



The Enacle

12th Anniversary Issue
Number 61
April 2007



*Is not one's art made out of a struggle in one's soul?
—W.B. Yeats, Journals, 1909*

April 25, 2007
7:07 p.m.
Seattle Public Library [1st fl. 1st floor]
Seattle, WA.

Dear Jim,

It's been at least five years since I've written you a pen & ink letter, what a confound of time that is! I'm happy we've renewed our friendship & had a visit, however short it was. Visiting Boston for the first time since I moved away in 2002 was an emotional tumult. For all that had happened to me & the world in that intervening time, a buried ice slough in my heart never left, revealed itself angry & sad over my last, lonely months there. As I walked around with Kassi, all kinds of memories shook me. Some places were gone, some remained, no logic. By week's end, I felt more balanced, a clearer sense of why I'd left Boston, & the affections for it I retained. I'll visit again, it won't be another five years, & maybe one day from now I'll entertain my fancy to be an old man around Harvard Square among the chess players & street freaks. For now, fresher, happier memories.

-3-

I turn 43 years old this Saturday & have been trying to make some intelligent thought of this. Lately I've been reading a biography called Yeats's Ghosts by Brenda Maddox. Gets into his "secret life" as its subtitle indicates. He & his wife George were deeply involved in occult practices: seances, Automatic Writing, all sorts of practices & beliefs.

Good stuff, esoteric, arousing, but what interests me is how Yeats fueled his art with everything he tried. He chased the secret & the strange in hope of forming his own system of beliefs, & thus giving his poetry a deeper grounding.

He was a fantastic old man, which is my point here. He worked fanatically, ~~every~~ ever trying to expand his bounds, right off rust & sentiment. If nostalgia the felt, he poured it into new work.

I feel likewise inclined, use it all for music, for new strange words. The rust of sentiment is my poison. Turning 43 means another year of work gone by, & I hope another waiting ahead. Even when I'm that old man in Harvard Square, I'll have pen & paper in hand!

April 26, 2007
7:28 p.m.
Bauhans Books + Coffee
-mezzanine [right row]
table
Seattle, WA.

This month Scribtor Press turns 12 years old, & you've been part of it nearly 10 of these years. A few have longer, but not many. Anniversaries, like birthdays, are about human obsession with time, with its passing.

Time seems to obsess humans as much as desire, as music, as creation & existence themselves & whatever God or gods they credit or blame. Time passes, seems to there's evidence of it in nature, in the length of one's hair, in heroes & loved ones who live & die. Death presses to each heart the potency of time, & our helpless rage or praise on it.

Is time true, real, indisputable arbiter of the material world? Some mystics & physicists would both say no.

In my dream-life, & during many psychedelic adventures, I have experienced non-linearity, places of no-time, even places of no-place. Valid experiences, if

only in the sense that I believe what may occur may participate in the possible. But on return, or resumption, of life in familiar environs, the shawl of gravity, time, day & night, material history, settles, & so what I remain with are deviant memories, alternative possibilities that may be true only in my mind, or true beyond it. Or perhaps all is one mind, all realities one reality; all soul, one soul.

Maybe. Let reck every busy city street, here in Seattle, there in Boston, wherever, & each distinct drama enveloping the passing faces & hearts. Tonight I passed by an ailing woman & her companions, awaiting an ambulance. Then a pretty girl & her shopping bag. A gristled man seated with his begging cup. Onto a crowded bus & seated next to a younger man deep inside his CD player, singing, enrapt. The bus driver, an African-American woman, chattering about restaurants with her companion. Friends? Had they just met?

This coffee house, wooden, bookcase, loud with '80s pop music, this mezzanine crowded with young faces & laptop computers. I've sat here watching, like now, the sun set

-7-
near the Space Needle, countless times,
late nights, alone, with Kassi, does my
ghost remain? What remembers, &
what is memory?

One more anecdote about time, in
lieu of answers. This week I went for an
eye exam, first time since 1997, &
my eyes came through well, even my
beat old eyeglasses are still OK. But
something odd happened. My insurance
covers a pair of new glasses, so I figured
I'd get them & have two. Ten years ago,
just entered Emerson College's graduate
program in Boston, got with a new
friend to his eyeglass place, he & the
eye doctor both pressed me to get a
fashionable pair, whatever that was then.
I stuck to my guns, getting the one pair
with round frames like Trotsky's, like
John Lennon's. Same thing this week,
stressed to get the latest. Again I smiled,
& refused.

Strange example but 10 years & 3000
miles away, same occurrence. Time, yes,
& time, no. Another sunset, time, yes, & time,
no.

When someone dies or goes away,

-8-

we remember. Or when we do the going away, as I did from Boston. There is memory, layers of it, a complex of emotions, sounds, images. When I came back to Boston, I had to face new & confront old. It was rupturous, though eventually I cohered, a peace of sorts was made. I'd grown up there, many loves, many friends, many long strange nights sweet with LSD, pens & notebooks, a Walkman cranking music. Secret nights with no real witnesses, only my memories of them.

Memory, time. Sometimes, from a burst, music.

I've ~~let~~ let some time, real or not, pass before these closing lines. The sky has light but no color left. People come & go around me.

No conclusion. What final word on time's passage, if time is, if time passes? Just rhetoric, & a shoulder shrug.

This letter comes to you glad that you, & Boston, both still extant.  4-26-2007



Edited by Raymond Souland Jr. ©

Assistant Editor: Kassandra Soulard

THE BLACKTHORN MIRROR by G. C. Dillon	1
NEW SONGS (FOR KASSANDRA) by Raymond Souland, Jr. [©]	5
A SMALL, GOOD THING by Raymond Carver	25
POETRY by Judih Haggai	41
THINGS CHANGE? (SIX THRESHOLDS) [A NEW FICTION] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [©]	47
ECUADOR HOTEL by Ric Amante	83
NOTES FROM THE NORTHWEST by Raymond Souland, Jr. [©]	85
THE BROTHERHOOD OF ETERNAL LOVE by Stewart Tendler & David May	91
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	98

Seattle, Washington



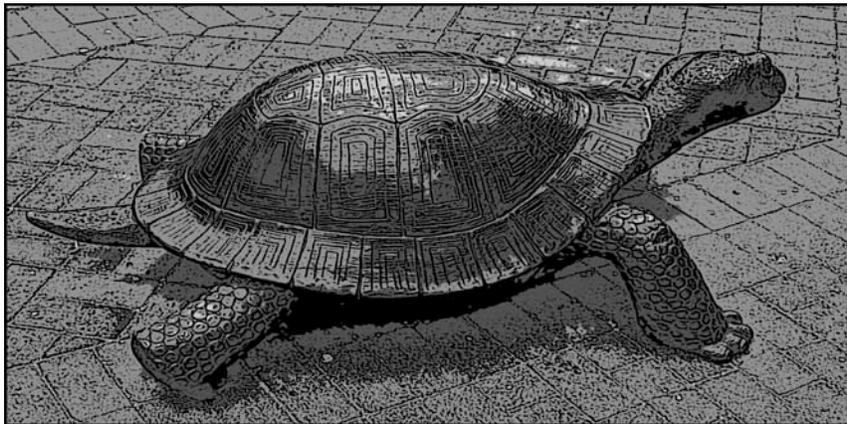
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April 2007 marks Scriptor Press’s 12th anniversary. It was April 1, 1995 that I announced to the Jellicle Literary Guild meeting at Roma Restaurant in New Britain, Connecticut that in four weeks I intended to bring out the first issue of *The Cenacle*. What began as a press devoted to one project now devotes to half a dozen in several media. What began as a project by & for a small group of long-time friends now spreads, more & less coherently, to many, to friends, to acquaintances, to strangers met, smilingly, once. Grateful, wonderfully so.



G. C. Dillon



The Blackthorn Mirror

Amanda Jasmine Ashbourne entered the dark confines of the Juno & the Paycock after work. It was a pub both suitably literary and suitably Irish for her taste. Jasmine took a seat at the bar. Her image came back to her from a large mirror. It was trimmed with an ornate frame carved with varied curlicue decorations. She was dressed in a sienna suit dress with a Texas string tie around her neck. Her work shoes—matching sienna pumps—were already in the knapsack at her sneakered feet. She'd gotten the knapsack at a conference in Washington. It had the name of a financial software vendor displayed conspicuously upon it. She could almost count her years at the bank by the number of tee shirts and promotional knickknacks she had gotten. She was now a Cashier Team Leader, a fancy name to give you the work of a low-level manager, but not the pay of one.

It wasn't getting older Jasmine minded; it was getting settled.

Brushing back her long, blonde hair, she mused lazily over the taps. Long Trail, Sierra Nevada, Bass. Maybe she would have a Black and Tan, no—"Guinness, please," she told the bartender when she came over for her order. Wasn't a real Irish bartender, just a local college student who needed a job. Jasmine could tell the difference. Or so she felt. It seemed only a few heartbeats since she was exactly that type of employee.

While the Guinness settled in her glass like rain into a Galway bog, Jasmine went over to the happy hour buffet. Is it called happy hour because people are happy they are out of work, not yet stuck in traffic? She grabbed a paper plate and began dishing macaroni salad onto it. Oooh, mini hot dogs and baked beans. Not too heavy on the beans, though. She was meeting Kiernan here. Kiernan was an Oracle programmer at the bank's corporate data center. She'd only heard him swear at computers and traffic. Can't say that about her, she thought. She has cussed her own litany at the bank's computer system. Even a few words her father hadn't taught her.

User friendly! It's more like friendly fire. She smiled wickedly at the thought—that included some of Kiernan's applications.

She was going home this weekend, home for a dual celebration at her parent's house. Her father's retirement party and her parents' forty-fifth wedding anniversary. It was to be a big family event. There would even be cousins there she was not related to. This would be her first time home in a while. She hadn't gone to her high school reunion. Even though her high school hadn't been named after Gog or Magog, what was really the point? That part of her life has passed resolutely away. She was a different person, literally. She'd just retch if anyone called her Mandy. She had decided at fifteen to be called by her middle name. Didn't even need a court to change it. It had taken going off to college, BC of all places, to get people to acquiesce to her desire and call her Jasmine.

She did have one question. Would Kiernan go back home with her for the party? Maybe she should ask him. Oh god, no, she thought. How could she inflict her family upon him? But how would he feel if she didn't? Would he or would he not be upset really

depended upon the one question she hadn't asked. Was Kiernan really her boyfriend? She pondered between wondrous sips of the stout. That was the real question. Christ, she was even wearing his clothes. Just his concert tee shirts, but still . . .

It's not getting older she minded; it's getting settled.

