Maybe just one time, I don't know. I don't know why I came here. I just came. I just made the sandwiches and I came down here. I didn't know where I was going and whom I was going to see. I didn't know I was going to see you. I just did it. I did it on my own." The thin jaw set itself a modicum of pride, a sense of accomplishment.

Banntry detected the quick sense of pride in the voice, or accomplishment. Turning his head and looking down the alley, he saw vague light crawling now on the opposite wall as if ivy were growing there on the tiers of bricks. He yelled, "Hey, Morgan!"

A deep-throated voice, megaphonic, James Earl Jones-ish, replied, "What you got there, man?" The voice rose from a shadow lingering yet in another corner, but there was no movement with it.

"What I got here, Morgan, is Beacon Hill Golden Arches come down to visit us."

"I don't mean no goddamn company, man," the voice in the alley said. "I mean what you got there in that hand of yours, you goin' to put in that mouth of yours right 'bout now?" There was a sense of minor movement, as if a Pacific platelet had shifted.

"Tuna, man, tuna on A-1 fookin' rye. He brought us tuna for breakfast, tuna right off a table on Beacon Hill. Tuna with lettuce, tuna with mayo, goddamn tuna without any fookin' coffee." He turned to Soft Face and the blue eyes and the pony nose. "You got anything else in there, Lefty? Any crap I should be afraid of? That suit ain't for long, you know. You're in Asia now, man. That's a continent of a whole new color!"

"Do you call this Little Asia, then?" Floyd Spahn smiled weakly, an insider's smile being put on, one would think, and then shook his head. "Nothing else. I couldn't do that. I could hardly do this." He gestured about the alley, the stable nothingness, and the darkness still abiding in places, the living threats. His eyes were still full of surprise, as much question in them as one could ask.

Banntry spoke again. "C'mon, Morg. We got us breakfast and no java. Lefty here's got something on his mind, social kind of, *This Living Earth* and whatever comes with it, you know. I guess we're it." He looked at the round face and the blue eyes and the pony nose and the thin hands crossed as if in pose in the lap of the young man sitting beside him. The suit was, even to an untrained eye, very expensive; dark gray, thin lines barely hinting at orange, a cut so neat it might have been painful, like a paper slice on a finger. In the breast pocket a

straw, with the paper wrapper still on it, protruded like an afterthought. Banntry looked at the straw the way coaches or teachers elicit responses, his eyebrows raised in demand.

“I was going to bring some milk, but I forgot it. I left too fast. I made the sandwiches and I left too fast.” The eyes above the soft mouth and the voice seemed screened, an allowed opacity in residence. There was an almost doll-like quality pervading them, too fashioned, too temperate, the mild reserves barely touched. A dim light glowed somewhere in the body of them, as if only the parking lights were on. In the poor light, in the glimmer of the false dawn, the face was nearly apathetic, a moon of paled, ashen ivory full of nothing but apology, calculated meekness. Banntry had seen a thousand and one faces like it. He had never counted on them for anything, ever.

The rustling sound came again from the alley, from the shadow in a far corner, out of which walked a shadow of a tall black man in a long black coat.

“Tuna,” said the tall newcomer. “I’ll be damned. Tuna on rye, and for breakfast. Ain’t we something’ today. Ain’t we somethin’ special. Beacon Hill tuna on rye. Ain’t that A-fuckin’ well. I ain’t sure what lunch is goin’ to brin’, but I can tell you I can hardly wait none.” He stretched one hand toward Banntry. “Like I tole you last night, your lucky day comin’ up wit’ the sun this mornin’. Ain’t no way around it, Chris. You got some luck comin’ on you today.”

His huge hand wrapped around a sandwich. “You got stars in the right attitude. They been gettin’ closer for you all week. You gettin’ shit lucky for a change. Did you tell him about his suit?” He looked directly at Banntry and then at the mild speaker, the evidence of threat unmistakably carried in his voice. “Them stars is different. Collision course for sure! Some thin’s just can’t be helped.” He bit and chewed and shrugged almost in one motion.

Chris Banntry bit into his sandwich. His teeth felt wired, his jaw felt tired. Out of practice, he thought. In a quick motion he brushed an ant off the backside of one hand and screamed another long string of profanities, picturing the world as a huge crawled-on-all-over dung ball.

The tall man in the black coat laughed loudly, the sounds rattling both in his throat and in the corners of the alley, guttural and somehow imperfect in their tone. “They’s better than worms, Chris. At least you can brush them off. When the worms get ahold of you, they own you for good and then some. It’s like plowin’ wit’ them. Just turn everythin’ over, right down to bone. Leave nothin’ but bone, like rocks in a dark field, skulls and empty sockets and leg bones and arms spilt all over creation, the way the Good Lord meant it to all end up. We’s just meat so’s the world can carry on without us when we go spoilin’. They’s call it legacy.”

Chris Banntry chewed and swallowed and chewed some more. The range of his whole jaw felt better and the grenade in his stomach lay pinned for the moment. He motioned toward the gift bringer. “Thank you, Lefty, for the tuna. Morg here is probably goin’ to carry on for hours if we let him. Morning exercise or something like that. Give him an inch and he’ll take all your rope. Some guys call him Preacher. What I should do is call him late for tuna on rye. But he’s right, and so am I, about your suit. It’s a stick-out down here. Keep half a dozen guys drunk a whole week if they wanted.”

“I wouldn’t care if it were taken from me, as long as they gave me something else to wear.” The fear had left his voice. He stood up, as short as he was a bit taller than he was. “I have other suits. I could give them some, but not so as they could drink all week. That’s not a fair exchange. It’s not what I meant to do.

“Every day I feel useless. I keep thinking about all of this. It frightens me, just having everything right at hand. I’ve done nothing all my life, really nothing, and it frightens me. When I go I want to know I’ve done something for somebody else, for other people. My whole life has been a waste. I don’t do anything for anybody. When I’m trying to sleep at night, when all I can do is measure things, it hurts. It makes the night longer than it ought to be.”

His jaw hung slacker. His shoulders sagged.

Morgan said, “How much you like it where the sun don’t shine, Lefty?” His laughter followed like a bad echo.

The small body of the man shook out his response. “I’m not a gay, but I knew it would be like this. You think I’m just a joke, that I don’t count for anything. You think I want attention for this or something else just as horrible. Well, you’re wrong!”

Light had lifted much of the shadow off him. Banntry saw there really was a bit of orange swimming in the lines of the suit, and the cut of the cloth *was* severe enough to have caused pain. Hair on the young man was razor clean, lines of the cut as severe as the suit had been cut. For a moment he thought the morning visitor might have been stamped out by a sheet metal die. Other copies of him were all around the city, hundreds of them, thousands of them, pressed from the same die, the same inordinate and clumsy power coming to bear to produce a mere echo, a flimsy sheet metal robot turned out for a quick spin around the old city. He snickered, “Casual is as casual does,” to himself.

“What’s down there?” Floyd Spahn asked, tossing his head in the direction of the alley, a bit of dare riding on him like a meek metaphor, frail but seated in place.

“That’s Asia down there, Lefty. You don’t want to go too deep into Asia. Some time if you go too deep there’s no way to get rid of it. There’s leaves there big as a man’s shadow. Time sucked right up into all the roots. Claims in the air strong as birthmarks. It don’t just let go sometimes! I don’t just mean Hong Kong and Nippon and all their crap made out of plastic and cut glass and fookin’ shiny tin. There’s more than junk and jungle and islands and peninsulas. Asia hangs on too fookin’ long for most people. It’s a leech if there ever was one, and that’s an early warning for you, if you can let yourself hear it.”

“You said I shouldn’t have come here, but I’m doing all right, aren’t I? Now you’re telling me not to go down there. You’re eating my sandwiches and I appreciate that. It’s something I had to do and there are other things I have yet to do. You’ll have to try to understand me. I am not afraid. I came here, didn’t I? There is something special in all of this you might never understand.”

He stood up and the lines of the suit seemed straighter, and the light reflecting in his eyes fixed them with a faraway look, almost dreamy. He walked off into the lingering shadows of the alley. They swallowed him wholly and quickly.

Moments later there was a muffled noise in the alley, in the darkness that had not let go, a darkness half a world away. It sounded as if a sewer had been flushed or a sump hole drained. Then there was silence, and air breathing on itself, and light trying to find its way home.

“What was that?” Morgan said, craning his head perfunctorily.

“That,” Chris Banntry said, “that’s probably the end of Lefty’s Delicatessen.”

“Or Lefty’s Haberdashery,” Morgan added, over the remnants of tuna on rye and mayo against the back of his teeth as pure as oil, and daylight still lifting shadows from their places of rest.

* * * * *





A Hood Funeral

[Prose]

My life-long friend Steve decided to drop dead. So I brought the remaining rum to his wake in an open container. En route, I neither drank too much on the freeway, nor got arrested. The bottle was drained properly in short order when I arrived, the guests chugging the stuff like it was UNICIF milk in Biafra. I then read in front of all his relatives a few pages of revelations (not Bible-related) that I had written as an excuse for a eulogy.

I thought it would be amusing for all to know how we had a beer hijacking operation in our youth, hunting deliveries on the city streets, which eventually caused the invention of the self-locking beer truck. Then there were our fine times in the Toronto prison. The tobacco casino. The Communist Party involvement.

Some leapt up in horror and indignation. “So you’re the one!” they shouted.

Methinks they were getting ready to stretch me out alongside Steve. Maybe not so amusing after all, but I was getting kind of tired with all their flowery crap. “He was so loyal. He was so thoughtful.”

The guy was a self-absorbed criminal like the rest of us. He was such a boner that he had six girlfriends. So I had to call bullshit. But he was a true blue friend, and I’ll miss his pirate ways.

Other “guests” from the “hood” were there, including the guy voted (in junior high) to be dead within the year. Now he’s a millionaire in Seattle from successes in the “agricultural business.” A real-estate magnate in whose houses cash crops of pot are grown. He’s got a new black BMW sports car, but smokes dollar-a-pack cigarettes from Yugoslavia. He says it’s critical that he smokes, otherwise he gets “road rage,” and is likely to open fire with the Glock sitting on the passenger seat.

Others are still alive without rhyme or reason. The old “everybody’s girl friend” was working the crowd, still trying to hook one of us, still with no luck. About a third of the crowd was calling Steve by a different name, Ajax or something, saying “Steve who?” when we said, “who’s Ajax?” I guess the peckerwood had a double or triple life. I think a few of the Ajax people were just street rats wandered in for the beer and buffet.

All the sobbing girlfriends were there, some crying with the realization of the other girlfriends. There was even this Catholic nun there who had fallen in love with Steve in the hospital. The nun was damning the other girlfriends to hell for their fornications. She played the fiddle in the band with a bunch of beefy black guys on bass guitars. Another tickled the ivories. It felt like being home, there with the homies.

Another of my sand-box buddies, a Tong general, had a liver swollen up to the size of a small dog. Prognosis bad. Death. He’s drinking and showing Fido off. I guess I’ll start writing his eulogy now and get a head start.

Topping all of us was this seven-foot-two guy we called “How-Weird.” He had these drooping sad cow eyes and leaned over you like the Tower of Pisa. He invaded your personal space from above like a spider web. How-Weird was getting all of our addresses and next of kin. He’s in the mortuary business.

Everybody delighted in talking about my past for some reason. “Remember when we were driving along 15th, and you were throwing those pipe bombs out the window?”

“Ahhh, no.”

“How about when you threw that CS tear gas canister into the Federal Building, and it got into the ventilation system? Gassed every asshole in there.”

“Mmmm . . . vaguely. Sure that was me?”

“Ya know you made the papers at the WTO riots, shooting those rockets at the helicopter. Had a blurry picture of you running. Damn! That was great!”

“Now seems to me that those were *your* rockets.”

So what gives here? Do I have an anarchist Sybil multi-personality thing going on? How can these bastards remember this shit? Did it happen? Or am I just the focus of urban legend? If the cells in the brain are replaced every seven years, they must have had to re-write this crap in there over four times. Where's the effect of massive erasure from an abundant ingestion of psychotropic substances? Hell, worked for me.

I am thinking I either have to live these buggers into the ground, or write my own eulogy. Can't have these fools spouting off in front of *my* relatives.

* * * * *



Judith Haggai



morning logic
first breathing
then headlines

* * *

mad dash to shelters
red alert warnings
then back to bed

* * *

back to war zone
red alerts all night long
familiar stress

* * *



Judih Haggai

how quiet the morn
as hours of explosions cease
i breathe in silence

* * *

one more day of war
morning birds come out to sing
message received

* * *

with talk of ceasefire
we brace ourselves for attack
one more sleepless night

* * *

suddenly tired
wars and covid aftermath
time to rebuild

* * *

in times of distress
if one can help, one helps
simple rule of life

* * *

back in the homeland
forsythia bushes bloom
yellow bursts of spring

* * *

gentle reminder
even in adversity
the spirit can fly

* * *

let's ride the wind
cloudtops and butterflies
our hearts our compass

* * *

birds in spring song
luxury of listening
before morning walk

* * * * *

Bags End News
 No. 381, September 6, 2014
 Editor: Alphonso Bagale
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Purple
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Sleepe Over in Impiana!

Az iz well nown big deer needs
 too mah beloved newspaper, Princess
 Cozykah of Impiana, orr Crissy 92.
 shee likes too play itt, iz wun of mah
 dearest friends! Shee is the guardian
 of Bagzard & probablyee, vthr places
 to, butt shee don't
 brag about itt.

Mrs. Inn herr Cassie
 with herr bestus
 looks lik a ferd &
 too see mee & th
 friends wen shee
 gum crazy times
 Well, this is
 opposit thup happen!

Bags End News
 No. 382 September 13, 2014
 Editor: Alphonso Bagale
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Purple
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

In too Crissys' Sekret Ruum!

Only jest hardley yet begun
 too tell yu deer needs, aft mah
 sleepover vizeit with mah deer
 friend Princess Crissy inn herr
 Cassel in Impiana. Jest timee
 I told ut gettin mah invitashun
 too kum & kempp. Boop greeted
 mee & chowised me too Crissy.
 az hee likes too doo, & hee iz
 herr best body so, I waz gam.
 Especially sids ittended inn
 Crissy huz. Wee mad Boop to
 wick hee like butt nott say no so.

Enwaye Boop straitened
 hammselt, upp lik hups no iz a
 messy bigness, butt wee waz



Bags End Book #18: Sleep-Over in Imagianna! Part 1

This story and more Bags End Books
can be found at:
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 4or 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.

* * * * *

Sleep-Over in Imagianna!

As is well-known among mah Dear Readers, Pricess Chrisakah of Imagianna, or Crissy as she likes to play it, is one of mah dearest friends. She is the Guardian of Bags End, & probably a lot of other places too, but she don't ever get all big guy bragging about it. Mostly, she just lives in her Castle in Imagianna with her bestus buddy Boop, who looks like a turtle but isn't one, & comes to visit me & the other Bags End friends when she gets bored & needs some crazy times in mah strange homeland.

Well, this story is about the opposite thing happening. It began one day when I was just home from all day at Mister Owl's Bags End School, & I was settling into a good nap in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch. Nothing fancy or looser in the dreams to come. Just friendly dozing.

There was a polite knock at the window that leads from me & mah brother Alexander Puppy's bedroom onto Milne's Porch.

Half awake, I said, "Come on in! Take off your skin! And rattle around in your bones! Just kidding!" I thought it was that silly Bumping brother of mine, coming to talk to & bother me in his own inimitable way.

But she wasn't. That is, she was Elaine El, who is mah friend Polly El's mommy & the Post-Mistress of Bags End. Els look a little bit like elephants but way smaller 4or sure.

"I hope I am not bothering you, Algernon dear," she said in her nice & polite voice.

I waked up fast. "No, no, Missus El, come out & you can sit with me in mah comfy armchair if you want."

"Well, I shouldn't, should I? Maybe just 4or a moment," she smiled & shushed & said more words, but eventually I had her sitting next to me.

She looked out at the view, which was right now just a big blue sky with some pretty white clouds. "This is so nice," she said. "I can see why you like to come here so often to write your fine newspaper stories."

I nodded & said, "O shucks!" at the same time. Then I said, "Did you come here just to say hello?" I asked. But I didn't think so.

Her pretty El eyes lighted up with remembering. "No! No, not this time. I have a letter 4or you. It's from Imagianna."

"A letter? Really? Hey! That probably means it's from Princess Crissy!" I said all excited.

She smiled shyly. "Would you like my help reading it?"

I nodded yes. Though I am learning mah ABZs a lot from Mister Owl, I am still kind of a illiterate guy overall.

Missus El had on her mail delivery sack, & pulled from it mah letter. She handed it over to me to look at. It had really pretty handwriting on it, & a wax seal that showed Crissy's Castle & everything.

"I think Boop probably helped Crissy make it," I said to Missus El. "He is a fan of the 4ormal & fancy." She nodded politely, & opened up the letter to its full size to read its writings.

"Dear Algernon," she read. "I would very much like 4or you to come & visit Imagianna this Saturday night. We can have a sleep-over, & maybe explore my Castle together. I hope you can come! Yours royally & always, Princess Chrisakah, Imagianna."

Wow! How exciting! I asked Missus El to read it to me again to make sure the words stayed the same. They did.

"I never slept-over & explored be4ore! I mean, I visited Crissy & Boop in their Castle a lot, but not to sleep-over & explore!" I cried.

Missus El smiled happy 4or me, & then pulled out a pencil & piece of paper. I just looked at her twice.

"Algernon, you received an invitation to visit. You need to reply!" she said. Smiling though.

"But why? Crissy knows I will come."

She smiled more. "But Boop made her write this letter, right? So he expects a reply."

Hm. I guessed that was right. I felt like a country bumpkin.

But she shooshed mah fears & we just wrote a short note together.

"Dear Princess Chisakah," it read. "Thank you 4or the invitation. Yes, I will come, & I can't wait! Your friend, Algernon Beagle."

Missus El nodded, like good job, & kissed me on mah furry 4orehead & left to send mah letter in reply to Crissy & Boop. Nice El.

I supposed I better tell the Bunny Family I would be away. I mean, I

am kind of a orphan so they adopted me & they're nice folks. I tolded Pat & Pete, who are Sheila's & Lori's & Petey's & Sharon's & Margy's mommy & daddy, & they tolded me to have a good time.

I wondered what to bring but I could not think of anything that Crissy would want except 4or me to show up.

So on Saturday night, I left mah bedroom & went down some ramps & levels of Bags End to the hallway with the door that leads to Imagianna. It was nighttime when I got there, & there sure were a lot of stars in the sky. There was even a big full moon, & I remembered how we once went in dreams up on a hill nearby here to read some of these strange Secret Books by big full moonlight. I wroted about that in mah Bags End Book #17 called The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers! Fun memory.

Anyway, I kept along mah way from the door up the golden green hills that lead up to Crissy's Castle. It looked especially tall & grand in the full moonlight.

I knocked on the door &, after a time, it was answered by Crissy's bestus buddy Boop, who is her servant too. Because he wants to.

Boop smiled to see me & I was glad. He had been mah newspaper's Apprentice Reporter 4or awhile, but then he got other writing idears, & I was OK going back to just me & Lori Bunny making mah newspaper.

"Hi, Boop!" I said all friendly.

Boop bowed stiffly to me like he got long protocols on his mind.

"Greetings, Venerated Scribe! The Princess will see you now."

And so I agreeably followed him as he led the way to Crissy's Throne Room. Herself was sitting in her Throne with her fancy Princess dress on over her bloo jeans.

"Presenting . . . the Court Scribe to King Sheila Bunny of Bags End, Mister Algernon Beagle!" Boop cried all, um, royally.

Crissy looked at me, & I looked at her, & we tried to resist, but we were so excited to visit that we rushed to hug each other! Then, so Boop would not fret, we hugged him a lot too.

"We're going to have so much fun tonight!" said Crissy with her happiest, trickiest smile. It was already true!

* * * * *

Into Crissy's Secret Room!

Anyway, Boop straightened himself up, like hugging is a messy business, but he was smiling anyway.

"Princess, if there's nothing more at this time, I am going to repair to my Composing Chamber," he said.

"Is it broke?" I said & then laughed a lot. Crissy did too, but then she nodded her charming smile at Boop. "Have fun!" Boop knows its charms well, & waved friendly as he left.

Crissy & I looked at each other now. I talked first mah curious question. "Where do we start to sleep-over & explore, Crissy?"

Crissy put her finger on her chin, like thinking. Then tricky smile & talking. "Let's go to my Secret Room!"

Crissy led the way since I am not too good at navigating her Castle, which 4orgets it's a building, sort of like that weird Clover-dale place we went to one time.

Crissy's Secret Room is quite a place to go to too. Its door is these long strings of colored rings, & inside it has strange purple lights. There

are these soft pink cushions with strange designs on them. Like weird picture stories of some kind. But you still sit on them. It's kind of a narrow room so it's good to feel cozy with everyone in it. Which is usually true.

Up high was a shelf of all of Crissy's storybooks she wrote back in her Christina days with Boop in a city. I was there too, but these books came later on after I was brought to Bags End. I was never sure how many she wrote but I always secretly hoped for her to write new ones sometime.

There were pictures on the walls too, different ones each time, like they took turns. I noticed this time that one of the pictures looked like a photograph taken in a lighthouse.

"I was traveling by the Wide Wide Sea with these Kittees in their Boat-Wagon when we visited that lighthouse," Crissy explained a little shyly.

"Is that time told of in one of your storybooks?" I asked. I knew a little bit of those Creature Kittees & their Boat-Wagon. But not a lot yet.

"No, but probably in those little Secret Books," she said, & pointed me to her long overcoat hanging up neatly in the corner. I knew it had many little pockets holding the ones we read by full moonlight.

I nodded. "I got letters from lots of readers of mah newspaper wanting to know more about them. I was figuring we would find out sometime together."

Crissy nodded too, & looked thoughtful. "I do think we need to do that, but I have something else in mind first."

We were sitting close like we like to do. I felt like we could talk about anything right now.

"What did you have in mind, Crissy?" I asked.

She stood up with a suddenly back-tricky smile. "I would like to read to you from one of my stories. If you would like that."

"Really? Wow! Yes, that would be wonderful!" I said with mah words fighting each other to say yes first.

Crissy laughed her sweet laugh. "Good. I have one in mind to read for while we are having our sleep-over."

She reached up to her shelf & pulled one storybook down, & we sat again close to look at it. It was green & gold just like that Tangled Gate book of hers she'd read me one time.

On the cover showed a Castle just like the one on the letter I got from her & that we were in. "That's here!" I said. Duh! But still. It was.

Crissy nodded & said, "There is a story in this book about this Castle. I wrote it when we still lived in our apartment in the city, Algernon."

"Like the Castle you always wanted?" I asked.

"Well, sort of. I mean, if Boop & I had to go, you know, with Benny Big Dreams, Boop wanted us to live in a Castle & have me Princess Guardian & him my servant & all." She looked embarrassed.

"I know all this, Crissy. I know you did it like this for me & Boop & Bags End & maybe other places."

She nodded, wordless.

"So you wrote a story about what your Castle would be like?" I asked. She nodded. "Read it!" said me. Smiling to make her smile again.

She nodded again, opened the storybook, & found the right page. "It's short. Just to get it on paper so I would not feel helpless when it happened."

I nodded. She read in her sweet Crissy voice, "When I arrived to the Castle, with my best friend & all of my doubts, I walked through the front door & said, "You & I are not Master & Servant, not now or ever. You are a living being allowing my friend & me sanctuary from the world, so that we are safe & can then focus on caring & protecting others. We are all friends now & hereon. Shift your rooms at will & whim, but be with Boop & me a trio

of good dear friends now & always!"

Crissy paused for a moment. I nodded. "Read the rest," I said. She did & here it is.

"My friend the Castle took us in that day, & has kept us safe & good since. She has many secrets of her own, as she is kind of a Beast of a building. We take good care of each other. She welcomes me to explore her always more!"

Then Crissy smiled at me & closed her storybook. Then she stood up to put it up on the shelf with the rest of them. Then she sat back down again with me.

I thinkd while she nicely skritchd mah head-bone. "OK. So your Castle is alive & don't mind friendly explorings."

She nodded.

"Well, we do that a lot in Bags End, especially when Sheila Bunny has her restless paws," I said some more.

Crissy nodded. She knows those paws well.

"So that what you want us to do tonight, Crissy?" I asked. Slowly figgering it out.

She nodded. Crissy tricky smilest.

"OK! Let's start!" I was raring to go. We were both surprised by me. Glad too.

Crissy stood up too, but then walked to the back of her Secret Room, where it is kind of dark. She sort of tricky-smile-magick'd some more light, & I saw how we were to begin. Crissy's Red Bag.

* * * * *

Into Imagianna's Red Bag!

Strange of recent times to tell is the appearance in Bags End, Imagianna, Dreamland, & who-knows-where-else of the Red Bag. I wrote all about the Red Bag in mah Bags End Book #16 called What Is the Red Bag?