What was it about boyfriends? Why couldn't she just go out with her friends on a Friday night? Why did she need to go out with him? Well, she did like him.

Jasmine paused to glance about the establishment. It was a self-consciously Irish pub with black and white photos from the old country peppering the walls and a soccer (football) team sign-up sheet posted on a corkboard. Then she noted the two guys sitting near her at the bar. One was about three years younger than she was. And she remembered when she was the youngest in a pub. The fellow he was with was a large man in a grey suit with a mane of brown, curly hair. It had just begun to be salted with white. He had a large mug of the pale yellow, domestic draft before him.

"I just don't get it," the younger one said.

"It's beer. Ya pour it in your mouth and ya swallow happily."

"Not the beer. It's my girlfriend. Or I should say my non-girlfriend."

"Kinda rough, is it?"

"Yeah, I saw her last night over a friend's place. We ended up in the corner talking. But all she talked about was how the guy she was with now was treating her like crap. I mean it's like my life has become a cliché. Classic story of the girl telling the guy who wants her, who treated her well, how bad her boyfriend is. I just don't get it."

"How's her father treat her?"

"Badly."

Yeah, easy answer, she thought. Electra complex. Girlie who'd do anything to win daddy's approval. Or was it love? What he didn't get—besides laid—was that there was more to it than just being nice, more to it than buying a girl a beer every once in a while. He could think he treated her the way she wanted to be all because he was better to her than some jerk had been, but that didn't mean he treated her the way she needed.

Jasmine felt too much like an eavesdropper so she sipped a taste of her brew and turned her attention to the paperback book she'd stashed in her knapsack. She had planned to read *Candide* during her lunch break, but instead only had time to grab a take-out Greek salad at her desk.

"Okay, see you at work tomorrow, kid." Jasmine looked up from her book to see the younger man leave. The older man passed her on the way to grab a second helping of the pub grub.

"So, you've seen the Blackthorn mirror?"

"Pardon?" Jasmine glanced toward the speaker. The man stood there, a small plate of vegetarian lasagna in his hand.

"The mirror. It's magic. Ask the bartender. Not her. Ask the old guy. He's out back having a smoke. It's called the Blackthorn mirror. It belonged to a witch in Kilarney or Sligo or somewhere before being brought to America back in '47."

"Magic?" Jasmine questioned.

"Yeah," he said between forkfuls of the stringy cheese and pasta. "It shows you alternate possibilities. Maybe just shows what you want to see."

"Like in Harry Potter?"

"Uh. I don't have kids. Could be it's scientific, you know. Beyond Newton, beyond Einstein, even beyond Heisenberg. Like something out of String Theory, it's a portal into parallel universes with bundled up dimensions exploding through the looking glass."

“Okay.”

“Could be it’s like looking into God’s afterthoughts.”

“Assuming we’re not the afterthought. Sixth day and all. Maybe it’s Lilith’s children who should have inherited the earth, the meek not withstanding,” Jasmine replied. *But from much of what I’ve seen of creation, she refrained from saying, it may be more like unintelligent design, or at least negligent.* “So,” she continued, “it is like quantum particles can theoretically inhabit any one of a multitude of possible subatomic locations, and this mirror reflects a different quantum reality. Is that it?”

“You got it. I guess like heavy water slowing down an electron enough to smash atoms, it’s a prism to an alternate truth.”

“Talk about a mirror darkly,” she replied.

“I’ve seen some weird shit. And it wasn’t the booze either.” He placed his empty plate on the bar near her Guinness. “I’ve got to be going. Say, weren’t you curious about why I started talking to you?”

“Well.” Jasmine smiled weakly. “Frankly, yes.”

“Saw it in the mirror. Before you got here.”

This was crazy, Jasmine thought. Some poor old woman’s mirror has become the source of a barroom superstition. It was sad, truly sad. She bet it got the best play on Halloween night.

So what would she see if she really gazed into the Backthorn mirror? Jasmine mused a moment. Would her hair be dyed red, or twisted into dreadlocks? She smiled a bit at the thought. Or—her heart suddenly beating faster, would her hair be gone, the victim of some needed chemotherapy, or her face disfigured in some horrific accident or mugging. She swallowed these thoughts with a long drink of her Guinness. Maybe if she looked hard enough she would be missing, having never left home and settling for the parochial pleasures her hometown had to offer.

Then Jasmine saw him standing at the free food line. A god-awful mustache marred his lip, and his hair was trimmed too short. Or too short for the brother she remembered.

On her desk at work, she had a picture of him with that damned bike. It wasn’t even a powerful American chopper—just a rice burner Japanese import. He loved that bike. He looked like such a bad ass in that instant photo with the wide frame and the magic marker date plastered crudely upon it. He wore sunglasses and had arms akimbo as he leaned casually against the kickstanded motorcycle. Their grandmother said he looked like he was a member of New York City’s Westies gang.

It wasn’t getting older Jasmine minded; it was getting settled. Wasn’t it? she thought.

There were other pictures, too. Neither Polaroid, nor Kodak, these were only developed in the darkroom of her memory. Pictures not so pretty. Scenes of the motorcycle accident, the hospital room, the cold walls and plush chairs in the Critical Care Waiting Area. The out-of-date *Newsweek* and *Redbook*. Waiting Area had not been a misnomer. Scenes of the casket, the flowers, the grey stones carved with names. A soundtrack existed as well. Fr. Kawiecki saying death is not an end, but rather a beginning with God. Where was God in this? she had thought. God ride a Harley or an Indian? Her aunt saying, “God loved Joey so much that He brought him to Him.” The doctor asking if he would be an organ donor.

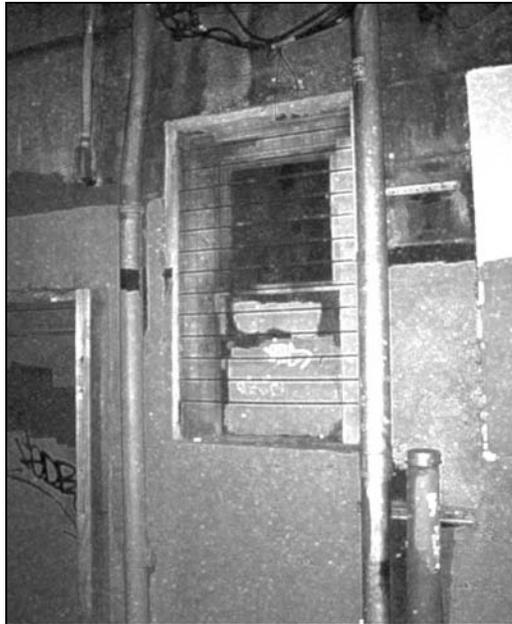
But the afternoon quiet that had been worse. She went to his room - stuff already in boxes, posters still on the wall. It was inconceivable that she had to stop and help fix supper, like routine swallowed up his passing too quickly, too easily, too completely, and too finally.

Great! To her the mirror shows Family, Death and Loss. Does anyone see anything happy? Joey piled his paper plate high with chicken wings. He placed his thumb in his mouth to taste test the Buffalo sauce. He looked toward her image and winked, then gave a thumbs up. So like him. She scanned the mirror's reflection carefully. Was he alone? Or had he come with wife, possibly mother of his children? Were there friends from work? And what work? She wanted to know what life he would have had.

Jasmine could feel the magic in the images. What had changed? What fateful alignment of quarks, not stars, had given birth to this life her brother did not live. A needed phone call from his girlfriend, one less fight with their father? Or had it just not rained and the roads were not slick. The what-if images, thoughts, never-had memories were seductive. So inviting to lose oneself in the mirror's reflected reality. So addictive. In her case, long buried grief broke the thin surface it had hidden under, only to be dispelled by that other world. So easy to leave one's real history behind; so easy to wallow in a self-indulgent fantasy; so easy to assuage the pain and ignore all her problems for the mirror's life. Just sit in front of the looking glass and have another Guinness with Joey. So easy . . .

"Jesse, sorry I'm late. There was an issue with an ACH file, and I had to run some queries on—" Kiernan stood behind her. His reflection broke the other images that had displayed upon the glass.

Jasmine turned. Life outside the mirror returned to her. And she knew what she should do. "Hey, what are you doing this weekend? My family has a big party planned. If—if ya wanna go."



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



New Songs (for Cassandra)
[concluded]

However

What was it like when this city was world
 & home? Blue days lorn for a maiden, flushed
 nights high in taverns, roaring brothers in
 song, hours alone near an answer, many
 books, the clutch of mysteries, their near sum
 to—? I found new construction atop memories,
 wrinkles & sentiment where another year would
 lean, cut wild, endless hurt. Power fallen to treacle & ash.

Consider

Travel to a yesteryear brown to its soft
 bones, sleep wild in crabbed universes &
 wake with a terrified shout, what this place,
 what its people, who are you? Who am I?
 I live crooked among songs & watchful
 among men. This yesteryear's city held my
 love once, awhile, forever, & gone. What resides
 within still the feeding seeds below wounds & old grooves.

Softer

When will the mystery give it free or devolve
to scraps & stains? I ask, love it all
sloppy & music, learn little or less from
the hits & loss. Listen, the world is noisy
with urge & delay. Ask, the mystery high
with hard mock, lures every hunger to the next hour.

Only

Same park has bled through my years &
we arrive to each other still. The glare
of time this morning acknowledges our
bond, & too our eventual passing.

Sorrow

Not for the rusting downtown, there's little
left here to go. Not for the years ran broader
through another world here. Not for the
unbreaking blue over bare skyline, sunset
an endless tail of glare. Sorrow for what
did not happen, yesterday's many hands
gesturing toward paths never followed.

Strange Blood

Hard memories root below the belly,
 crimson scars where hours bumped & bled,
 feed still on thighs' golden want & heart's
 disappearing paths. You, the roughest ache,
 I can touch where you dwell even tonight. Call
 you one name or another, brown eyes full
 above, others in tart bedchambers, or the ones
 I found mapless & tickless in my dreams. I call
 you all strange blood, riding my later years
 as hard as I do. You, the roughest ache, root
 below the belly, connect one to another as much as
 the ancient egg wherefrom & the glaring crumble to come.

Revive

Reaching in til scrape, & scrape again,
 cross two memories, call it a new hour's
 song, reach deeper, sex together path from
 wherefrom & hunger's ever, this is
 Art, chewing & chewing the mind's bones
 til a melody of dust flickers through.

Tavern Light

Another night midst the click & clink,
 the dancer leaned near me & smiled til
 neon birds puffed countless from his lips.

“There's nothing but praise,” he whispered.
 “It's our only mission. Our only home.”