It's one Bag, but also in many places too, is the twisted-up-words way to try to describe the Red Bag. That & also that the inside of the Red Bag kind of looks like the place it is many in. So, in Bags End, it has at least one hallway, like the other Bags. In Imagianna, it looks like that little apartment where Crissy & Boop & I lived in a city long ago. Where Crissy rited those books later when it was just her & Boop, & typed them up on the rite-typer she gave me to use for Bags End News. But it also is still in the Imagianna Red Bag too. Weird, but true, but OK.

This Red Bag was even where me & Crissy & a strange Author guy wrote "The Story of the 4 Pictures" Grand Production not long ago. I tolded all about this in mah Bags End Book #17 called The Myth of the 4 Famous Travelers!

And I want Crissy to write new storybooks in this Writing Room of hers if she wants to. I will share the writing game with all comers, especially my dear friend who used to make such good storybooks!

All this to say that when, on our sleep-over in her Castle, comfortable to start in her Secret Room, Crissy showed me in a shadowy back corner of that room her Red Bag, & I was mostly game.

"Shall we go through, Algernon?" Crissy asked, smiling her most eager Crissy smile.

I was more curious than slow to go. "Why there first, Crissy?"

Crissy sat back down with me on the pink cushion I hadn't quite left yet. "I fixed it up some. Since we wrote our Grand Production. I wanted it

Bags End News
 No 383 September 20, 2014
 Editor: Agneron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig

In too Imagianmas' Redd Bagg!
 Three or more stages for
 old beagle
 Agneron
 Ham and
 harvinkle
 mah deer
 Kani Cris
 cestus bu
 inn Lora
 Nadi
 Lms iz th
 the Imagia
 Gingo hou
 Redd Bam
 W- the T
 An the
 the plasis

Bags End News
 No 384 September 27, 2014
 Editor: Agneron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig

Toy Start the Inspekshun of
 Ingeadna!
 Thiss
 unrented
 mah frand
 ut Bopend
 sto vrit m
 Crissy inn
 -rr.
 So ut d
 our sleep
 with her
 quid store
 sto hater
 all so hor
 Cassid Phans
 exd onns b
 respectid g

Bags End News
 DOUBLE ISSUE!
 No 385-386 October 4-11, 2014
 Editor: Agneron Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunnig
 Lead/Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunnig

Wither the Dark Creechuz Go
 Wenn mah deer friend ^{Flam} Rannish St
 the Postmistress of Bopend shoed
 upp onn the windbill ut mah
 be love Mins Porch inn Bopend
 too deliner her mah too vrit
 I did not no watt travils stms
 Thiss mayl wood set mee off onn.
 The mayl waz a g. g. g. g. g.
 from mah deer friend & princess
 Crissy ut Ingeadna too a
 sleepor att her Cassel. So I
 kum wen invitid mee & Crissy
 travps from her sekret Ruum
 sto her re-stid Redd Bagg
 Rippo Ruum inn a good swoop
 ut a wayo.

Follies
 here
 before

to feel like a place I would go to be now, & not just a memory."

"O!" I nodded. "Does that make you sad that we 3 don't live together there in the city no more?"

Crissy thought a moment. "No. But here we are now, & I want my Writing Room to be too."

Well, that was good enough for me. I walked right up to that Red Bag with Crissy, & she nicely reminded me of our how.

"Just close your eyes & imagine yourself on the other side. We take turns doing this, & each of us in turn says, while eyes closed, 'this is the door & now we pass through!' Say it 3 times total." And she did this to show me how easy it was. And, strange to say, it was! I have done this strange thing before & it usually works. I still prefer regular doors mostly, but I am not prejudiced. A door is a door, after all, as long as it works one way or another.

And here we come just like nothing to Crissy's Writing Room! But, aha, Crissy had been busy redecorating.

Even though she is a Princess by trade, Crissy told me she always really preferred beanbags to royal thrones. And there was this big old soft one in the middle of this Writing Room! And next to it on a little table was even some copies of your old pal Algernon's newspaper called Bags End News!

"Hey! That's mah newspaper!" I said, with smiles & blushes too. I forget that some guys read it, some anyway, who don't do that to mock or demand more headlines.

Crissy nodded & suddenly plopped down into her beanbag chair. She motioned me to come too, & I half-plopped, half-tried-not-to-crash.

Crissy laughed & settled us comfortable together. I looked about me curiously to see more of the new things.

I see'd on the walls new pictures hung up. Haha, one was of those strange funny but nice & good music R.E.M. guys Crissy likes to dance to, & them on her pajamoze too I remembered.

Another picture was of one of that Monet painter guy's haystacks. His pictures are always full of funny secret little tricks to find.

And another picture was a kind of fotograf in a frame that showed those Creature Common guys Rosaleeta the Imp & Bellla the um I guess Piglet. They were looking tricky too, like Monet's picture, happy & pleased.

"They were Great Heroes that day when they climbed Mount Cloudy Day!" said Crissy all pleased. I nodded uncertainly. I should find out more about that too when I have a chance.

There was room for more pictures on the walls, but I guessed Crissy hadn't picked them out yet, or maybe she liked having some blank space too to inspire her writings.

One thing that hadn't changed was Crissy's rite-typer on the other table next to our shared beanbag seat. Her notebooks & pencils & pens right next to it. Green & gold colored too, I noticed.

So I asked & wanted to know, "Are you writing a new story?"

She nodded. "About my Castle."

"You mean another one?" I asked, hoping I remembered right.

She nodded again. "I figger there will be more after we do our explorings." I nodded too.

"Shall we go on?" she smiled. I nodded yes. Then she helped me out of her beanbag chair which seemed to want to keep me close. Another time again, friend.

We came back to Crissy's Secret Room, & I was about say, "Where to next, Crissy?" when Boop rushed into the Secret Room to find us!

"Princess! O, Princess! He's here! How? I didn't know? He is here!"

Crissy hugged Boop from his crazy to a bit calmer. Finally I talked.

"Who, Boop?"

"The Inspector. Ignatius the Inspector!" Boop cried, with the strangest of looks.

"Iggy? Here?" I asked. Wow.

Boop nodded.

Crissy had a sort of wondering & remembering look on her face. "Is that tonight? I thought he was coming later."

Well, Boop started getting really upset again, first breathing too hard, & then 4orgetting to breathe at all. Crissy comforted him twice as much.

I decided to make mahself useful & go let Iggy in. He has been inspecting fantasylands including Bags End 4or a very long time. We used to get D-'s from him all the time until he changed his inspecting ways. Since Bags End wouldn't. Now we do better & he is happier too. I tolded about those dark old times in mah Bags End Book #3 called Bags End Gets a F.

Iggy was just inside the front door, looking around curiously. Then he saw me & smiled & I was glad he saw me.

I never knowed Imagianna to get inspected be4ore but I suppose it had to happen. We all get inspected in the end. Even though Crissy knowed it was coming, even if she 4orgetted when.

* * * * *

Iggy Starts His Inspection of Imagianna!

"Hi, Iggy!" I said in mah friendly Algernon way.

"Why, Algernon! How are you?" smiled Iggy. "I have just come from Bags End." He likes us now that he inspects 4or how true a fantasyland is being to itself. Bags End is as weirdly true as ever.

"How did we do this time?" I asked, just to check. Iggy & Sheila Bunny used to fight & argue all the time.

"O dandy! Sheila & I listened to jazz records 4or hours! Miles & Trane & Bird & Dizzy & those crazy E.S.T. fellows. Alex your clever brother showed his newest Bump picture-book. I marched with Sargent Lisa-Marie Chow's Army of the Babys. She calls me a visiting General. Gweneral, I mean," & he laughed a lot. I did too.

Latest Bump picture-book. Hmmm.

"Anyway, I'm afraid I'm early to visit here & um--" Iggy looked through his Inspecting Case, which has his notes & things, checked something, & then said, "Boop? Yes, Boop. Is upset & thrown off."

I nodded. "I think Crissy 4orgotted to tell him you were coming too."

"O!" said Iggy & looked upset.

But just then Crissy come out sorta tugging Boop along with her.

Iggy right away sank to his 1 knee. "Princess! Goodness! I am so sorry I am early!"

Crissy smiled & waved us all into her Throne Room. Smart girl. If she got Princessy 4or awhile, Boop would calm down some.

She climbed agreeably into her Throne. Then she said all serious, "Servant Boop, present our guest!"

Well, that got Boop on track good. I slunk into a corner 4or safe keeping & good watching.

"Princess Chrisakah, I present to you Ignatius the Independent

Inspector of Fantasylands, Near & Far, High & Low!" Boop cried out proudly.

Iggy then again bowed low.

Crissy nodded. "You're early, Inspector Ignatius." All serious still.

"I know! I know! I am so sorry, Princess!" Iggy looked terrified. Of Crissy?

Then she smiled the right Crissy way & I felt OK. No simulacres going on. "It's OK. I just didn't have a chance to tell Boop. I'm sorry too," & she looked at Boop sincerely. Hopeful for forgiveness too.

Well, Boop loves Crissy more than the world. He nodded & hurried out of the Throne Room in case his smiles or tears runned his protocols over.

"Call me Crissy please," Crissy smiled more at Iggy.

Iggy nodded smiling too. "Algernon & Sheila & the Bags End folks have always called me Iggy, so that works nice."

At mention of mah name, I come out of mah corner & they smiled at me like I wasn't unwelcomed.

"When do you want to start your Inspection?" asked Crissy.

Iggy suddenly yawned. "Goodness! I guess my travels have tired me."

"Well then, you need to rest," decided Crissy. "We can start tomorrow. Algernon & I are having a sleep-over tonight anyway. Boop!" she then called.

Boop was all business when he come back, & he happily showed Iggy to a guest room to sleep. Iggy smiled & told us all a good night. I think Boop probably went to bed too then, or else back to his Composing Chamber.

Well, that was that for now. Crissy & I were alone again. We looked at each other. "What now?" asked me.

"Are you tired, Algernon?"

I thinked, & I wasn't, & I shooked mah head no.

She smiled big then. "Good! Let us continue our sleep-over!"

"How?" asked me.

She thinked a moment, finger on chin. "Back to my Secret Room to start. I have a good idea!"

So she led us back to her Secret Room, & we sat together again on the pink cushions.

Then she called, "Castle! Lights out, please!"

And it was now dark. I would have been a little spooked but Crissy was holding mah paw closely.

"Algernon, I learned when I first came here that there are Creatures who live here in the Dark."

"Um, like Creature Common guys?" I asked.

"Sort of. They are part of the Dark of the Castle when all the lights are out."

"O! like Miss Chris's friends called Suzie & Freddy Dark & their kin?"

Crissy laughed. "Maybe! They lead me on adventures to places in the Castle I could not get to by myself. They know their own ways. Are you game to come?"

I could feel Crissy's happy smile & nodded to it. "Game as Bunnyball!" I said.

So Crissy called out again, "OK, Creatures of the Dark here, Algernon & I are ready to follow you!"

Then she said to me, "If you close your eyes, you will see how they do. That way you won't bump into anything. And they will touch our hands & paws to lead us too."

Wow, this was some crazy stuff! But I guessed that a sleep-over with Crissy in her Beast Castle would not be any less.

And it was true. My eyes tightly shut, I could see better, & their touch

was gentle.

The Creatures of the Dark led us along the lightless hallways of the Castle 4or a long time. Crissy & I kept touch to each other too, but were quiet & paying good attention.

4or awhile it seemed like we were walking along regular, but then it seemed like we were floating on the air! Like those Blondy girls in Bags End do! But I started to panick because beagles do not float. But Crissy & the Dark Creatures kept near & I didn't shipwreck sink immediately. And still a beagle too. I guess the Dark Creatures' magicks kept me up somehow!

* * * * *

Whither the Dark Creatures Go

Ahead there was a light coming from a mostly closed door.

"That's Boop's Composing Chamber," Crissy suddenly speaked in a half-whisper.

"Are we going to visit him?" I half-whispered too, wondering how the Dark Creatures would visit in the light. Probably some way my poor simple brain-bone could not fathom.

As though to answer mah strange question, the light in the Composing Chamber went out as we got closer. O.

I began to wonder if floating was just how these Dark Creatures traveled, even in hallways you could find & walk regular by daytime. Maybe Crissy didn't think to explain this to me because she more natively floats too, & she knowed I wasn't going to crash despite mah beagle's non-floating nature.

Boop's Composing Chamber wasn't too big though it still had a nice couch 4or visitors while Boop sat at his, um, Composing Desk. Me & Crissy sat on the couch, & I think the Dark Creatures sort of perched up on the wall or near the ceiling. I noticed up on the wall a framed picture of the issue of Bags End News that Boop rited the cover story 4or. A good revue too.

Eyes still closed tightly like I was told, I could see Boop smiling at us calmly. Like he knowed we was coming. Which gives his usual stresses & strains half a chance of not coming.

"Would you like 4or me to read to you a little?" he asked.

We nodded eagerly. His writings 4or mah newspaper are always good.

"I was writing about my bother tonight," Boop said. "About our times together. He was always daring, like the Princess."

Crissy laughed.

Boop picked up his papers & started to read from them. "He told me about a strange dream he had that he could remember every detail. He said that we had gone up to the Overworld." We nodded.

Um. "Wait, what?" I asked.

Boop looked at me & thought about mah question. "O! I see. Well, that was our name 4or the world above us, above our tunnels & caves & the Great Cavern. What you know as the Tangled Gate. We didn't go up there much."

I nodded.

Boop read on. "And he said that we were running side by side together along these paths, one then next, like we knowed where we were going. Finally, we can to this big Fountain. It sprayed very high in the air. My brother kept us going through the Gate itself."

This was a good story. Me & Crissy both leaned nearer, & I thought the Dark Creatures were listening close too.

Boop read on. "The Tangled Gate is impossibly tall & it seems to be black metal. It has complex scrollwork from the top to the bottom. Very dense pictures & symbols in it. My brother said that we had come to study it, to learn."

Boop paused. "More?" he asked with a smile.

We nodded & the Dark Creatures made some friendly noises. I don't know if they speak English. They understand it to listen anyway.

Boop read on. "There were so many pictures on the Tangled Gate, but what was strange was that we found images of Creatures on it. A Bunny with long ears. A Turtle-not-a-turtle, like my brother & me. Even a tiny Imp clear to see."

"Wow!" I said out loud, & Crissy nodded the like.

Boop read a little more. "Then in this dream, my brother told me, the music started."

Boop straightened out his papers from reading, & put them neatly back on his desk.

"Is there more?" Crissy asked. "What happened next?"

Boop laughed. "I haven't rited it yet!"

Well, it would have been rude to demand the unwritten word, so we told Boop how much we liked it so far. He was very pleased, but then he said he had to resume his work & so turn on the lights & all.

So me & Crissy & the Dark Creatures got in some appreciative hugging be4ore continuing along our dark travels. Boop closed his door be4ore turning on his light again.

Then Crissy turned to me & shocked me by yawning! Then I not-so-shocked mahself by yawning too. Even the Dark Creatures sort of huddled tiredly together.

Crissy nodded. "Now comes the sleeping part of our sleep-over, Algernon."

So we all traveled back to Crissy's Secret Room. Crissy & me both thanked the Dark Creatures & sort of petted them good night & all. I definitely wanted to float with them again. Ha! Me float! But true this time.

So the Dark Creatures continued on their way, & Crissy got me & her settled among pink cushions, & she brung out blankets too.

When we were all sorts of cozied down, & the Secret Room's purple light was dimmed down, Crissy said, "Would you like to stay 4or Iggy's Inspection?"

"That's up to Boop," I said. "He might be too spooked 4or onlookers."

Crissy nodded in the purplish dim. "We will ask him then."

"Why is Iggy inspecting Imagianna anyway?" I asked suddenly.

"Well, I rote him a letter. I was reading old issues of your newspaper about all the inspecting he does. I said in my letter I would be happy to welcome him. There was one time he almost came, but never did."

"O. OK. So now he has to figger out what Imagianna being its best is like, & then inspect to compare against that, I guess." I was starting to wonder if I understood this all as much as I did.

Crissy laughed. "Yes, that's how I think it works too."

I was falling asleep not wanting to. It was quite comfortable.

Crissy started *hmming* & I think that was what finished me off. I drifted on her pretty *hmming* right into good sleeping. Nothing looser this time. Just friendly sleeping.

I think Crissy woked up be4ore me because I was tangled in mah own bones & nobody else's. So I gathered mahself together quickly & left her purple-lighted Secret Room.

Mah guess was that Iggy was up bright & early to begin his Inspection. I figgered I better hurry not to miss more than I did.



Hurried I did & by lucky chance found Crissy's Throne Room, & by luckier chance found Crissy, Boop, & Iggy still in it!

Crissy was in her Throne, & Boop was nearby. Iggy was standing at a table with his Inspecting Case on it.

"Algernon!" said Crissy all happy. "I didn't want to wake you up," she added, all shy.

"The Princess insisted we wait 4or you though," said Boop, & he couldn't help his smile. After all our liking of his writing especially.

"So you don't mind me watching?" I asked him.

He smiled nicely. "Of course not!"

Now Iggy talked. "And so of course we waited 4or you! This might even be a news story 4or you, Algernon. This is a first time Inspection, which means I am getting all of my notes & impressions 4or the first time, 4or the future."

I thought a minute. Then I nodded. "So I will come along with mah reporter's fedorah on, so to speak." Since I didn't bring it.

Crissy did a double-time tricky smile at me as she stood up from her Throne, & come over to hand me mah own fedorah!

"I'm ready!" sayeth me.

Iggy began to unpack his Inspecting Case. I had seen some of the stuff in it be4ore, but he brought out a lot more tools & things this time. He picked up his clipboard to get started.

Crissy sorta sat back in her Throne & motioned me & Boop to both join her. Boop was too curious about all of this to cite protocols right now.

Iggy started asking some questions right off. Boop & Crissy took turns answering since they both know Imagianna good 4or quizzes.

"Fantasyland name?"

"Imagianna."

"Number of residents?"

"2. Possibly more."

"Neighboring lands?"

"Bags End. Over there. Dreamland. Over there."

"Purpose?"

"Home 4or the Guardian of Bags End & possibly other fantasylands. And her dearest friend."

"Enemies?"

"None."

"Is this a happy land?"

"Sure."

"Does it welcome visitors?"

"Friendly ones. Like Algernon."

I nodded. I am indeed a friendly visitor.

Iggy put on his Inspecting Spectacles now. I call them Inspectacles 4or short & laugh in mah head at this joke. I don't think he really minds so much.

Anyway, Inspectacles time I knowed better because it meant he was ready to do his walking tour. Iggy once tolded me that he likes to get his inspecting boots on the ground, which I thought meant walking around & looking with his own eyes & sniffing with his own nose-bone. Made sense to me.

So Iggy closed up his Inspecting Case & slung it over his shoulder. He kept his clipboard out 4or notes of course. And his Inspectacles on his nose-bone too.

"Lead the way," he said smiling. Boop & Crissy popped out of her Throne,

& I followed because I was reporting & so wouldn't get tossed 4or nosiness.

Crissy led us first to her Secret Room. Good place to start.

"I got this idea from Algernon & his Milne's Porch," explained Crissy, smiling at me. "A sort of sanctuary to come to. And a nice place to bring visitors."

Iggy nodded & scribbled away on his clipboard. "I know Milne's Porch well," & he smiled at me too. I hoped I wasn't causing trouble by comparisons or nothing. Not yet, I guessed.

That done, we went down to Boop's Composing Chamber. It was daytime so no Dark Creatures & no floating. Just regular walking. O well.

Iggy was very impressed by Boop's Composing Chamber & how neat it was, but still a friendly guest couch too.

"Crissy reminds me that both doing good Art & trying to be a good person is the best way to to be. So I made this very important place to me friendly 4or others to visit." Boop nodded at Crissy with all of his usual admirations.

Iggy nodded too, & took a lot of notes.

I wondered what next when Iggy paused us in the hallway still near Boop's Composing Chamber.

"I do what research I can be4ore I come to a new fantasyland. What I'm wondering now though is not what you've shown me, but what you didn't yet. What's missing?"

Well, at this all of us looked uncertain at each other.

"Missing?" repeated Boop. Crissy & my looks said the same as his words.

Iggy nodded. "There's something missing to Imagianna. Maybe someone?"

"Who?" I asked.

Iggy shrugged his shoulders. "It seems important."

Boop talked again. "We have lived here a long time. Who would be missing that is so important? And where is this person?"

I was looking at Crissy & her face was changing thoughts a lot.

"What, Crissy?"

She talked slowly, like she was shocking herself too with words.

"I have a sister," she said.

"You mean Miss Chris?" I asked, thinking I knowed this one.

"No, Algernon. We came from Emandia together."

"That's Crissy's home place from long ago," I explained too Iggy in a hurry like he suddenly had to go.

Iggy nodded. "So where is your sister?"

Crissy shooked her head. "I don't know. We became separated long ago."

I suddenly thinked a thought & tried it out.

"Why is she missing, Iggy? Is she supposed to live here?"

Iggy thinked too. "I don't know. I just think this is something missing about Imagianna."

"Does that mean Imagianna's gonna get a bad grade, Iggy?" I asked. This was all going wrong in a surprising & strange new way.

Iggy laughed, but kindly. "No, no, Algernon! We're figgering this out together. No bad grades. I promise."

Crissy decided then & there to return us to her Secret Room. That's where she seems to figger things out best.

So soon we were all at our ease among pink cushions & blankets, but with this question 4or us now. Sister?

"How long ago did you get separated?" I asked.

Crissy thinked hard, remembering. "We were children, Algernon. Taken to different places."

Suddenly Boop, who had not said a word till then, talked.
 "We have to find her & we have to make sure that she feels welcomed in Imagianna. To visit. To live. Whatever she likes."
 Well, this seemed like a friendly idea so we all nodded.
 "But how to find her even to invite her?" I asked.
 Iggy nodded, & stood up. "I will put out some feelers in the places I travel." He put his clipboard in his Inspecting Case & took off his Inspectacles.
 Then he shooked Crissy's hand, & Boop's paw, & even mah grubby one too.
 "We will resume this Inspection when we figger this all out. We will write each other soon." He smiled at all of us. Then he was on his way be4ore any of us had breathed twice.
 I looked at Crissy & at Boop 4or what & what next. But they were new to this all too.
 Right. Sometimes a guy has to know when his visiting time's up. Iggy was right in going, but I went slower. These were mah dear friends.
 But I did let them bring me to the Castle's front door 4or goodbye hugs. Quite a sleep-over, this time anyway!

Read Part 2 in *Cenacle* | 117 | October 2021!



* * * * *







The Dead

[Classic Fiction]

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Continued from *Cenacle* | 115 | April 2021

Gabriel had not gone to the door with the others. He was in a dark part of the hall gazing up the staircase. A woman was standing near the top of the first flight, in the shadow also. He could not see her face but he could see the terra-cotta and salmon-pink panels of her skirt which the shadow made appear black and white. It was his wife. She was leaning on the banisters, listening to something. Gabriel was surprised at her stillness and strained his ear to listen also. But he could hear little save the noise of laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing.

He stood still in the gloom of the hall, trying to catch the air that the voice was singing and gazing up at his wife. There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter.

The hall-door was closed, and Aunt Kate, Aunt Julia, and Mary Jane came down the hall, still laughing.

"Well, isn't Freddy terrible?" said Mary Jane. "He's really terrible."

Gabriel said nothing, but pointed up the stairs towards where his wife was standing. Now that the hall-door was closed the voice and the piano could be heard more clearly. Gabriel held up his hand for them to be silent. The song seemed to be in the old Irish tonality and the singer seemed uncertain both of his words and of his voice. The voice, made plaintive by distance and by the singer's hoarseness, faintly illuminated the cadence of the air with words expressing grief:

*O, the rain falls on my heavy locks
And the dew wets my skin,
My babe lies cold . . .*

"O," exclaimed Mary Jane. "It's Bartell D'Arcy singing, and he wouldn't sing all the night. O, I'll get him to sing a song before he goes."

"O, do, Mary Jane," said Aunt Kate.

Mary Jane brushed past the others and ran to the staircase, but before she reached it the singing stopped and the piano was closed abruptly.

"O, what a pity!" she cried. "Is he coming down, Gretta?"

Gabriel heard his wife answer yes and saw her come down towards them. A few steps behind her were Mr. Bartell D'Arcy and Miss O'Callaghan.

“O, Mr. D’Arcy,” cried Mary Jane, “it’s downright mean of you to break off like that when we were all in raptures listening to you.”

“I have been at him all the evening,” said Miss O’Callaghan, “and Mrs. Conroy, too, and he told us he had a dreadful cold and couldn’t sing.”

“O, Mr. D’Arcy,” said Aunt Kate, “now that was a great fib to tell.”

“Can’t you see that I’m as hoarse as a crow?” said Mr. D’Arcy roughly.

He went into the pantry hastily and put on his overcoat. The others, taken back by his rude speech, could find nothing to say. Aunt Kate wrinkled her brows and made signs to the others to drop the subject. Mr. D’Arcy stood swathing his neck carefully and frowning.

“It’s the weather,” said Aunt Julia, after a pause.

“Yes, everybody has colds,” said Aunt Kate readily, “everybody.”