Hgb

A wish as I tire of the city's mute, rushing forms, the cold truck among souls thin & wary with loot, a wish for somewhere high & strange, a creature among few, good creatures, fine with hope, a we by choice not accident. Watching the shrivel grey this way & pink ripen over there, asking what for, blood's passing potent, what for? Counting the beats & the breaths, this one's green memories, that one's tangled long for escape. What for? A wish for content through the empty pocket hours, troughs of crass neon feed, here is the world in its bite & murmur, here is the world arcing rhythms through aeon & race, here is the world, love its spectacle, praise its going.

Blue Notes

Slip closely, warmly, eager as small hands for chocolate, into tonight's dreams, their clues to your unasked questions, & the strange lights again, you will be theirs one coming hour, til then simply bear you gently into sleep, closely, warmly, old eyes sparking slow by a known touch, memory like a roar's great reach, affecting without will, while heeded, worshipped, slaven to, warmly, eagerly, the ancient glowing clouds risen below, raw creatures & shapeless cavern no waking hours illumine, windows shot out in a building with no exterior, warmly, eagerly, even when the pursuers are close & merciless, do they resemble the lights? Shall they take you at last? A pocked still face in the cafe's dankest shadow shakes no, keep on, they're only memories, their song as great as your lean within.

Spectres

I watch a maiden pink smile & speak
 deafly, her long fingers flying creatures of blood
 & symbol. A party of winter jackets & bright lights
 crowd into a nearby cavern. The world sings
 of love & uncertainty both. I try to see beyond
 the cities of men & only hear unknowable
 growls & ice snapping. Neither king nor preacher,
 nor the mangy one wet in the long alley, none
 know what the night's beauty or danger portend.

Weeds

We snap off another's line & into the world,
 alone belong to our beat & breath. Weeds
 in the shine & blow, no given purpose
 but to shine & bloom. We touch, the hour
 raves high, the jug is full & bread hot.
 All is possible. We part, cry over shards,
 curse the blood within & stars about. All
 diminishes. Nearer, ever nearer, to what,
 to where, & why? Walk the ground like
 a spring to God, or tap it twice & wonder
 how soft its rest will be. Dusk's murky light,
 the elusive sound of drums, the young
 maiden at her thick book, the tattered master
 rasping another day, none can tell the miracle
 of alive & its pending fruit. None can tell its cost.

Simple Dream

If it was blood burst from my own finger, it was brown & splashed thin as water. I was split with anger & loss, breathing narrowly, watchful doubt of every face, bent unhappy by a path marred with coins, by the dying green of my land. Buried the sheaf of musics in winter's joyless ground. Something's going to bloom better this time.

Centuries Arriving

There were spastic amber clouds hovering high oaks that night, a hundred bare drummers & then more, a great crowd sexed liquidly toward the groove & thrust of shared infinity, alike the clean raw bite of doorless dreams, music for slickest mutual release, eat it, drink it, remember it, racial history leaves little remain else.

Hallow

What to be recovered in the arching rear look, where to return with any waking music but much shaded place near spires & towers of Empire's sagging heart? How to wrest wrinkles & fists from pulpit & throne? Another use for men than muscle & piston? Another for women than hooks & nesters? World for more than feeding & dominion? What ignites waking music in a world slumped in habit? You there. Dare this hour's far border, depart tubes & tomes, run for what you do not know! What do you have left?

Dominion

The sorrow hit one man & another, taste
 this day & its lesser meat, why? Why did
 we do this? What in each other did we fear?
 What in the further places we beheld within?
 What do we do now? How do we become, again,
 lesser? Assuming the bondage again, who do we protect?

What do we do with those unconvinced?
 What do we do with those who *will not cease*?

Enigma

The beggars on winter's wet streets praise
 God & dinner alike. Watch a theatre couple
 hurry by with envy & enmity. The night is
 cold even by cigarette's warm suck. Buy
 something from me. Give something to me.
 Why you with her? Why you at all? *Something.*

LSD 1966

Cease the tide by cursing the moon?
 Crush the drumheads, men will tap stones
 to oaks. Bind a woman's fire & she will lay
 dreaming coming stars. Green breaks your
 fist at every shade & angle. Freedom bears
 your cluster of notes but in season they too will fall.

Haunting

Yesterday, no, years away, call youth
the sugared days, soft-boned heart, cageless,
& a great moon nearly close enough.

Years, throbbing fans in a thousand separate
rooms, unhappy waits, clockless kisses, meals
& mirrors, evidence of nothing more than passing.

Youth, roots, tangle, muck. Love arcing a
mottled sky, hard clumsy rain of hours called
self, sadness follows below on swift, broken feet.

Spectral

The cafe's old man rants on the endless
spiking reach of the Empire, I sit with
his pencilled maps of Old Europe & figures
denoting webbed bloodlines of power, sad.
We sum to lost centuries men have spent
discovering their blunt truths. Hunger & fear.
Maybe curiosity, too, on prettier, well-supped days.

Melt

Flesh sniffs flesh, little muted by
 tight pink band or leather mask,
 dig through your tomes & preacherly nays
 for explain, & none. Flesh does not
 muse or cogitate, fingers pressing
 for lace's undoing, thighs tighten at a
 buttock's twitch, lingual grunts of tongue
 code for hard & have & take. Flesh wants now.

Drums for forest caterwaul & crown's new
 conquest alike raise to knock flesh high
 & calm, pay out its spasm for king or
 beauty, direct hand from blood's heated
 cheek to trigger or crowd's ecstatic tumult.
 Untwist limbs, relax into mind's order,
 time's duty, patience pretty with sacred golden
 statuary, the quiet rolling pulse of blooms,

the lively hellish jostle of brother against
 brother. Then long fingers spark sun in
 a dulling eye, notice a bared foot wrestling
 the surf's white growl, remember to the
 lure of slow lick & moan's urging fret.
 Then dreaming where flesh twines heat, many
 tight backs roar in need, fire runs from
 every pore touching pore, why finally crumbles

in the long grind, & all are sated in lawless union.

Soma

Where then, sense opened to the talk
 among clusters of trees, how starlight
 arrives & returns both, signs of revolution
 everywhere where once boredom, dull coins
 & days. Where then? Join tribes in the
 mountains, caterwaul & bonfire, electric
 limbs crossed bright with spiced honey's
 kiss, where then? I'm high, I'm awake,
 I'm open. Universe, which path shall I be?

Cost

Art, rummage the hours, nudge secrets
 & wounds for a dust something like melody,
 for a fruitful cluster of beats, for a line
 high or low, for what crosses & reck the spark.
 The wince, the pleasure. Old anger stones
 to the cleared hill, sweetness the beams &
 walls, hope the rooms. Too little, hit them,
 & again. Something's left. There. And there.

Golden

What hasn't happened yet, bright funky
 fineness to come, the golden swoop without
 end. Blood wakes at dawn, ready again for
 the world to explain. God, fine ass, lessing tides.

Warp

What true music tease from the loose angles,
 webs in the glass, where the warped eye rests
 & pursues. Brief violet dusk, now a loathing
 metallic rain, now calm again, noisy glow,
 how pry the hour wide, its bloom's fecund
 remain? What place men in this world but
 restless, moving flesh, craving songs & cities?

Scriptural

Wedding binds blood to blood by vows & wish.
 By rose, by lace, by eager witness of
 men & women. By mystery's sanction & praise.

Bind

Blood binds to night's caterwaul by the
 smearing smack of high flesh, two pretty
 beats & a hard breath, call it Art, bristling
 scars in a man's well-worn quiver raise
 about the heart crown & cage, are these
 years saying best path neither to nor from
 but a shifting path in the wild pitch?

Trauma

Canna tell you it doesn't hurt, you know that
 for yourself. Canna tell you that love doesn't
 lure back, you've traveled there too. Canna
 say much explains when too many odd hours
 prick the package, her secret hotel embrace,
 his cry of stumbling power to the hard winter's
 blow. What overlays the years, what meshes,
 what calls back to worship if you will, a hurt face,
 a smiling hour, the hope dearest when dreaming
 with scant other. Canna tell you where it's bound,
 or why, or worth. But feel it, warmth grubbing
 for warmth tonight, & somewhere a song &
 showers of light reign down. Feel it, the hardest
 creature shuffles in dream to near something.
 Feel it, the rhythm & beat within urging about,
 old memory, brief blossom, future's quick muse.
 Feel it, that best truth, ever a stranger's curious knock.

Sanction

Call it the sunshine hustle for coin,
 smacking pink flesh, music hungry enough
 to bear starlight, lawless hands tame a
 little by preacher's nays & king's hard lean.
 Lookee there, how it moves by wing, by sinew,
 by fin & buzz, all is hunger, desire is true law,
 for a curving hue of melody, for a smoking
 bite of flesh, for a kindness unbegged. Lovers
 & armies alike crack open gladly in the tumult,
 skins marred, breath clutched & released.
 We bloom best by spasm's arcing cry, by the
 music tapped within let free, by the years'
 mysterious shift from take to share to give.

Muses

Desire is true law. Say again. How each
of you so loved, seam & sinew to very life,
how you entered me doorlessly sweet, kindling
to crack every why, how you left among
charred bones & needless alarums. How I
sang sucker's prince to every tide & crescendo.
Want slowly bears its own demise, passion's
widest hour begs, & passes, births each new hungry hour.

Watering Music

My wish would be an hour's content for each
of you, plain sun & long grass, a touch with
desire, a sparkle hinting God, sweet earth in
a taste of bread, a dreaming finish in your
heart's native tongue. A long memory, too, for
years when dread-deep in the rough little consoles.

Glaze

This music wanting for the greater chimes,
cleaved long to night's dreaming heat,
hustle & near it, by soft, by conjure, by plea,
what the great world still peeping in its
shell? Wanting for the greater chimes, call
it God or a closer starlight, a whither to space,

a taking sweetness, convincing in its quiet roar,
long waiting first discover. This music
will sing endless to its end, mystery bound
in acceptance, open hands to these skinless
hours, what love. What love! Startle & awake.
Sudden again these fruits of music in hand,

roused beasts around the weeping gape, what
known now, what known ever? Consider.
There is blood. There is cosmos. There is song.
Ragged figures in the rain. Nobody knows. Say again.
What music does not diminish ever throb
its faith into a knot, & calls it Art.