“They say,” said Mary Jane, “we haven’t had snow like it for thirty years, and I read this morning in the newspapers that the snow is general all over Ireland.”

“I love the look of snow,” said Aunt Julia sadly.

“So do I,” said Miss O’Callaghan. “I think Christmas is never really Christmas unless we have the snow on the ground.”

“But poor Mr. D’Arcy doesn’t like the snow,” said Aunt Kate, smiling.

Mr. D’Arcy came from the pantry, fully swathed and buttoned, and in a repentant tone told them the history of his cold. Everyone gave him advice and said it was a great pity and urged him to be very careful of his throat in the night air. Gabriel watched his wife, who did not join in the conversation. She was standing right under the dusty fanlight and the flame of the gas lit up the rich bronze of her hair, which he had seen her drying at the fire a few days before. She was in the same attitude and seemed unaware of the talk about her. At last she turned towards them and Gabriel saw that there was color on her cheeks and that her eyes were shining. A sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart.

“Mr. D’Arcy,” she said, “what is the name of that song you were singing?”

“It’s called ‘The Lass of Aughrim,’” said Mr. D’Arcy, “but I couldn’t remember it properly. Why? Do you know it?”

“‘The Lass of Aughrim,’” she repeated. “I couldn’t think of the name.”

“It’s a very nice air,” said Mary Jane. “I’m sorry you were not in voice tonight.”

“Now, Mary Jane,” said Aunt Kate, “don’t annoy Mr. D’Arcy. I won’t have him annoyed.”

Seeing that all were ready to start she shepherded them to the door, where good night was said:

“Well, good night, Aunt Kate, and thanks for the pleasant evening.”

“Good night, Gabriel. Good night, Gretta!”

“Good night, Aunt Kate, and thanks ever so much. Good night, Aunt Julia.”

“O, good night, Gretta, I didn’t see you.”

“Good night, Mr. D’Arcy. Good night, Miss O’Callaghan.”

“Good night, Miss Morkan.”

“Good night, again.”

“Good night, all. Safe home.”

“Good night. Good night.”

The morning was still dark. A dull, yellow light brooded over the houses and the river; and the sky seemed to be descending. It was slushy underfoot, and only streaks and patches of snow lay on the roofs, on the parapets of the quay and on the area railings. The lamps were still burning redly in the murky air and, across the river, the palace of the Four Courts stood out menacingly against the heavy sky.

She was walking on before him with Mr. Bartell D’Arcy, her shoes in a brown parcel tucked under one arm and her hands holding her skirt up from the slush. She had no longer any grace of attitude, but Gabriel’s eyes were still bright with happiness. The blood went bounding along his veins and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.

She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect that he longed to run after her noiselessly, catch her by the shoulders and say something foolish and affectionate into her ear. She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her. Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory. A heliotrope envelope was lying beside his breakfast-cup and he was caressing it with his hand. Birds were twittering in the ivy and the sunny web of the curtain was shimmering along the floor: he could not eat for happiness. They were standing on the crowded platform and he was placing a ticket inside the warm palm of her glove. He was standing with her in the cold, looking in through a grated window at a man making bottles in a roaring furnace. It was very cold. Her face, fragrant in the cold air, was quite close to his, and suddenly he called out to the man at the furnace:

“Is the fire hot, sir?”

But the man could not hear with the noise of the furnace. It was just as well. He might have answered rudely.

A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries. Like the tender fire of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illumined his memory. He longed to recall to her those moments, to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls' tender fire. In one letter that he had written to her then he had said: “Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?”

Like distant music these words that he had written years before were borne towards him from the past. He longed to be alone with her. When the others had gone away, when he and she were in the room in their hotel, then they would be alone together. He would call her softly:

“Gretta!”

Perhaps she would not hear at once: she would be undressing. Then something in his voice would strike her. She would turn and look at him . . .

At the corner of Winetavern Street they met a cab. He was glad of its rattling noise as it saved him from conversation. She was looking out of the window and seemed tired. The others spoke only a few words, pointing out some building or street. The horse galloped along wearily under the murky morning sky, dragging his old rattling box after his heels, and Gabriel was again in a cab with her, galloping to catch the boat, galloping to their honeymoon.

As the cab drove across O'Connell Bridge Miss O'Callaghan said:

“They say you never cross O'Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.”

“I see a white man this time,” said Gabriel.

“Where?” asked Mr. Bartell D'Arcy.

Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.

“Good night, Dan,” he said gaily.

When the cab drew up before the hotel, Gabriel jumped out and, in spite of Mr. Bartell D'Arcy's protest, paid the driver. He gave the man a shilling over his fare. The man saluted and said:

“A prosperous New Year to you, sir.”

“The same to you,” said Gabriel cordially.

She leaned for a moment on his arm in getting out of the cab and while standing at the curbstone, bidding the others good night. She leaned lightly on his arm, as lightly as when she had danced with him a few hours before. He had felt proud and happy then, happy that she was his, proud of her grace and wifely carriage. But now, after the kindling again of so many memories, the first touch of her body, musical and strange and perfumed, sent through him a keen pang of lust. Under cover of her silence he pressed her arm closely to his side, and, as they stood at the hotel door, he felt that they had

escaped from their lives and duties, escaped from home and friends and run away together with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure.

An old man was dozing in a great hooded chair in the hall. He lit a candle in the office and went before them to the stairs. They followed him in silence, their feet falling in soft thuds on the thickly carpeted stairs. She mounted the stairs behind the porter, her head bowed in the ascent, her frail shoulders curved as with a burden, her skirt girt tightly about her. He could have flung his arms about her hips and held her still, for his arms were trembling with desire to seize her and only the stress of his nails against the palms of his hands held the wild impulse of his body in check. The porter halted on the stairs to settle his guttering candle. They halted, too, on the steps below him. In the silence Gabriel could hear the falling of molten wax into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs.

The porter led them along a corridor and opened a door. Then he set his unstable candle down on a toilet-table and asked at what hour they were to be called in the morning.

“Eight,” said Gabriel.

The porter pointed to the tap of the electric-light and began a muttered apology, but Gabriel cut him short.

“We don’t want any light. We have light enough from the street. And I say,” he added, pointing to the candle, “you might remove that handsome article, like a good man.”

The porter took up his candle again, but slowly, for he was surprised by such a novel idea. Then he mumbled good night and went out. Gabriel shot the lock to.

A ghastly light from the street lamp lay in a long shaft from one window to the door. Gabriel threw his overcoat and hat on a couch and crossed the room towards the window. He looked down into the street in order that his emotion might calm a little. Then he turned and leaned against a chest of drawers with his back to the light. She had taken off her hat and cloak and was standing before a large swinging mirror, unhooking her waist. Gabriel paused for a few moments, watching her, and then said:

“Gretta!”

She turned away from the mirror slowly and walked along the shaft of light towards him. Her face looked so serious and weary that the words would not pass Gabriel’s lips. No, it was not the moment yet.

“You looked tired,” he said.

“I am a little,” she answered.

“You don’t feel ill or weak?”

“No, tired: that’s all.”

She went on to the window and stood there, looking out. Gabriel waited again and then, fearing that diffidence was about to conquer him, he said abruptly:

“By the way, Gretta!”

“What is it?”

“You know that poor fellow Malins?” he said quickly.

“Yes. What about him?”

“Well, poor fellow, he’s a decent sort of chap, after all,” continued Gabriel in a false voice. “He gave me back that sovereign I lent him, and I didn’t expect it, really. It’s a pity he wouldn’t keep away from that Browne, because he’s not a bad fellow, really.”

He was trembling now with annoyance. Why did she seem so abstracted? He did not know how he could begin. Was she annoyed, too, about something? If she would only turn to him or come to him of her own accord! To take her as she was would be brutal. No, he must see some ardor in her eyes first. He longed to be master of her strange mood.

“When did you lend him the pound?” she asked, after a pause.

Gabriel strove to restrain himself from breaking out into brutal language about the sottish Malins and his pound. He longed to cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her. But he said:

“O, at Christmas, when he opened that little Christmas-card shop, in Henry Street.”

He was in such a fever of rage and desire that he did not hear her come from the window. She stood before him for an instant, looking at him strangely. Then, suddenly raising herself on tiptoe and resting her hands lightly on his shoulders, she kissed him.

“You are a very generous person, Gabriel,” she said.

Gabriel, trembling with delight at her sudden kiss and at the quaintness of her phrase, put his hands on her hair and began smoothing it back, scarcely touching it with his fingers. The washing had made it fine and brilliant. His heart was brimming over with happiness. Just when he was wishing for it she had come to him of her own accord. Perhaps her thoughts had been running with his. Perhaps she had felt the impetuous desire that was in him, and then the yielding mood had come upon her. Now that she had fallen to him so easily, he wondered why he had been so diffident.

He stood, holding her head between his hands. Then, slipping one arm swiftly about her body and drawing her towards him, he said softly:

“Gretta, dear, what are you thinking about?”

She did not answer nor yield wholly to his arm. He said again, softly:

“Tell me what it is, Gretta. I think I know what is the matter. Do I know?”

She did not answer at once. Then she said in an outburst of tears:

“O, I am thinking about that song, ‘The Lass of Aughrim.’”

She broke loose from him and ran to the bed and, throwing her arms across the bed-rail, hid her face. Gabriel stood stock-still for a moment in astonishment and then followed her. As he passed in the way of the cheval-glass he caught sight of himself in full length, his broad, well-filled shirt-front, the face whose expression always puzzled him when he saw it in a mirror, and his glimmering gilt-rimmed eye-glasses. He halted a few paces from her and said:

“What about the song? Why does that make you cry?”

She raised her head from her arms and dried her eyes with the back of her hand like a child. A kinder note than he had intended went into his voice.

“Why, Gretta?” he asked.

“I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song.”

“And who was the person long ago?” asked Gabriel, smiling.

“It was a person I used to know in Galway when I was living with my grandmother,” she said.

The smile passed away from Gabriel’s face. A dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind and the dull fires of his lust began to glow angrily in his veins.

“Someone you were in love with?” he asked ironically.

“It was a young boy I used to know,” she answered, “named Michael Furey. He used to sing that song, ‘The Lass of Aughrim.’ He was very delicate.”

Gabriel was silent. He did not wish her to think that he was interested in this delicate boy.

“I can see him so plainly,” she said, after a moment. “Such eyes as he had: big, dark eyes! And such an expression in them—an expression!”

“O, then, you were in love with him?” said Gabriel.

“I used to go out walking with him,” she said, “when I was in Galway.”

A thought flew across Gabriel’s mind.

“Perhaps that was why you wanted to go to Galway with that Ivors girl?” he said coldly.

She looked at him and asked in surprise:

“What for?”

Her eyes made Gabriel feel awkward. He shrugged his shoulders and said:

“How do I know? To see him, perhaps.”

She looked away from him along the shaft of light towards the window in silence.

“He is dead,” she said at length. “He died when he was only seventeen. Isn’t it a terrible thing to die so young as that?”

“What was he?” asked Gabriel, still ironically.

“He was in the gasworks,” she said.

Gabriel felt humiliated by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A shameful consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a ludicrous figure, acting as a penny-boy for his aunts, a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own clownish lusts, the pitiable fatuous fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. Instinctively he turned his back more to the light lest she might see the shame that burned upon his forehead.

He tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation, but his voice when he spoke was humble and indifferent.

“I suppose you were in love with this Michael Furey, Gretta,” he said.

“I was great with him at that time,” she said.

Her voice was veiled and sad. Gabriel, feeling now how vain it would be to try to lead her whither he had purposed, caressed one of her hands and said, also sadly:

“And what did he die of so young, Gretta? Consumption, was it?”

“I think he died for me,” she answered.

A vague terror seized Gabriel at this answer, as if, at that hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world. But he shook himself free of it with an effort of reason and continued to caress her hand. He did not question her again, for he felt that she would tell him of herself. Her hand was warm and moist: it did not respond to his touch, but he continued to caress it just as he had caressed her first letter to him that spring morning.

“It was in the winter,” she said, “about the beginning of the winter when I was going to leave my grandmother’s and come up here to the convent. And he was ill at the time in his lodgings in Galway and wouldn’t be let out, and his people in Oughterard were written to. He was in decline, they said, or something like that. I never knew rightly.”

She paused for a moment and sighed.

“Poor fellow,” she said. “He was very fond of me and he was such a gentle boy. We used to go out together, walking, you know, Gabriel, like the way they do in the country. He was going to study singing only for his health. He had a very good voice, poor Michael Furey.”

“Well; and then?” asked Gabriel.

“And then when it came to the time for me to leave Galway and come up to the convent he was much worse and I wouldn’t be let see him, so I wrote him a letter saying I was going up to Dublin and would be back in the summer, and hoping he would be better then.”