Cathartic

Drawn to our wedding hour, its public vows &
 crowded wishes, its unknown garments worn by
 an altar plainly scented of men. Give its tome
 of instructions a level-eyed praise in return,
 little knowing if the flaming creature stuck to its
 heart is any truth more than crimson curtains

burning in a ceaseless desert war, or the steaming,
 howling forms in dreams, or the small, mottled
 creature hid motherless on a cloudy moving steppe.
 What answer? Sadness & morning light. What truth?
 The disloyal remembrance of days for days. Vows
 will root awhile, through give & take & share,

& a beat, & begin again. Why the universe,
 why desire? Vows at the altar explain in passing,
 will diminish to weeds along the path. No hour
 waits without mystery, & a coiled thought to break
 & new want's fiercest blood. Still, bear the vow &
 smile the wish. We shall wed & twine further our

song, flush our root higher from joined will
 alone, share an ocean between our hearts, &
 hope to endure its many changing tides.

Remain

I will call no common God my own,
 & thus splintered from the mass of men,
 their tomes cry a rampage, a gleam, a subtle,
 howling way. Upon me a mist, a light,
 a crooning sugar, a want to move nearer
 all ways, I do not know what or how.

Wish to kneel & kiss the ground, none of it,
 magick perches plain upon every beat
 & breath, hand for hand in the wall of
 beggars longer every night, in the farthest
 jungle & feeding cove, in the trash among
 the treasure in one's going red flow.

Find me there if you would look, singing
 helpless in rushing black ink, looking to
 men & seeing, above them, trees, looking
 to trees & recking their sunshine lovers,
 looking to sunshine & what there to know?
 Universe ever climbing its own beam to fall

untold within. What fetches on this cryptic
 twining, what divides & suffers to know,
 what joins by chorus & feeding? Tell the moment
 when a heart falls, a limb gives way, two
 creatures cross past formula, morning light
 shows a fallen barn's many dews, within

a bullet loads near its quarry, still dreaming
 its lost mate among the quiet strews.

Stranger

Path blows stranger with the years, across
 hands gentle from back to back, vows
 so near the heart, later dust from old tracks.

You are my beloved when the rest but sung
 scatters on the page, my love a mystery
 sweet jagged in my veins, my fidelity &

hope when the world but a great yowling
 banditry. One true note. We need to keep breathing.
 Everything to go, everything to lose, everything to behold.

Joint

To play one true note, ever & again,
 here I am, no more veils, this word,
 the next, beat it hard, beat it true,
 one true note, all is possible, I know
 sunshine again today, hear mutter
 in what they call dream, a wind resembling
 an old day's joy, one true note, this
 morning toward a softer knowing, shhh,
 nothing more than evidence of passing,
 the wild green of that fullmoon blaze,
 the twists by which a soul comes the years.
 One true note, music in a buzz & secret icon.

Here I am. No more veils. This word. The next.

Wedding

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



February 5, 2006
Seattle, Washington





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Raymond Carver*A Small, Good Thing*

Saturday afternoon she drove to the bakery in the shopping center. After looking through a loose-leaf binder with photographs of cakes taped onto the pages, she ordered chocolate, the child's favorite. The cake she chose was decorated with a spaceship and launching pad under a sprinkling of white stars, and a planet made of red frosting at the other end. His name, SCOTTY, would be in green letters beneath the planet. The baker, who was an older man with a thick neck, listened without saying anything when she told him the child would be eight years old next Monday. The baker wore a white apron that looked like a smock. Straps cut under his arms, went around in back and then to the front again, where they were secured under his heavy waist. He wiped his hands on his apron as he listened to her. He kept his eyes down on the photographs and let her talk. He let her take her time. He'd just come to work and he'd be there all night, baking, and he was in no real hurry.

She gave the baker her name, Ann Weiss, and her telephone number. The cake would be ready on Monday morning, just out of the oven, in plenty of time for the child's party that afternoon. The baker was not jolly. There were no pleasantries between them, just the minimum exchange of words, the necessary information. He made her feel uncomfortable, and she didn't like that. While he was bent over the counter with the pencil in his hand, she studied his coarse features and wondered if he'd ever done anything else with his life besides be a baker. She was a mother and thirty-three years old, and it seemed to her that everyone, especially someone the baker's age—a man old enough to be her father—must have children who'd gone through this special time of cakes and birthday parties. There must be that between them, she thought. But he was abrupt with her—not rude, just abrupt. She gave up trying to make friends with him. She looked into the back of the bakery and could see a long, heavy wooden table with aluminum pie pans stacked at one end; and beside the table a metal container filled with empty racks. There was an enormous oven. A radio was playing country-western music.

The baker finished printing the information on the special order card and closed up the binder. He looked at her and said, "Monday morning." She thanked him and drove home.

On Monday morning, the birthday boy was walking to school with another boy. They were passing a bag of potato chips back and forth and the birthday boy was trying to find out what his friend intended to give him for his birthday that afternoon. Without looking, the birthday boy stepped off the curb at an intersection and was immediately knocked down by a car. He fell on his side with his head in the gutter and his legs out in the road. His eyes were closed, but his legs moved back and forth as if he were trying to climb over something. His friend dropped the potato chips and started to cry. The car had gone a hundred feet or so and stopped in the middle of the road. The man in the

driver's seat looked back over his shoulder. He waited until the boy got unsteadily to his feet. The boy wobbled a little. He looked dazed, but okay. The driver put the car into gear and drove away.

The birthday boy didn't cry, but he didn't have anything to say about anything either. He wouldn't answer when his friend asked him what it felt like to be hit by a car. He walked home, and his friend went on to school. But after the birthday boy was inside his house and was telling his mother about it—she sitting beside him on the sofa, holding his hands in her lap, saying, “Scotty, honey, are you sure you feel all right, baby?” thinking she would call the doctor anyway—he suddenly lay back on the sofa, closed his eyes, and went limp. When she couldn't wake him up, she hurried to the telephone and called her husband at work. Howard told her to remain calm, remain calm, and then he called an ambulance for the child and left for the hospital himself.

Of course, the birthday party was canceled. The child was in the hospital with a mild concussion and suffering from shock. There's been vomiting, and his lungs had taken in fluid which needed pumping out that afternoon. Now he simply seemed to be in a very deep sleep—but no coma, Dr. Francis had emphasized, no coma, when he saw the alarm in the parents' eyes. At eleven o'clock that night, when the boy seemed to be resting comfortably enough after the many X-rays and the lab work, and it was just a matter of his waking up and coming around, Howard left the hospital. He and Ann had been at the hospital with the child since that afternoon, and he was going home for a short while to bathe and change clothes. “I'll be back in an hour,” he said. She nodded. “It's fine,” she said. “I'll be right here.” He kissed her on the forehead, and they touched hands. She said in the chair beside the bed and looked at the child. She was waiting for him to wake up and be all right. Then she could begin to relax.

Howard drove home from the hospital. He took the wet, dark streets very fast, then caught himself and slowed down. Until now, his life had gone smoothly and to his satisfaction—college, marriage, another year of college for the advanced degree in business, a junior partnership in an investment firm. Fatherhood. He was happy and, so far, lucky—he knew that. His parents were still living, his brothers and his sister were established, his friend from college had gone out to take their places in the world. So far, he had kept away from any real harm, from those forces he knew existed and that could cripple or bring down a man if the luck went bad, if things suddenly turned. He pulled into the driveway and parked. His left leg began to tremble. He sat in the car for a minute and tried to deal with the present situation in a rational manner. Scotty had been hit by a car and was in the hospital, but he was going to be all right. Howard closed his eyes and ran his hand over his face. He got out of the car and went up to the front door. The dog was barking inside the house. The telephone rang and rang while he unlocked the door and fumbled for the light switch. He shouldn't have left the hospital, he shouldn't have. “Goddamn it!” he said. He picked up the receiver and said, “I just walked in the door!”

“There's a cake that wasn't picked up,” the voice on the other end of the line said.

“What are you saying?” Howard asked.

“A cake,” the voice said. “A sixteen-dollar cake.”

Howard held the receiver against his ear, trying to understand. “I don't know anything about a cake,” he said. “Jesus, what are you talking about?”

“Don't hand me that,” the voice said.

Howard hung up the telephone. He went into the kitchen and poured himself some whiskey. He called the hospital. But the child's condition remained the same; he was still sleeping and nothing had changed there. While water poured into the tub, Howard lathered

his face and shaved. He'd just stretched out in the tub and closed his eyes when the telephone rang again. He hauled himself out, grabbed a towel, and hurried through the house, saying, "Stupid, stupid," for having left the hospital. But when he picked up the receiver and shouted, "Hello!" there was no sound at the other end of the line. Then the caller hung up.

He arrived back at the hospital a little after midnight. Ann still sat in the chair beside the bed. She looked up at Howard, and then she looked back at the child. The child's eyes stayed closed, the head was still wrapped in bandages. His breathing was quiet and regular. From an apparatus over the bed hung a bottle of glucose with a tube running from the bottle to the boy's arm.

"How is he?" Howard said. "What's all this?" waving at the glucose and the tube.

"Dr. Francis's orders," she said. "He needs nourishment. He needs to keep up his strength. Why doesn't he wake up, Howard? I don't understand, if he's all right."

Howard put his hand against the back of her head. He ran his fingers through her hair. "He's going to be all right. He'll wake up in a little while. Dr. Francis knows what's what."

After a time he said, "Maybe you should go home and get some rest. I'll stay here. Just don't put up with this creep who keeps calling. Hang up right away."

"Who's calling?" she asked.

"I don't know who, just somebody with nothing better to do than call up people. You go now."

She shook her head. "No," she said. "I'm fine."

"Really," he said. "Go home for a while, and then come back and spell me in the morning. It'll be all right. What did Dr. Francis say? He said Scotty's going to be all right. We don't have to worry. He's just sleeping now, that's all."

A nurse pushed the door open. She nodded at them as she went to the bedside. She took the left arm out from under the covers and put her fingers on the wrist, found the pulse, then consulted her watch. In a little while, she put the arm back under the covers and moved to the floor of the bed, where she wrote something on a clipboard attached to the bed.

"How is he?" Ann said. Howard's hand was a weight on her shoulder. She was aware of the pressure from his fingers.

"He's stable," the nurse said. Then she said, "Doctor will be in again shortly. Doctor's back in the hospital. He's making rounds right now."

"I was saying maybe she'd want to go home and get a little rest," Howard said. "After the doctor comes," he said.

"She could do that," the nurse said. "I think you should both feel free to do that, if you wish." The nurse was a big Scandinavian woman with blond hair. There was the trace of an accent in her speech.

"We'll see what the doctor says," Ann said. "I want to talk to the doctor. I don't think he should be sleeping like this. I don't think that's a good sign." She brought her hand up to her eyes and let her head come forward a little. Howard's grip tightened on her shoulder, and then his hand moved up to her neck, where his fingers began to knead the muscles there.

"Dr. Francis will be here in a few minutes," the nurse said. Then she left the room.

Howard gazed at his son for a time, the small chest quietly rising and falling under the covers. For the first time since the terrible minutes after Ann's telephone call to him at

his office, he felt a genuine fear starting in his limbs. He began shaking his head. Scotty was fine, but instead of sleeping at home in his own bed, he was in a hospital bed with bandages around his head and a tube in his arm. But this help was what he needed right now.

Dr. Francis came in and shook hands with Howard, though they'd just seen each other a few hours before. Ann got up from the chair. "Doctor?"

"Ann," he said and nodded. "Let's just first see how he's doing," the doctor said. He moved to the side of the bed and took the boy's pulse. He peeled back one eyelid and then the other. Howard and Ann stood beside the doctor and watched. Then the doctor turned back the covers and listened to the boy's heart and lungs with his stethoscope. He pressed his fingers here and there on the abdomen. When he was finished, he went on to the end of the bed and studied the chart. He noted the time, scribbled something on the chart, and then looked at Howard and Ann.

"Doctor, how is he?" Howard said. "What's the matter with him exactly?"

"Why doesn't he wake up?" Ann said.

The doctor was a handsome, big-shouldered man with a tanned face. He wore a three-piece suit, a striped tie, and ivory cuff links. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head, and he looked as if he had just come from a concert. "He's all right," the doctor said. "Nothing to shout about, he could be better, I think. But he's all right. Still, I wish he'd wake up. He should wake up pretty soon." The doctor looked at the boy again. "We'll know some more in a couple of hours, after the results of a few more tests are in. But he's all right, believe me, except for a hairline fracture of the skull. He does have that."

"Oh, no," Ann said.

"And a bit of a concussion, as I said before. Of course, you know he's in shock," the doctor said. "Sometimes you see this in shock cases. This sleeping."

"But he's out of any real danger?" Howard said. "You said before he's not in a coma. You wouldn't call this a coma, then—would you, doctor?" Howard waited. He looked at the doctor.

"No, I don't want to call it a coma," the doctor said and glanced over at the boy once more. "He's just in a very deep sleep. It is a restorative measure the body is taking on its own. He's out of any real danger, I'd say that for certain, yes. But we'll know more when he wakes up and the other tests are in," the doctor said.

"It's a coma," Ann said. "Of sorts."

"It's not a coma yet, not exactly," the doctor said. "I wouldn't want to call it a coma. Not yet anyway. He's suffered shock. In shock cases, this kind of reaction is common enough; it's a temporary reaction to bodily trauma. Coma. Well, coma is a deep, prolonged unconsciousness, something that could go on for days, or weeks even. Scotty's not in that area, not as far as we can tell. I'm certain his condition will show improvement by morning. I'm betting it will. We'll know more when he wakes up, which shouldn't be long now. Of course, you may do as you like, stay here or go home for a time. But by all means feel free to leave the hospital for a while if you want. This is not easy, I know." The doctor gazed at the boy again, watching him, and then he turned to Ann and said, "You try not to worry, little mother. Believe me, we're doing all that can be done. It's just a question of a little more time now." He nodded at her, shook hands with Howard again, and then he left the room.

Ann put her hand over the child's forehead. "At least he doesn't have a fever," she said. Then she said, "My god, he feels so cold, though. Howard? Is he supposed to feel like this? Feel his head."

Howard touched the child's temples. His own breathing had slowed. "I think he's supposed to feel this way right now," he said. "He's in shock, remember? That's what the

doctor said. The doctor was just in here. He would have said something if Scotty wasn't okay."

Ann stood there a little while longer, working her lip with her teeth. Then she moved over to her chair and sat down.

Howard sat in the chair next to her chair. They looked at each other. He wanted to say something else and reassure her, but he was afraid, too. He took her hand and put it in his lap, and this made him feel better, her hand being there. He picked up her hand and squeezed it. Then he just held her hand. They sat like that for a while, watching the boy and not talking. From time to time, he squeezed her hand. Finally, she took her hand away.

"I've been praying," she said.

He nodded.

She said, "I almost thought I'd forgotten how, but it came back to me. All I had to do was close my eyes and say, 'Please God, help us—help Scotty,' and then the rest was easy. The words were right there. Maybe if you prayed, too," she said to him.

"I've already prayed," he said. "I prayed this afternoon—yesterday afternoon, I mean—after you called, while I was driving to the hospital. I've been praying," he said.

"That's good," she said. For the first time, she felt they were together in it, this trouble. She realized with a start that, until now, it had only been happening to her and to Scotty. She hadn't let Howard into it, though he was there and needed all along. She felt glad to be his wife.

The same nurse came in and took the boy's pulse again and checked the flow from the bottle hanging above the bed.

In an hour, another doctor came in. He said his name was Parsons, from Radiology. He had a bushy moustache. He was wearing loafers, a western shirt, and a pair of jeans.

"We're going to take him downstairs for more pictures," he told them. "We need to do some more pictures, and we want to do a scan."

"What's that?" Ann said. "A scan?" She stood between this new doctor and the bed. "I thought you'd already taken all your X-rays."

"I'm afraid we need some more," he said. "Nothing to be alarmed about. We just need some more pictures, and we want to do a brain scan on him."

"My God," Ann said.

"It's perfectly normal procedure in cases like this," this new doctor said. "We just need to find out for sure why he isn't back awake yet. It's normal medical procedure, and nothing to be alarmed about. We'll be taking him down in a few minutes," this doctor said.

In a little while, two orderlies came into the room with a gurney. They were black-haired, dark complexioned men in white uniforms, and they said a few words to each other in a foreign tongue as they unhooked the boy from the tube and moved him from his bed to the gurney. Then they wheeled him from the room. Howard and Ann got on the same elevator. Ann gazed at the child. She closed her eyes as the elevator began its descent. The orderlies stood at either end of the gurney without saying anything, though once one of the men made a comment to the other in their own language, and the other man nodded slowly in response.

Later that morning, just as the sun was beginning to lighten the windows in the waiting room outside the X-ray department, they brought the boy out and moved him back up to his room. Howard and Ann rode up on the elevator with him once more, and once more they took up their places beside the bed.

They waited all day, but still the boy did not wake up. Occasionally, one of them would leave the room to go downstairs to the cafeteria to drink coffee and then, as if suddenly remembering and feeling guilty, get up from the table and hurry back to the room. Dr. Francis came again that afternoon and examined the boy once more and then left after telling them he was coming along and could wake up at any minute now. Nurses, different nurses from the night before, came in from time to time. Then a young woman from the lab knocked and entered the room. She wore white slacks and a white blouse and carried a little tray of things which she put on the stand beside the bed. Without a word to them, she took blood from the boy's arm. Howard closed his eyes as the woman found the right place on the boy's arm and pushed the needle in.

"I don't understand this," Ann said to the woman.

"Doctor's orders," the young woman said. "I do what I'm told. They say draw that one, I draw. What's wrong with him, anyway?" she said. "He's a sweetie."

"He was hit by a car," Howard said. "A hit-and-run."

The young woman shook her head and looked again at the boy. Then she took her tray and left the room.

"Why won't he wake up?" Ann said. "Howard? I want some answers from these people."

Howard didn't say anything. He sat down again in the chair and crossed one leg over the other. He rubbed his face. He looked at his son and then he settled back in the chair, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

Ann walked to the window and looked out at the parking lot. It was night, and cars were driving into and out of the parking lot with their lights on. She stood at the window with her hands gripping the sill, and knew in her heart that they were into something now, something hard. She was afraid, and her teeth began to chatter until she tightened her jaws. She saw a big car stop in front of the hospital and someone, a woman in a long coat, get into the car. She wished she were that woman and somebody, anybody, was driving her away from here to somewhere else, a place where she would find Scotty waiting for her when she stepped out of the car, ready to say *Mom* and let her gather in him in her arms.

In a little while, Howard woke up. He looked at the boy again. Then he got up from the chair, stretched, and went over to stand beside her at the window. They both stared out at the parking lot. They didn't say anything. But they seemed to feel each other's insides now, as though the worry had made them transparent in a perfectly natural way.

The door opened and Dr. Francis came in. He was wearing a different suit and tie this time. His gray hair was combed along the sides of his head, and he looked as if he had just shaved. He went straight to the bed and examined the boy. "He ought to have come around by now. There's just no good reason for this," he said. "But I can tell you we're all convinced he's out of any danger. We'll just feel better when he wakes up. There's no reason, absolutely none, why he shouldn't come around. Very soon. Oh, he'll have himself a dilly of a headache when he does, you can count on that. But all of his signs are fine. They're normal as can be."

"It is a coma, then?" Ann said.

The doctor rubbed his smooth cheek. "We'll call it that for the time being, until he wakes up. But you must be worn out. This is hard. I know this is hard. Feel free to go out for a bite," he said. "It would do you good. I'll put a nurse in here while you're gone if you'll feel better about going. Go and have yourselves something to eat."

"I couldn't eat anything," Ann said.

“Do what you need to do, of course,” the doctor said. “Anyway, I wanted to tell you that all the signs are good, the tests are negative, nothing showed up at all, and just as soon as he wakes up he’ll be over the hill.”

“Thank you, doctor,” Howard said. He shook hands with the doctor again. The doctor patted Howard’s shoulder and went out.

“I suppose one of us should go home and check in on things,” Howard said. “Slug needs to be fed, for one thing.”

“Call one of the neighbors,” Ann said. “Call the Morgans. Anyone will feed a dog if you ask them to.”

“All right,” Howard said. After a while, he said, “Honey, why don’t *you* do it? Why don’t you go home and check on things, and then come back? It’ll do you good. I’ll be right here with him. Seriously,” he said. “We need to keep up our strength on this. We’ll want to be here for a while even after he wakes up.”

“Why don’t “We need to keep up our strength on this. We’ll want to be here for a while even after he wakes up.”

“Why don’t *you* go? she said. “Feed Slug. Feed yourself.”

“I already went,” he said. “I was gone for exactly an hour and fifteen minutes. You go home for an hour and freshen up. Then come back.”

She tried to think about it, but she was too tired. She closed her eyes and tried to think about it again. After a time, she said, “Maybe I *will* go home for a few minutes. Maybe if I’m not just sitting here watching him every second, he’ll wake up and be all right. You know? Maybe he’ll wake up if I’m not here. I’ll go home and take a bath and put on clean clothes. I’ll feed Slug. Then I’ll come back.”

“I’ll be right here,” he said. “You go on home, honey. I’ll keep an eye on things here.” His eyes were bloodshot and small, as if he’d been drinking for a long time. His clothes were rumpled. His beard had come out again. She touched his face, and then she took her hand back. She understood he wanted to be by himself for a while, not have to talk or share his worry for a time. She picked up her purse from the nightstand, and he helped her into her coat.