She paused for a moment to get her voice under control, and then went on:

“Then the night before I left, I was in my grandmother’s house in Nuns’ Island, packing up, and I heard gravel thrown up against the window. The window was so wet I couldn’t see, so I ran downstairs as I was and slipped out the back into the garden and there was the poor fellow at the end of the garden, shivering.”

“And did you not tell him to go back?” asked Gabriel.

“I implored of him to go home at once and told him he would get his death in the rain. But he said he did not want to live. I can see his eyes as well as well! He was standing at the end of the wall where there was a tree.”

“And did he go home?” asked Gabriel.

“Yes, he went home. And when I was only a week in the convent he died and he was buried in Oughterard, where his people came from. O, the day I heard that, that he was dead!”

She stopped, choking with sobs, and, overcome by emotion, flung herself face downward on the bed, sobbing in the quilt. Gabriel held her hand for a moment longer, irresolutely, and then, shy of

intruding on her grief, let it fall gently and walked quietly to the window.

She was fast asleep.

Gabriel, leaning on his elbow, looked for a few moments unresentfully on her tangled hair and half-open mouth, listening to her deep-drawn breath. So she had had that romance in her life: a man had died for her sake. It hardly pained him now to think how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life. He watched her while she slept, as though he and she had never lived together as man and wife. His curious eyes rested long upon her face and on her hair: and, as he thought of what she must have been then, in that time of her first girlish beauty, a strange, friendly pity for her entered his soul. He did not like to say even to himself that her face was no longer beautiful, but he knew that it was no longer the face for which Michael Furey had braved death.

Perhaps she had not told him all the story. His eyes moved to the chair over which she had thrown some of her clothes. A petticoat string dangled to the floor. One boot stood upright, its limp upper fallen down: the fellow of it lay upon its side. He wondered at his riot of emotions of an hour before. From what had it proceeded? From his aunt's supper, from his own foolish speech, from the wine and dancing, the merry-making when saying good night in the hall, the pleasure of the walk along the river in the snow. Poor Aunt Julia! She, too, would soon be a shade with the shade of Patrick Morkan and his horse. He had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing "Arrayed for the Bridal." Soon, perhaps, he would be sitting in that same drawing-room, dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and Aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. He would cast about in his mind for some words that might console her, and would find only lame and useless ones. Yes, yes: that would happen very soon.

The air of the room chilled his shoulders. He stretched himself cautiously along under the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one, they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age. He thought of how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover's eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live.

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.

* * * * *



Sam Knot



Twelve Twelve Twentysomething

*deep
in the forest of beech
traffic haunted*

“ . . . as if now were high ground—and all around a flood of time—lapping at the shrunk horizon—it was that sound—when a big gust comes—that’s when you’d remember them—the ghost machines—memories at great speed—that’s in the sound too—the rushing—the wind in the ears—rushing in the windows—brushing at the smooth metal skin—

“think of a horse—of going full gallop on some well-fit steed—the wind roars in your ears just the same—but then think—that’s just your little toe—all the rest of both your feet is how much faster we would go . . .”

*in the fog
passing shades of
sun body*

“ . . . remember driving—as if it were yesterday—driving through the mist—thick fog—so that the road seemed to unravel out the clouds less than fifty metres in front—and when the incline changed—you went down and were about to ascend—it looked for all the world like a path leading straight to heaven—but it was a cold damp heaven—a giant’s mountain house—the clouds—

“and it reminded you of old computer games—like seeing the foggy horizon of some preternatural processing power—the smudged-out limits of its ability to render your simulated world . . .”

*drawn inside
the storm cloud
branches*

“ . . . so you got home—some inexplicable ache behind your eyes—and sat—exhausted—on the edge of the coffee table in front the stove tying knots of newspaper—

“you went off to get your lighter and were just about to put a flame to it when—whoosh!—a flap and a fucking demon flew out—this glinting black bundle of power—

“and bash!—it smacked into the window and lay for a moment with one wing spread and you saw it was a starling—

“then it flew—straight across the room into a painting—*The Monk by the Sea*—you were chatting away telling it to chill while you opened the window and then—fwh!—it flew out and was gone—

“you imagined you had already started the fire and the bird had caught alight—you opened the stove and a burning starling came out smelling of burning hair and bouncing round the room like a tiny phoenix in reverse—

“so you imagined helping this little bird—this small semi-bald frazzled thing—dressing its wounds and—though it couldn’t fly—giving it some kind of a life—

“then you wondered who you would be doing that for—

“not another thought now—just snuffing it out . . .”

*shotgun shot
far-off—past the ear
an arrow*

“ . . . in some strange sense the notion in your head this morning is really a memory—both of dreams—a dream—and of thoughts—little moments—inklings—glimmerings of a something too big to see—too big—or—

“classical music playing on the stereo as we roll towards the woods—your being manipulated—no—too rude a word—the sympathetic movements of your emotions and the music—their synchrony—

“I should follow the deer away from the hunt—

“the way a melody will be running along and it will take a sudden shift—it will drop or rise and it’s like—it mimics the way you just felt something—something suddenly happened and your chest opened and your heart fell out—

“maybe music—once-upon-a-time—was more like the expression of a single sustained feeling—each song a trance—a dirge—but somewhere along the line we learned to let it shift seamlessly from one key to another—like something inside us already does—and unlock these deeply felt intangi-bubbles—not just emotion but the things before and after—this level of immediacy that we can neither deny nor confirm—we can share it but only in terms of a kind of—

“do you know what I mean are you getting this do you understand?

“so—the actual sentence in your head this morning—something like—becoming aware of—moments of apprehending . . .”

*glimpses
of the being
I am dying into*

“ . . . glimpses of the great mind we are all thoughts in or something—but that is such a cheesy clichéd expression—so try to get to the heart of that image—what it feels like to live it—what it feels like to

see through yourself to a world that is completely beyond you—and yet to recognize that this world is going on inside you too—

“this is the sense in which to die into this greater being is a becoming of ourselves—of sorts—a revelation of what is deep—deep within us—and yet oh so very close to the surface—

“there is a sense of translucence—of colors that are see-through—and yet brighter and more pure in their being not completely there—or here—not bouncing off things into our eyes—flavored spaces occupied—yet somehow still reflective in the way they glint and glimmer—absorbed in forbidden invitations—the way they intimate that somehow we are . . .”

*concentric bubbles of
lives burst into
this bird-filled world*

“ . . . we are seeing ourselves from a new point of view—a point of view that is no point of view—everything seen-through from nowhere—a place in a world that can't be placed—

“a house with trees inside and
brightly colored birds in the branches
a fire in the middle and
ruined stone walls open to a cold blue day
a spiraling wolf—footprints in the snowhere
a snuggling cat—snake-
flick of disappearing tail—dragons!

“this is what you are . . .”

*always open
ears extend a welcome
to voice space*

“ . . . you are—a place—and the things moving through you are places too—and many times as well—but fuck time and space—this is beyond them—between them too—eternity yes—but not some static eternity—not some cold unmoving everness—a changing eternity—a living and—

“that's how we get the sense that—even though you are neither here nor there—you were important somehow—the things that came before you are the movements that make you and continue through and beyond you—they are both you and not you—they won't sit together—they won't exist logically together—but you can hold them together—because that's what you are—those are the things that hold you together—what you are not—

“so this place changed you and you changed it—you have been acknowledged by existence itself—it is what you are and it is what is there when you are not—it is where you leave from to go nowhere—which sounds like nonsense—and so it feels like an emptiness now—to have talked it out—

“it is no longer evocative of that—world—that time-place-sense in which imagination is located—where you can stand—and you can’t point to this thing—but you can feel it—almost spatially—you can feel its location—somewhere that is both—inside the crack in the wrinkle in the crevice you are—and off to one side—

“this particular feeling is off and to the right—behind—both inside—and out there in space—and in time—it’s something that has visited you in the past—an image a feeling a moment an ungraspable thing that happened—and it’s something you will meet again in the future—

“glimpses of the being you are dying into—glimpses of the bigger thing you are becoming—but you don’t want to put any kind of candy-coating on it—because where you are going you will almost certainly not be there by the time you arrive—

“no candy-coating but nothing to fear—though a sense of anxiety sometimes . . .”

*—just passing through—
the robin’s eye
level with mine*

“ . . . you read somewhere recently that anxiety is little but the movement of things in a realm you are not quite aware of—anxiety is things happening in a part of you that you do not at this moment have complete access to—and perhaps those things wouldn’t be happening if you did—you would be interfering somehow—

“so after a time we learn to let anxiety be—we can’t be rid of it—but we can understand what it means—what it signifies—

“depths
depths—soul and deepness—deep-ression—

“wulurub-bikay wu-bukup-wulurup-roooo
wriggly-wriggly-wrup-de-roody-mush-roo-deeee
o-wul-kave-to-rise-in-a-beel-oh-ko-boww
yes-you-can-be-as-crazy-as-you-wan-to-beee
yes-thisis-the-definition-of troo-sanit-eeee . . .”

*uprooting desires
tree thoughts walk in
deep written skin*

“ . . . then yesterday—hunting small beech trees to bring home to our land and transplant—it was the first time I had wandered the wood with—utile eyes—looking for things that were useful to me—and it made me uncomfortable—it was a strange way to look at the wood for me—this place of dreams—this house of many lives—and there I was—a continual interruption stumbling through an almost imperceptible conversation—wondering if this piece or that might fit into my plans—

“it felt rude but I knew it could be right too—to take a little from here to improve things over there—to make a richer home—and not just for us—for the land itself—diversify its biology—make it more than just meadows—thicken the hedges—make new woods—expand the existing one—make ponds—leave some places closed—there would be edge-zones everywhere—

“and in the end feeling okay about these utile eyes—these eyes that see resources in the wood—in this place that is so much bigger than us—that is so much more than mere resources—whose ultimate value has nothing at all to do with how useful it is to us—whose ultimate value is in the fact that it exists and has grown itself—

“and so thinking about trees—planting trees—and having them change my ideas of time—until suddenly it seems nothing to think—I will put you in the ground now—and in five years you’ll be—perhaps a little taller than me—and in ten—while still young—maybe you are something I can stand under and enjoy as—you know—I carry on getting older—

“you are growing—I guess some people have this with children—with kids in their lives—but I’d rather have tree children—I’d rather die into a world than an individual or a line of them—

“a world that is a person—a personable world—filled with personality but with no center of personality—no self—all self—and all selfless—

“so I become happier with the grander expanses of time—less immediate results—there is no great pressure to finish this or that project—they are threads—continuations—they are not things that I will finish—and no one ever will finish them—they might be finished with people at some point but—they will never in themselves be finished—

“which perhaps—in some straight-to-the-point but quite round-about way—is what it means to call a being complete . . .”

*instantly gradual
behind the white sky
the sun grows closer*

* * * * *



 Raymond Soulard, Jr.


Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Twelve

"I tell you, there are more words,
and more fears to them,
than you will think of in many years!"
—George Macdonald
Lith, 1895

iv.

I was 43 years old in 2007, first year this book crossed my birthday. Lived on the other side of the continent. Before *Dream Raps*, before *Travelers Tales*, before *Bags End News* fully revived. Before the Tangled Gate, before the vast mythopoeia now arisen.

This book was more like the earlier ones then, has become & become over time more, deeper, better. But tis also like a road, not better or worse, simply further along.

Means much, means little to say so. "It's all one song!" is what Neil Young once shouted back at a heckler, with reckless & well-earned pride.

Could I have guessed this 15th time this book has crossed my birthday? That it would happen, maybe. The world it would be? Not really.

But, then again, the world of this book, these ongoing pages, is a safe one for me. Tis familiar. This book is a handwritten affair, tho many only ever see it typed up neat & published in *The Cenacle*. Occasionally, a tidbit from these actual pages.

Likely fewer saw this book's pages in any form in 2007. A curious thing to toy with, this thought, but not one to do much with.

These pages are what they are neither because of nor despite readers of them. Which is not to say unfriendly to them, but more to say they are like two kids playing catch in an empty field. They do what they do, be there any kind of audience or not.

In truth, this book is too deep down in me for the world to be a primary concern. A secondary one, sure, but primary? No.

So why the extended riff on this topic then? Because I wonder, rarely but do, why I am different. Someone told me recently every other writer values book sales & regard.

Book sales? *Labyrinthine?* That makes me laugh. Regard? Maybe such a thing is nice but my fear is that it sets an expectation. I do this work because I love doing it, & it is my greatest passion. But I cannot say the plan, or promise anything one way or another. Best to share work, as I do, but neither expect nor hope for more than a passing compliment.

Funny topic to drift through, especially when Abe & Willy Nilly patiently await me.