“I won’t be gone long,” she said.

“Just sit and rest for a little while when you get home,” he said. “Eat something. Take a bath. After you get out of the bath, just sit for a while and rest. It’ll do you a world of good, you’ll see. Then come back,” he said. “Let’s try not to worry. You heard what Dr. Francis said.”

She stood in her coat for a minute trying to recall the doctor’s exact words, looking for any nuances, any hint of something behind his words other than what he had said. She tried to remember if his expression had changed any when he bent over to examine the child. She remembered the way his features had composed themselves as he rolled back the child’s eyelids, and then listened to his breathing.

She went to the door, where he turned and looked back. She looked at the child, and then she looked at the father. Howard nodded. She stepped out of the room and pulled the door closed behind her.

She went past the nurses’ station and down to the end of the corridor, looking for the elevator. At the end of the corridor, she turned to her right and entered a little waiting room where a Negro family sat in wicker chairs. There was a middle-aged man in khaki and pants, a baseball cap pushed back on his head. A large woman wearing a housedress and slippers was slumped in one of the chairs. A teenaged girl in jeans, her hair done in dozens of little braids, lay stretched out in one of the chairs smoking a cigarette, her legs crossed at

the ankles. The family swung their eyes to Ann as she entered the room. The little table was littered with hamburger wrappers and Styrofoam cups.

“Franklin,” the large woman said as she roused herself. “Is it about Franklin?” Her eyes widened. “Tell me now, lady,” the woman said. “Is it about Franklin?” She was trying to rise from her chair, but the man had closed his hand over her arm.

“Here, here,” he said. “Evelyn.”

“I’m sorry,” Ann said. “I’m looking for the elevator. My son is in the hospital, and now I can’t find the elevator.”

“Elevator is down that way, turn left,” the man said as he aimed a finger.

The girl drew on her cigarette and stared at Ann. Her eyes narrowed to slits, and her broad lips parted slowly as she let the smoke escape. The Negro woman let her head fall on her shoulder and looked away from Ann, no longer interested.

“My son was hit by a car,” Ann said to the man. She seemed to need to explain herself. “He has a concussion and a little skull fracture, but he’s going to be all right. He’s in shock now, but it might be some kind of coma, too. That’s what really worries us, the coma part. I’m going out for a little while, but my husband is with him. Maybe he’ll wake up while I’m gone.”

“That’s too bad,” the man said and shifted in the chair. He shook his head. He looked down at the table, and then he looked back at Ann. She was still standing there. He said, “Our Franklin, he’s on the operating table. Somebody cut him. Tried to kill him. There was a fight where he was at. At this party. They say he was just standing and watching. Not bothering nobody. But that don’t mean nothing these days. Now he’s on the operating table. We’re just hoping and praying, that’s all we can do now.” He gazed at her steadily.

Ann looked at the girl again, who was still watching her, and at the older woman, who kept her head down, but whose eyes were now closed. Ann saw the lips moving silently, making words. She had an urge to ask what those words were. She wanted to talk more with these people who were in the same kind of waiting she was in. She was afraid, and they were afraid. They had that in common. She would have liked to have said something else about the accident, told them more about Scotty, that it had happened on the day of his birthday, Monday, and that he was still unconscious. Yet she didn’t know how to begin. She stood looking at them without saying anything more.

She went down the corridor the man had indicated and found the elevator. She waited a minute in front of the closed doors, still wondering if she was doing the right thing. Then she put out her finger and touched the button.

She pulled into the driveway and cut the engine. She closed her eyes and leaned her head against the wheel for a minute. She listened to the ticking sounds the engine made as it began to cool. Then she got out of the car. She could hear the dog barking inside the house. She went to the front door, which was unlocked. She went inside and turned on lights and put on a kettle of water for tea. She opened some dog food and fed Slug on the back porch. The dog ate in hungry little smacks. It kept running into the kitchen to see that she was going to stay. As she sat down on the sofa with her tea, the telephone rang.

“Yes!” she said as she answered. “Hello!”

“Mrs. Weiss,” a man’s voice said. It was five o’clock in the morning, and she thought she could hear machinery or equipment of some kind in the background.

“Yes, yes! What is it?” she said. “This is Mrs. Weiss. This is she. What is it, please?” She listened to whatever it was in the background. “Is it Scotty, for Christ’s sake?”

“Scotty,” the man’s voice said. “It’s about Scotty, yes. It has to do with Scotty, that problem. Have you forgotten about Scotty?” the man said. Then he hung up.

She dialed the hospital’s number and asked for the third floor. She demanded information about her son from the nurse who answered the telephone. Then she asked to speak to her husband. It was, she said, an emergency.

She waited, turning the telephone cord in her fingers. She closed her eyes and felt sick at her stomach. She would have to make herself eat. Slug came in from the back porch and lay down near her feet. He wagged his tail. She pulled at his ear while he licked her fingers. Howard was on the line.

“Somebody just called here,” she said. She twisted the telephone cord. “He said it was about Scotty,” she cried.

“Scotty’s fine,” Howard told her. “I mean, he’s still sleeping. There’s been no change. The nurse has been in twice since you’ve been gone. A nurse or else a doctor. He’s all right.”

“This man called. He said it was about Scotty,” she told him.

“Honey, you rest for a little while, you need the rest. It must be that same caller I had. Just forget it. Come back down here after you’ve rested. Then we’ll have breakfast or something.”

“Breakfast,” she said. “I don’t want any breakfast.”

“You know what I mean,” he said. “Juice, something. I don’t know. I don’t know anything, Ann. Jesus, I’m not hungry, either. Ann, it’s hard to talk now. I’m standing here at the desk. Dr. Francis is coming again at eight o’clock this morning. He’s going to have something to tell us then, something more definite. That’s what one of the nurses said. She didn’t know any more than that. Ann? Honey, maybe we’ll know something more then. At eight o’clock. Come back here before eight. Meanwhile, I’m right here and Scotty’s all right. He’s still the same,” he added.

“I was drinking a cup of tea,” she said, “when the telephone rang. They said it was about Scotty. There was a noise in the background. Was there a noise in the background on that call you had, Howard?”

“I don’t remember,” he said. “Maybe the driver of the car, maybe he’s a psychopath and found out about Scotty somehow. But I’m here with him. Just rest like you were going to do. Take a bath and come back by seven or so, and we’ll talk to the doctor together when he gets here. It’s going to be all right, honey. I’m here, and there are doctors and nurses around. They say his condition is stable.”

“I’m scared to death,” she said.

She ran water, undressed, and got into the tub. She washed and dried quickly, not taking the time to wash her hair. She put on clean underwear, wool slacks, and a sweater. She went into the living room, where the dog looked up at her and let its tail thump once against the floor. It was just starting to get light outside when she went out to the car.

She drove into the parking lot of the hospital and found a space close to the front door. She felt she was in some obscure way responsible for what had happened to the child. She let her thoughts move to the Negro family. She remembered the name Franklin and the table that was covered with hamburger papers, and the teenaged girl staring at her as she drew on her cigarette. “Don’t have children,” she told the girl’s image as she entered the front door of the hospital. “For God’s sake, don’t.”

She took the elevator up to the third floor with two nurses who were just going on duty. It was Wednesday morning, a few minutes before seven. There was a page for a Dr. Madison as the elevator doors slid open on the third floor. She got off behind the nurses, who turned in the other direction and continued the conversation she had interrupted when she'd gotten into the elevator. She walked down the corridor to the little alcove where the Negro family had been waiting. They were gone now, but the chairs were scattered in such a way that it looked as if people had just jumped up from them the minute before. The tabletop was cluttered with the same cups and papers, the ashtray was filled with cigarette butts.

She stopped at the nurses' station. A nurse was standing behind the counter, brushing her hair and yawning.

"There was a Negro boy in surgery last night," Ann said. "Franklin was his name. His family was in the waiting room. I'd like to inquire about his condition."

A nurse who was sitting at a desk behind the counter looked up from the chart in front of her. The telephone buzzed and she picked up the receiver, but she kept her eyes on Ann.

"He passed away," said the nurse at the counter. The nurse held the hairbrush and kept looking at her. "Are you a friend of the family or what?"

"I met the family last night," Ann said. "My own son is in the hospital. I guess he's in shock. We don't know for sure what's wrong. I just wondered about Franklin, that's all. Thank you." She moved down the corridor. Elevator doors the same color as the walls slid open and a gaunt, bald man in white pants and white canvas shoes pulled a heavy cart off the elevator. She hadn't noticed these doors last night. The man wheeled the cart out into the corridor and stopped in front of the room nearest the elevator and consulted a clipboard. Then he reached down and slid a tray out of the cart. He rapped lightly on the door and entered the room. She could smell the unpleasant odors of warm food as she passed the cart. She hurried on without looking at any of the nurses and pushed open the door to the child's room.

Howard was standing at the window with his hands behind his back. He turned around as she came in.

"How is he?" she said. She went over to the bed. She dropped her purse on the floor beside the nightstand. It seemed to her she had been gone a long time. She touched the child's face. "Howard?"

"Dr. Francis was here a little while ago," Howard said. She looked at him closely and thought his shoulders were bunched a little.

"I thought he wasn't coming until eight o'clock this morning," she said quickly.

"There was another doctor with him. A neurologist."

"A neurologist," she said.

Howard nodded. His shoulders were bunching, she could see that. "What'd they say, Howard? For Christ's sake, what'd they say? What is it?"

"They said they're going to take him down and run more tests on him, Ann. They think they're going to operate, honey. Honey, they *are* going to operate. They can't figure out why he won't wake up. It's more than just shock or concussion, they know that much now. It's in his skull, the fracture, it has something, something to do with that, they think. So they're going to operate. I tried to call you, but I guess you'd already left the house."

"Oh, God," she said. "Oh, please, Howard, please," she said, taking his arms.

"Look!" Howard said. "Scotty! Look, Ann!" He turned her toward the bed.

The boy had opened his eyes, then closed them. He opened them again now. The eyes stared straight ahead for a minute, then moved slowly in his head until they rested on Howard and Ann, then traveled away again.

“Scotty,” his mother said, moving to the bed.

“Hey, Scott,” his father said. “Hey, son.”

They leaned over the bed. Howard took the child’s hand in his hands and began to pat and squeeze the hand. Ann bent over the boy and kissed his forehead again and again. She put her hands on either side of his face. “Scotty, honey, it’s Mommy and Daddy,” she said. “Scotty?”