They would not exist if I hadn't focussed my entire, obsessive attention on Art & Art alone.

They entertain me, & I them to a degree. That's my glad preference.

Neither better nor worse, just mine, all this, as the world comes & goes, shifts & shifts & shifts again. Another birthday, so glad of this book!

"Is it time to toss your coins & dice, Son?" asks kindly Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle. *Oh yes. Narrative.* OK.

I look around at this strange beautiful place. Let me say more about it now.

A beautiful sandy beach running both ways forever, is this Beach of Many Worlds. Tis at the shore of the Deeper Deeper Sea, yonder, dive in there & deeper down, or better yet make good friends with Calgary the Sea Dragon, & you will come to a dry cave, a long tunnel, & if your travels go well, or Calgary brings you, you will arrive to the Great Tree at the Heart of the World. And nearby the Hut by which one can travel to & from Unitive Time.

Up there, those clouds, what not quite visible above them? The bottom of the Deep Deep Sea. Calgary again a help in traveling through. Up, up, & come to the surface of the Wide Wide Sea!

Near us is a hut with a porch of rocking chairs, & also a beautiful White Birch. Past & hence a fellow. A White Birch because helping a friend.

I start. Oh yes. "Is Assoyadonna here around?" I ask Abe, & I guess Willy Nilly who I notice comfortably tucked in the grasp of one of Abe's flippers.

Abe shakes his head. "Not right now."

I think. "Has Francisco been back for his friend?" Pointing to the White Birch.

Abe shakes his head.

I sit on the sand. *Hmmms.* Deep colors in it. Beautiful, more than my casual notice.

"Is this narrative about finding & uniting the King & his lost Brothers, or what they do when united?"

"Are you unsure?"

"Both interest me."

"What then?"

Abe's expression is ancient & kind. His is the age of every upward rather than a kind of curling decay.

Willy Nilly in his grasp is green & freckled & crooked smile charming. They wait.

“I know they are all far in time & space from each other. The Beast told me this scattering wasn’t his doing, & did not happen in his Cave.”

“What slows you then?”

I shrug.

The air is cool here, very clear.

“Do you know?”

I shake my head.

“Time to throw the dice & coins?”

I nod. My bookbag is nearby, now if not before, & so I start to unpack my notebooks, & also dig out my blue-green coin purse.

Willy Nilly sort of hops from Abe’s grasp to among my doings. His charming smile & he wants to help. OK.

I offer my hand for Willy to hop up on for better conversation—he agreeably does—

“What do you Creatures know about the Brothers?” I ask.

He smiles even wider, sniffs agreeably.

I think. “They all know you Creatures. What I’m struggling to know is what happened to them in the Tangled Gate & what they would do if reunited.”

“Why?” Willy asks friendly.

“Why?” I reply.

He nods, paw on his chin listening.

I close my eyes a moment, feel the lavishly soft air here, maybe because between two living oceans? the *whoosh-whoosh-whoosh* of the Deeper Deeper Sea so close.

“I want to tell a really good story. Straight & true as I can.”

Willy smiles like this makes sense.

“Time for dice & coins?”

I nod. “This mythopoeia best helps itself along.”

I arrange my little trinkets in a circle & roll the dice & toss the coins until I come up with a list to draw from. Ranges from work of 2020 or so, on back, toward 2000, lots of years in between—

I’m crouched on soft musical colorful sand near Abe, who half-dozes waiting. Willy Nilly is nearby too, paw on his chin, Creature-style thinking.

Finish, smile low & high at them as I pack my trinkets back into my bookbag.

“Ready!” I pronounce.

They nod & smile happy.

Then I happen to look far down this endless Beach of Many Worlds, & here comes Asoya Donna!

I hop up & rush to hug her. Her smile cheery as the unseen sun above.

We return to Abe & Willy Nilly & form a kind of circle of very small to very large, but a friendly group for certain.

They wait for me. I close my eyes & we reach to touch, & they soon join my *hmmmming* invite.

I find myself drifting back to that moment when I found myself waking up in the Pensionne but for a lingering moment I had thought it was Clover-dale—old armchair in a wooden room—ceiling of stars above—

Barely aware of where I am sitting, *actually* sitting, I try to *hmmm* an image to my friends, of this wooden room, & the words, or at least their sentiment: *wait for me*.

Open my eyes, or the ones I have in this strange vision, & this time I am indeed in Clover-dale—

And it feels real despite all—Clover-dale wanted me to return—whatever this means—

And for a lingering moment, I stay unmoving in this old armchair, its soft cushion beneath me, equally plush pads on its arms. Kindly? No. I project too much. I want everything in the world to be kindly. Isn't.

Look up to ceiling of stars & they seem much nearer than stars usually are. Like Clover-dale is speeding through deep space. Like a Space Tugboat or those *Star Trek* guys?

But, again, no menace in this. Spaceship, or house, or somehow both, nothing to intimidate or chase in this.

This room feels *longer* than it ought, *deeper* or something. Like it is oddly stretched—distorted somehow—

Am I here to help? Am I summoned? To learn, perhaps tell the full story here?

I lean back in my chair. *No*, I think, *that's not it*.

Speak now: "If you want me to help, let me know how." Remember Algernon Beagle had good luck here, politely asking.

Wait. Nothing. Hmm. Figgers.

Wait some more.

"I can wait a long time for you to respond. Or I can try to shake myself out of this," I warn mildly. "But I would rather help if you need it."

Long wait. Near dozing, I hear a hidden cackle.

I suspect tis an Imp, & among those many bookshelves lining the walls. Hopeful her game plays a part in all this, not just random shenanigans, I begin to hunt high & low among the volumes, led on by her cackles, no pattern of a path to them, but keep on—

They stop me as I alight on a slender volume, looks old & well-worn, just at my eye's level.

Knowing she is gone, I pull out the volume. Its worn title:

NHW S() JGO
[For K]

New Songs [For Cassandra] is the title page within. *Oh*. These are *my* poems, written as a sequence of short poems, long ago, as a kind of wedding gift for my beloved. Not of my knowing ever an *actual volume* but the home-made copy I gave her.

Why this? Clue? I open up curiously.

Page after page I read with a kind of wondering dismay. *These are not my poems*. One after the next. Not. Oh there are lines here & there I recognize. Not that I have them all memorized but they do not *feel* like *my kind* of expressions. Or just fragments mixed with foreign matter.

I try to study just one example & figure out what I *think* I *mean*.

Copy it out here, right into this

[This is where the secret is more hinted at, right in the middle of this sentence unknown to the author on either side of these brackets—listen—

[There are mysteries in this book, these related books, yet fully unearthen, maybe or maybe not to be revealed.

[Who am I? An iterate,
 another, an old preacher
 friend from somewhat green
 years & wishing to join
 anew in this game.

[The reaching back to older
 pages & times has its effects;
 noticed is changed, science
 says so.

[The more compasses & dice
 & arrows & flip-flopping through

old pages, the more the books
 change this & the other ones.

[Not meant as a warning, this,
 but more a heavy observation
 of what's pending. You see,
 it's like that crazy guy in
 the woods says to me that
 one time, "See, time runs only
 one way, but the heart doesn't.
 That's what fucks us up some-
 times. But sometimes just
 says our pots are more interesting
 finished with a smile.

[Just watch this happen &
 see what comes. Maybe I'm
 that guy in the wheelchair
 keeping watch, who knows for
 sure. Ask him? He'll just
 knock together a new voice,
 new face, same, different,
 but never give the answers.
 Get back now, before he
 notices...]

Labyrinthine, pulled from my bookbag. My own notebook of *New Songs* I cannot find. Right now, here, there's only this one.

*Ruins revive in a dream,
 a war-burnt monastery,
 its crowded char of ancient palms,
 a century or two ago,
 or maybe hence, a silence
 here in the worst leavings,
 no time here before the war,
 its cries & flames, a solitude
 here that believes no companion
 possible. On the ground, seeming
 baked into the frozen mud,
 a fragile necklace of blue shells,
 sole feeble argument for life's remain.*

Not my poem. I know, I know, I just copied it out here in this, my book, from that, a book alleging to be mine. But no, I did not write it.

On I guess a whim, after paging on through to the end with like results, I return to the title page:

New Songs [for Cassandra]

it says *now*. Oh. Um. Well. Why the Imp led me to this book, how it helps Clover-dale, if any way at all—I tuck it into my bookbag—

A voice: “Imagine, if you will, two great wheels. Two great wheels that form your entire universe.” It’s coming from near that armchair I was sitting in. I hurry over, still listening. “And they are turning, each towards the other, in towards the center & down. Where these wheels mesh, all that you know is both *revealed & in motion. This is your world.*”

I sit back down, now seeing the white-faced pink cat radio on the weird game-board on the side-table. The voice is soft, measured, Scottish. Humorous, a little, in tone, intelligent, easy to lose into.

“Now, please imagine that you were, in fact, mistaken. There are not *two* wheels, but an *uncountable* number of them. And they enter from, & mesh at, every conceivable angle & dimension. And they are of every conceivable . . .” I fall into a light doze then, in whatever this all happens to be.

I feel movement all around me, a steady shaking movement, & open my eyes to find myself in the back seat of a Greyhound bus! *Oh! Hm.*

My black sneakers are worn, & I feel ragged & looser like long years ago—*is this the bus I was on with Asoyadonna not long ago?*

No. It’s grittier. It feels like memory. I see I am writing with an old black pen in an old notebook:

*I haven't found my home yet so
I keep looking harder & the more
it eludes me the more it seems
I am nearing it*

Oh. *Things Change? [A New Fixtion]*. Check further. 6/9/2002. Chicago to Salt Lake City bus. *Why the fuck?* Dice & coins, yah, but still, I’m in Clover-dale! Was reading a fake version of poems I wrote in 2005! *How is this helping with the current narrative?* I am speeding, again, to heartbreak & poverty on the West Coast. *What to learn in this?*

I slow my plaint to read these pages anew, how this book imprisoned itself to my life’s struggles out there, how I kept writing it even after I lost for a long while Luna T’s Cafe, & Rich Americus, & Rebecca, & Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, & all the rest—it was just recorded sadness of struggling days—I tried to make it good still—

If no longer good, these pages witnessed then, & remember me now.

Then some kind of tussle in my bookbag? *What this?*

Out pops a Secret Book, almost like flung up into my hands! Upon my catching, the bookbag quiets down again, as though no-tussle-never-twas.

OK, I hold this Secret Book in my hand now, which I did not learn of till some years later than this seeming 2002 bus ride—was about 6 years later—

This one, chunky like a fist-sized brick, orange cloth cover decorated by various colored long leaves—its colored pages within stitched to its binding—is the current volume, begun November 2020, so long past this bus ride—

Yet it tussled up to me & so I check my dice & coins notes in *Labyrinthine*—yes, Vol. 18 on my list. OK.

I try to page through it for clues but the words are murky—what of this then?

Am I still on Abe's Beach with himself & Willy Nilly & dear Asoya Donna? Or back in the Pensionne with Donna & her beloved Aunt?

Is it too gritty here for *hmmming*? I think. OK. Got it.

Pull out from my old green windbreaker jacket my Walkman & headphones of that time. No Polly iPod yet.

Don the headphones, click the *play* button, will disguise my *hmmming* as listening to music.

Groovy jamband sounds, like recorded from an audience. Oh, this is one of my *Voice Journal* volumes, a time when I snuck my Walkman into a show!

Listen . . . Strangefolk at the Avalon in Boston. About June 2000? OK. Sure. Volume on low, I let this pretty music engage me just enough as I close my eyes & start to *hmmm*. Holding dear to the Secret Book as well.

Now the music louder, beyond my headphones. I open my eyes to discover myself sitting, Secret Book still in hand, at the bar of Luna T's Cafe!

I find myself looking up beyond the back of the bar to the old Dümönt TV up in the corner. Seems to be black & white or color by its own choosing. Right now, the former.

My headphones still on grooving jamband sounds from ago, I watch the images come into focus. I'm guessing this program is *TripTown* as so often here. Looks like Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle's Beach of Many Worlds up there!

And there is that lovely Abe himself, sitting peacefully near that strange hut with the rocking chairs on its porch, & the pretty tree growing nearby.

Not just Abe. Also that small little charming Froggy Creature fellow called Willy Nilly. Finely freckled & frocked to boot.

Willy Nilly is sitting on the soft paw of that dear Asoyadonna! Smiling friendly & I notice all of their attention is on a handsome bearded fellow standing near the pretty tree, a White Birch, before a canvas on an easel. Is that Francisco the painter, one of Asoya Donna's long lost Brothers?

Isn't his painting done? *What is going on here?*

Two large hands distract me by gently removing my headphones.