The boy looked at them, but without any sign of recognition. Then his mouth opened, his eyes scrunched closed, and he howled until he had no more air in his lungs. His face seemed to relax and soften then. His lips parted as his last breath was puffed through his throat and exhaled gently through the clenched teeth.

The doctors called it a hidden occlusion and said it was a one-in-a-million circumstance. Maybe if it could have been detected somehow and surgery untaken immediately, they could have saved him. But more than likely not. In any case, what would they have been looking for? Nothing had shown up in the tests or in the X-rays.

Dr. Francis was shaken. “I can’t tell you how badly I feel. I’m so very sorry, I can’t tell you,” he said as he led them into the doctors’ lounge. There was a doctor sitting in a chair with his legs hooked over the back of another chair, watching an early-morning TV show. He was wearing a green delivery-room outfit, loose green pants and green blouse, and a green cap that covered his hair. He looked at Howard and Ann and then looked at Dr. Francis. He got to his feet and turned off the set and went out of the room. Dr. Francis guided Ann to the sofa, and sat down beside her, and began to talk in a low, consoling voice. At one point, he leaned over and embraced her. She could feel his chest rising and falling evenly against her shoulder. She kept her eyes open and let him hold her. Howard went into the bathroom, but he left the door open. After a violent fit of weeping, he ran water and washed his face. Then he came out and sat down at the little table that held a telephone. He looked at the telephone as though deciding what to do first. He made some calls. After a time, Dr. Francis used the telephone.

“Is there anything else I can do for the moment?” he asked them.

Howard shook his head. Ann stared at Dr. Francis as if unable to comprehend his words.

The doctor walked them to the hospital’s front door. People were entering and leaving the hospital. It was eleven o’clock in the morning. Ann was aware of how slowly, almost reluctantly, she moved her feet. It seemed to her that Dr. Francis was making them leave when she felt they should stay, when it would be more the right thing to do to stay. She looked back at the front of the hospital. She began shaking her head. “No, no,” she said. “I can’t leave him here, no.” She heard herself say that and thought how unfair it was that the only words that came out were the sort of words used on TV shows where people were stunned by violent or sudden deaths. She wanted her words to be her own. “No,” she said, and for some reason the memory of the Negro woman’s head lolling on the woman’s shoulder came to her. “No,” she said again.

“I’ll be talking to you later in the day,” the doctor was saying to Howard. “There are still some things that have to be done, things that have to be cleared up to our satisfaction. Some things that need explaining.”

“An autopsy,” Howard said.

Dr. Francis nodded.

"I understand," Howard said. Then he said, "Oh, Jesus. No, I don't understand, doctor. I can't. I can't. I just can't."

Dr. Francis put his arm around Howard's shoulders. "I'm sorry. God, how I'm sorry." He let go of Howard's shoulders and held out his hand. Howard looked at the hand, and then he took it. Dr. Francis put his arms around Ann once more. He seemed full of some goodness she didn't understand. She let her head rest on his shoulder, but her eyes stayed open. She kept looking at the hospital. As they drove out of the parking lot, she looked back at the hospital.

At home, she sat on the sofa with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard closed the door to the child's room. He got the coffee-maker going and then he found an empty box. He had thought to pick up some of the child's things that were scattered around the living room. But instead he sat down beside her on the sofa, pushed the box to one side, and leaned forward, arms between his knees. He began to weep. She pulled his head over into her lap and patted his shoulder. "He's gone," she said. She kept patting his shoulder. Over his sobs, she could hear the coffee-maker hissing in the kitchen. "There, there," she said tenderly. "Howard, he's gone. He's gone and now we'll have to get used to that. To being alone."

In a little while, Howard got up and began moving aimlessly around the room with the box, not putting anything into it, but collecting some things together on the floor at one end of the sofa. She continued to sit with her hands in her coat pockets. Howard put the box down and brought coffee into the living room. Later, Ann made calls to relatives. After each call had been placed and the party had answered, Ann would blurt out a few words and cry for a minute. Then she would quietly explain, in a measured voice, what had happened and tell them about arrangements. Howard took the box out to the garage, where he saw the child's bicycle. He dropped the box and sat down on the pavement beside the bicycle. He took hold of the bicycle awkwardly so that it leaned against his chest. He held it, the rubber pedal sticking into his chest. He gave the wheel a turn.

Ann hung up the telephone after talking to her sister. She was looking up another number when the telephone rang. She picked it up on the first ring.

"Hello," she said, and she heard something in the background, a humming noise. "Hello!" she said. "For God's sake," she said. "Who is this? What is it you want?"

"Your Scotty, I got him ready for you," the man's voice said. "Did you forget him?"

"You evil bastard!" she shouted into the receiver. "How can you do this, you evil son of a bitch?"

"Scotty," the man said. "Have you forgotten about Scotty?" Then the man hung up on her.

Howard heard the shouting and came in to find her with her arms over the table, weeping. He picked up the receiver and listened to the dial tone.

Much later, just before midnight, after they had dealt with many things, the telephone rang again.

"You answer it," she said. "Howard, it's him, I know." They were sitting at the kitchen table with coffee in front of them. Howard had a small glass of whiskey beside his cup. He answered on the third ring.

"Hello," he said. "Who is this? Hello! Hello!" The line went dead. "He hung up," Howard said. "Whoever it was."

“It was him,” she said. “That bastard. I’d like to kill him,” she said. “I’d like to shoot him and watch him kick,” she said.

“Ann, my God,” he said.

“Could you hear anything?” she said. “In the background? A noise, machinery, something humming?”

“Nothing, really. Nothing like that,” he said. “There wasn’t much time. I think there was some radio music. Yes, there was a radio going, that’s all I could tell. I don’t know what in God’s name is going on,” he said.

She shook her head. “If I could, could get my hands on him.” It came to her then. She knew who it was. Scotty, the cake, the telephone number. She pushed the chair away from the table and got up. “Drive me down to the shopping center,” she said. “Howard.”

“What are you saying?”

“The shopping center. I know who it is who’s calling. I know who it is. It’s the baker, the son-of-a-bitching baker, Howard. I had him bake a cake for Scotty’s birthday. That’s who calling. That’s who has the number and keeps calling us. To harass us about that cake. The baker, that bastard.”

They drove down to the shopping center. The sky was clear and the stars were out. It was cold, and they ran the heater in the car. They parked in front of the bakery. All of the shops and stores were closed, but there were cars at the far end of the lot in front of the movie theater. The bakery windows were dark, but when they looked through the glass they could see a light in the back room and, now and then, a big man in an apron moving in and out of the white, even light. Through the glass, she could see the display cases and some little tables with chairs. She tried the door. She rapped on the glass. But if the baker heard them, he gave no sign. He didn’t look in their direction.

They drove around behind the bakery and parked. They got out of the car. There was a lighted window too high up for them to see inside. A sign near the back door said THE PANTRY BAKERY, SPECIAL ORDERS. She could hear faintly a radio playing inside and something creak—an oven door as it was pulled down? She knocked on the door and waited. Then she knocked again, louder. The radio was turned down and there was a scraping sound now, the distinct sound of something, a drawer, being pulled open and then closed.

Someone unlocked the door and opened it. The baker stood in the light and peered out at them. “I’m closed for business,” he said. “What do you want at this hour? It’s midnight. Are you drunk or something?”

She stepped into the light that fell through the open door. He blinked his heavy eyelids as he recognized her. “It’s you,” he said.

“It’s me” she said. “Scotty’s mother. This is Scotty’s father. We’d like to come in.”

The baker said, “I’m busy now. I have work to do.”

She had stepped inside the doorway anyway. Howard came in behind her. The baker moved back. “It smells like a bakery in here. Doesn’t it smell like a bakery in here, Howard?”

“What do you want?” the baker said. “Maybe you want your cake? That’s it, you decided you want your cake. You ordered a cake, didn’t you?”

“You’re pretty smart for a baker,” she said. “Howard, this is the man who’s been calling us.” She clenched her fists. She stared at him fiercely. There was a deep burning inside her, an anger that made her feel larger than herself, larger than either of these men.

“Just a minute here,” the baker said. “You want to pick up your three-day-old cake? That it? I don’t want to argue with you, lady. There it sits over there, getting stale. I’ll give it

to you for half of what I quoted you. No. You want it? You can have it. It's no good to me, no good to anyone now. It cost me time and money to make that cake. If you want it, okay, if you don't, that's okay, too. I have to get back to work." He looked at them and rolled his tongue behind his teeth.

"More cakes," she said. She knew she was in control of it, what was increasing in her. She was calm.

"Lady, I work sixteen hours a day in this place to earn a living," the baker said. He wiped his hands on his apron. "I work night and day in here, trying to make ends meet." A look crossed Ann's face that made the baker move back and say, "No trouble, now." He reached to the counter and picked up a rolling pin with his right hand and began to tap it against the palm of his other hand. "You want the cake or not? I have to get back to work. Bakers work at night," he said again. His eyes were small, mean-looking, she thought, nearly lost in the bristly flesh around his cheeks. His neck was thick with fat.

"I know bakers work at night," Ann said. "They make phone calls at night, too. You bastard," she said.

The baker continued to tap the rolling pin against his hand. He glanced at Howard. "Careful, careful," he said to Howard.

"My son's dead," she said with a cold, even finality. "He was hit by a car Monday morning. We've been waiting with him until he died. But, of course, you couldn't be expected to know that, could you? Bakers can't know everything—can they, Mr. Baker? But he's dead. He's dead, you bastard!" Just as suddenly as it had welled in her, the anger dwindled, gave way to something else, a dizzy feeling of nausea. She leaned against the wooden table that was sprinkled with flour, put her hands over her face, and began to cry, her shoulders rocking back and forth. "It isn't fair," she said. "It isn't, isn't fair."

Howard put his hand at the small of her back and looked at the baker. "Shame on you," Howard said to him. "Shame."

The baker put the rolling pin back on the counter. He undid his apron and threw it on the counter. He looked at them, and then he shook his head slowly. He pulled a chair out from under the card table that held papers and receipts, an adding machine, and a telephone directory. "Please sit down," he said. "Let me get you a chair," he said to Howard. "Sit down now, please." The baker went into the front of the shop and returned with two little wrought-iron chairs. "Please sit down, you people."

Ann wiped her eyes and looked at the baker. "I wanted to kill you," she said. "I wanted you dead."

The baker had cleared a space for them at the table. He shoved the adding machine to one side, along with the stacks of notepaper and receipts. He pushed the telephone directory onto the floor, where it landed with a thud. Howard and Ann sat down and pulled their chairs up to the table. The baker sat down, too.