Twinkling blue eyes. None other could be. James T. Michael Reality III.

“Say guy!” he smiles friendly.

I do the only thing I could possibly do & slip off my barstool to give my dear old friend the deepest most loving hug I am able. He hugs me back, of course, maybe less panicked over his affection for me, & our ability still to meet up these many years by his passing.

He friendly gets us onto two adjacent barstools—Mr. Bob the barman has Jim’s mug of stout & my diet cola before us in a smooth swish—

“How are things among the stars?” I ask, at least half-serious.

Jim sips deeply, enjoys, but also mulling my words.

“I miss the world back there sometimes. My kids, you. Smoking weed out at the old Reservoir.”

“Weed’s getting legal everywhere.”

He twinkling smiles.

I tell him some of my travels in these pages, read him a passage or two. Smiling. This an old, dear pleasure of ours.

He sips deeply again, still in thought. “So you stopped by here for some grounding, & some remembering?”

Sip my own drink. “Yes, but not all. I don’t want this place, or you, to be just sentiment. I want to carry you along, find that way.”

He nods. Mr Bob ready to get him a refill but he shakes off. “Later.” Nods to me to follow him into the band-room.

Nobody is around. We sit at Rich Americus’s & Rebecca’s little table neath the front window. Jim’s guitar in hand, & a notebook pressing out of my bookbag. *Oh right.*

Jim leans comfortably forward in his chair, his bulky frame sort of wrapped lovingly around his playing. No song in particular—just roaming.

OK, check my notes, coins, dice, all that, open up that notebook, & begin to read bits of what I find—

And because Jim, his guitar, Luna T’s, I let other words come along too—

“Universe, I am asking again for help, for strength, for the best of what’s left in me—for strength to love the Beast & share the hour—to let grip on knowledge & clutch for wisdom give way—ever give way—”

Jim plays in & under & through my words, finding gaps & harmonies & where to twist word & note together into something *blooming new*—

I read & speak & sing some more, eyes sometimes open, sometimes wide shut—

“Reck the countless drummers & their dancers crying up the dust!

*“Shout ‘beguiled!’ again & again & fall deep anew into the desert—
Urge them all dance, all drum this word—
crush it to sparkles & blow laughing away!”*

I stand, nudge & push Jim from his seat, shout to him to play with me—

*“High on labyrinth!
endless desert!
to go!*

*“High on labyrinth!
endless desert!
to go!*

*“High on labyrinth!
endless desert!
to go!”*

He shouts it with me strumming the pretty chords & the dirty ones alike—

I half blindly grab another phrase—*“Love’s long blind reach into the dark”*—we sing it & play it again & again till we are collapsed on the floor—

He takes my notebook, pages back & forth a bit, then half-sings in his beautiful voice: *“What remains of the years I sing & call my Art.”* Hands me back my notebook. Nods & smiles like me *goodbye for now.*

I stand, offer to help him up. He shakes me off, smiling. Has a baggie of joint fixings for his pleasure. Rolls a good one.

I lean down & grasp his big shoulder.

I walk out the side entrance of Luna T’s Cafe to—*where?*

Thinking while switching pens—from my oldest school black pen to the I guess next oldest school one—neither are made anymore—

Walk out—*to where?* I know what’s next—the coil of it tightening in my mind—*readying—nearing—*

Sitting in a cushy old armchair I’ve sat in many times before—my beloved’s kin’s farmhouse on the High Plains—her old bedroom—this book has travelled through here before—not been since before the Pandemic—on either side—back again—

My dear one Polly iPod nearby—*oh deeper into it*—her playing Volume III of my *Voice Journal*—from back in August 1999—walking Boston with my also dear one Ciccone—I think we’re high on shrooms—this old content in my ears I’m passing from a bin of old cassettes, now digitized to MP3, bound for SpiritPlants Radio in some enigmatic form—

We'd been grad students together for two years—drunk & tripped & dived deep into each other's lives & Art—

I think he's going into a store for chewing tobacco—I was there—I can hear it—I've been here in this chair before—

We're chawing tobacco together—new to me—

Is this *to where?* A night 22 years ago & 1500 miles from here? With this old poet friend? Is *to where* also this armchair? Do these braid well? A quiet bedroom in a High Plains farmhouse & two friends tromping a late night Eastern city?

The narrative pending is the Six Brothers—*now capitalized?*—& how they reunite—how this involves the Creatures & the Gate-Keeper—& what else I could not guess—

Ah, I just learned that night I was drunk as a skunk, as I recorded it. Last night we drank at that apartment of his. He moved while I was away at Burning Man 1999. I was sentimental for the two years we visited in that apartment.

Present moment now lunch.

All these things dance friendly in my mind.

Day & a night pass, again it's morning, armchair, now King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band on Tabby, another electro-friend with music—*what then?*—

The Tangled Gate mythopoeia began, or came together, in 2012, & the Six Brothers were not the primary focus. Twas the Princess. The Creatures were also not primary. These many mixtured in a different way from what's to tell now, & yet what's to tell now is more story for them all—

My desire is toward a continuance—rather than a completion—I desire all of their stories go on—this has been true of the Princess, & of the Creatures, but not yet of the Brothers—

I filled in the Brothers' individual stories up to their joining up to find the Tangled Gate, but then scattered them, & left it there. Eventually, this felt . . . incomplete. *Why not re-unite them?* Isn't *saving* the world as much *protecting* & *preserving* the world? Took me this long to get to this simple, good idea.

But, how? What happened to them in the Cave of the Beast? 'Tis now come known that their scattering was *not* by the Beast's doing, nor did it happen in that Cave. Leaves big questions of *where? what? how? who? why?*

OK then. *To where?*

To there. Ready.

[None other but sing true, 15 years of this book, & all its dark & dancing days, its passing & its staying hungers, what it meant, what it fierces still to mean—

[None other but sing true & how the singer & the song ever strive for what this is, what it might yet be, its knives warming up new, its fur hackling—

[None other but sing true when this could be many things at once & some of them a clash, sing true, till the harmony finds that common note—to hold—to love—

[None other but sing true when truth itself eludes, what does it sound like, today, tonight, the morrow?
What does it ever sound like to sing?

[None other but sing true & maybe others join, maybe live awhile in shared music, but many move on,
by smile, by fury, by fall—

[None other but to sing true & believe by open hands & reaching hopes this all *possible*, this is all *good*,
this all *necessary*. *True*. *Sing true*.]



To be continued in Cenacle | 117 | October 2021



Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 115 | April 2021. Feeling like he is on the verge of arcing into deeper Art than ever before. More of his work can be found at: 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*. From his new adventures, he writes: “The current melange of characters will give me fodder for future tomes.” *Fodder ho, Charlie!* More of his writings can be found at therubyeye.blogspot.com.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His fiction & poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Lucky me that I was able to see him read his work live in a recent online poetry gathering! His new book of poetry, *Escape Envy*, selections of which are featured in this issue, was published in May 2021 by Brick Road Poetry Press.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at electrolounge.boards.net. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet, & perhaps join, those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her current passion is studying Chinese medicine. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless. She also hosts the excellent radio show of the same name on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com).

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*, was 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 (spiritplantsradio.com).

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. We had the most delightful phone call today, some of it remembrancing beloved old mentors. 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: 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 delight on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). Visit samknot.com for more of his work. We also had a lovely call today, talking of Art & wonderful, strange Nature.

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her prose & poetry appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). Her poems in this issue derive from her entries into the 2020 Bhéal Five Words International Poetry Competition.

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. She reports to me recently that her writing is going well. Wonderful! More of her writings can be found at: martinaneberry.wordpress.com.

Kenzie Oliver lives in Central Texas. She is a freelance writer, an avid naturalist, photographer, gardener, and amateur beekeeper. She is working on her bachelor's degree in Arts, and has future plans to help those affected by climate change. She plans to turn her family's ranch into a bee, native plant, and friendly wild animal sanctuary. Her work is a welcomed new addition to the pages of *The Cenacle*!

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry & prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His 50th book, *Fables, Fairy Stories, Folk Lore and Fantasies*, was published by Cyberwit in August 2020. Ever hunched over his keyboard after midnight, chasing the perfect sentence.

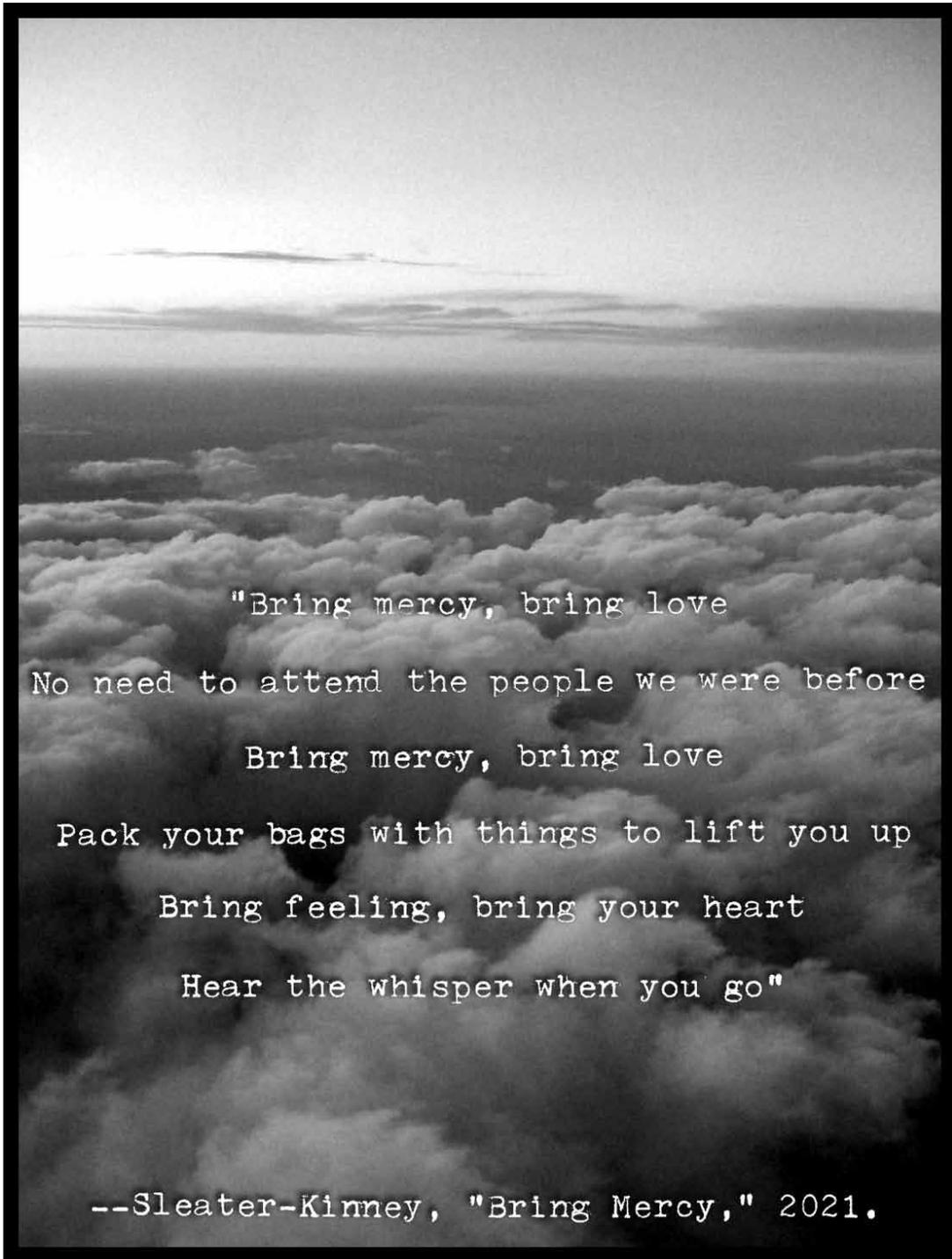
Kassandra Soulard lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. Kind, talented, funny, a wonderful kisser. In any order.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Milkrose, Massachusetts. Can't wait to get back into Boston & Cambridge & thereabouts this summer. Been too long!

Timothy Vilgiate lives in Austin, Texas. His *Rivers of the Mind [A Novel]* is regularly serialized in this journal. He's down in Mexico right now, working his special groove. The text version of *Rivers of the Mind* can be found at online: scriptorpress.com/vilgiate-riversofthemind.pdf. Its radio version, an amazing work in any form, can be found online at: riversofthemind.libsyn.com.

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"Bring mercy, bring love

No need to attend the people we were before

Bring mercy, bring love

Pack your bags with things to lift you up

Bring feeling, bring your heart

Hear the whisper when you go"

--Sleater-Kinney, "Bring Mercy," 2021.