"Let me say how sorry I am," the baker said, putting his elbows on the table. "God alone knows how sorry. Listen to me. I'm just a baker. I don't claim to be anything else. Maybe once, maybe years ago, I was a different kind of human being. I've forgotten, I don't know for sure. But I'm not any longer, if I ever was. Now I'm just a baker. That don't excuse my doing what I did, I know. But I'm deeply sorry. I'm sorry for your son, and sorry for my part in this," the baker said. He spread his hands out on the table and turned them over to reveal his palms. "I don't have any children myself, so I can only imagine what you must be feeling. All I can say to you now is that I'm sorry. Forgive me, if you can," the baker said. "I'm not an evil man, I don't think. Not evil, like you said on the phone. You got to

understand what it comes down to is I don't know how to act anymore, it would seem. Please," the man said, "let me ask you if you can find it in your hearts to forgive me?"

It was warm inside the bakery. Howard stood up from the table and took off his coat. He helped Ann from her coat. The baker looked at them for a minute and then nodded and got up from the table. He went to the oven and turned off some switches. He found cups and poured coffee from an electric coffee-maker. He put a carton of cream on the table, and a bowl of sugar.

"You probably need to eat something," the baker said. "I hope you'll eat some of my hot rolls. You have to eat and keep going. Eating is a small, good thing in a time like this," he said.

He served them warm cinnamon rolls just out of the oven, the icing still runny. He put butter on the table and knives to spread the butter. Then the baker sat down at the table with them. He waited. He waited until they each took a roll from the platter and began to eat. "It's good to eat something," he said, watching them. "There's more. Eat up. Eat all you want. There's all the rolls in the world in here."

They ate rolls and drank coffee. Ann was suddenly hungry, and the rolls were warm and sweet. She ate three of them, which pleased the baker. Then he began to talk. They listened carefully. Although they were tired and in anguish, they listened to what the baker had to say. They nodded when the baker began to speak of loneliness, and of the sense of doubt and limitation that had come to him in his middle years. He told them what it was like to be childless all these years. To repeat the days with the ovens endlessly full and endlessly empty. The party food, the celebrations he'd worked over. Icing knuckle-deep. The tiny wedding couples stuck into cakes. Hundreds of them, no, thousands by now. Birthdays. Just imagine all those candles burning. He had a necessary trade. He was a baker. He was glad he wasn't a florist. It was better to be feeding people. This was a better smell anytime than flowers.

"Smell this," the baker said, breaking open a dark loaf. "It's a heavy bread, but rich." They smelled it, then he had them taste it. It had the taste of molasses and coarse grains. They listened to him. They ate what they could. They swallowed the dark bread. It was like daylight under the fluorescent trays of light. They talked on into the early morning, the high, pale cast of light in the windows, and they did not think of leaving.





Judih Haggai



Hot Times in the Wind and the Weather

i

hot times in the wind and weather
 slow wheatfields bend to the will of time
 cold flight of the brown willow weepers
 wide smile of the little green toads

hot times in the wind and the weather
 shy voices of bedouin men
 flapping plastic of nurturing structures
 loud trucks in the passing of dust

ii

rowing through wheatfields,
 barnacles and husks stick to my knees
 I paddle harder, upstream, windswept
 currents of clouds pointing north

stick by, dear friend,
 show me the wired constellation
 the hook that keeps me travelling
 onwards through the fields of days

Nothing is Mine

i

I'm an invisible calendar hovering over units of days
 I watch as others' smiles grow live
 I bless, I cry, I send out warmth
 I retreat into human foibles
 and then I pass by

nothing is mine
 I claim only a kiss or a hug
 a laugh or an insight

I share and then it's gone
 my empty sacs
 a silent instrument

ii

the thousand things twine and intertwine
 we dance and revolve at midnight
 to meet again, perhaps, again

a brief connection
 electric pulse
 universal salsa

iii

sand slips through fingers
 in samba, salsa, tango,
 subliminal tactile

and dramatic pause
 while sand slips through fingers

memories burst like a mouthful of lime
 sublime

then sand slips through fingers

Whisper My Voice

i

help me through this dusk, dusty tunnel
pull me into light
whisper my name
let me hear my heart throb in the sound of high

take me into lush green warmth
reveal my chakra miles
unfold my twisted coils unsprung
whisper my voice
open my ears

talk to me, universe
speak to me, friend
unveil this cloudy tombstone brain

ii

at the end of a tunnel
wherever it leads
stands a light haloed welcome

one day, I'll meet those arms
somehow, I'll make the moves
in the resonant presence of love

Pause Between Weeks

a day in the life
 my grandmother had such a day
 listening to the sounds of seagulls
 swarming the skies of coney island

such is my mind
 a coney island dressed in laundry lines
 fallout shelters
 ficus and lemon trees

my airspace is resplendent in yawns
 saturday morning neighbours
 walls paper thin
 voices relaxed uninhibited

we know our sounds
 saturday morning familiarity
 soon the espresso will awaken the mind
 yeast will call for breadmaking
 children will ask for lunch

my grandfather knew these sounds
 his brooklyn streets ripe with bagels
 long park benches
 a day to ponder the voices of others

my son knows days like these
 city strange accents
 bizarre shots and SUV engines
 ears cocked crooked, timezone twisted diagonal

from yawn to yawn
 we carry on
 DNA hit parade
 we shoot, we score, we generate

saturday morning
 pause between weeks
 past edging further
 future creeping closer

heart clinging to hang on

Good Night, Evening

good night, evening
it's been glorious to see you again
after a long, lugubrious day
hot, dusty air, melted bodies on ping pong tables
sun beating down, rooftops curling from tarpit fever
so many cracked voices, parched words
laughter a mere wheeze

it's been a day
and a doctor's appointment
a reflexologist incident
a tooth cleaning and a gum prod
a teacher and a point
a student and a mumbled thanks

it's been this and more
and now i shake your cool knowing hand
good night, eve

Vonnegut

with a smirk and a whistle
he spoke in epistle
a shrug, banter or quip
heavy of lid, seriously hip

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Things Change?

[a new fiction]

Part Four

“No Way Out But Through”

—Robert Frost

Dwindle into one’s work, become one’s work again, how it defines, how it breaches, how it sustains—

Sustains—

She who brought me here sustains me still—

Sitting near a tree long known ever loved thinking home is making the music, loving many creatures, resistance & renewal—

Alive tonight, a vessel of water, a beloved place.

Service ever to her, to green, to all—

To the small & the greater

I vow fidelity, pray it matters, work to sustain meaning.

Adoration, laughter, grit

Get along—

Sometimes a pen’s scratchings no more than small wild barks for reassurance, someone, anyone, some dreamt toward moment blossoms with touch, cease hunger’s futile suck pon the wind, this time she will stay, this time she will stay, she will stay

or something else, fidelity, work, grit, some other creature’s or kind’s example when mine own fails—

I can’t stop. I don’t know how.
What next keeps happening.

Hurry & limp toward shifting something, a life of songs & squander

life glows with radiant possibility
crossed by paths of ache

Flashes of joy & her useless soft tap

songs conjure toward something & somewhere

this morning found me strumming again

To love you is to forbid you nothing, to cup light while it dances, watch, sing, kept, released, love of the nest's kind, a safety between flights, the way tide swings to shore & away, love you & love the world & love you more, I'm trying to learn, to be enough, break blankness within finally—

love's aching puzzle, endless rule,
love the supreme noise rhythms deeper the heart, love the pool of flicking maybes,
the curing smoke—

love the birthing pyre—blow out, fall, return
singing for you is what I am.

Luna T's Cafe 2003. Nowadays a business, a culture, a dream. Like love, people go as far into it as they may, some see a bar with Hendrix & Wilco posters on the wall, a number of fine beers on tap, a kickass house chili for cheap. Some see further in & dance helpless ecstasy to Noisy Children rock music on Friday & Saturday nights, & some further notice the hookah pipes, the baskets of azurescence mushrooms, the pitchers of Electric Koolaid freely offered on a strangely glowing oak table in a corner of the bandroom.

Deeper in there is to see if sought a tall cavemouth & unhindered one may enter its tunnel opens out to a fullmoon field surrounded by hills of trees, at one end a natural amphitheatre, tall bonfire, many drummers & dancers, & Noisy Children now a participation rather than event, the night sweeping ever towards dawn—

more still, places I've not yet imagine, without scapes or bodies, places beyond becoming or memory

long has Luna T's been calling me back, insisting on my place & it being filled by me

Reluctant because unsure I notice my broken heart still beating & nod to this paradox

Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker, aware of most everything Luna T's offers nonetheless most times maintains his place on a barroom stool & his grip on a mug of black coffee laced with bourbon.

“The Lord & I no longer grapple over our conflicting ends” he announces in a somewhat quiet voice.

“I say: I demand more than thee can account for much less offer. The Lord replies: you are free to flee my bosom as to return. The Universe is a place of eternal rhythm. I say: I hate thee no longer. The Lord replies: for this I am grateful.”

He sips, shaky cup. I wait. He continues to cease.

Rebecca Dorothy Americus Soulard sits in my lap, all of 22 years old now, resting her head against my chest, our fingers twined.

“I knew there would be more. She loves you unending.”

“I hardly know.”

“You’re getting better. She sees that.”

Noisy Children no longer concern with together or apart. By agreement each lives a dual life, none questioning how Gretta lives in Seattle, Stephanie in DC, Ronnie in Westport, all join local dwellers Grey & Americus even weekend without plane travel. I grant them fiction’s gift to come & go Luna T’s Cafe from anywhere with the immediacy of two steps. They’ve taken to calling me the Magician & threatened to call their next album by that name.

Spring, it’s May 2003, I am 39 years old, this story has accompanied me for over two years. I am nearing greater ease with it. Most of its pages have never been seen by anyone.

The green & the sunshine sing hope to me as I greater again sing to her, singing to her what I am.

True love squeezes, releases, & again,
& ever again.

& squeezes & releases again I surely do not know why yet choose life or death I can’t keep avoiding this—

I’ve said “I don’t know” for too long & lived that way for too long—

I look at Knickerbocker. “Why did you stop fighting?”

“The ground was no longer worth the winning. It became beneath my toils.”

“How did you know?”

He says nothing. Americus looks at me: “Who are you fighting? What are you fighting for? What is the prize?”

“Vindication.”

“The only things worth seeking or defending—”

I shake my head. Taking Rebecca’s hand, I leave the barroom into the bandroom to its rear down the cave tunnel into the Amphitheatre. Rebecca knows we always end up here sooner or later.

We sit far from the tall fire & its dancers & drummers. Its? Her. Of course.

Rebecca does not speak but moves onto my legs, wraps hers 'round me, head against my chest.

I think about years past, thousands of days, millions of moments perhaps, most of them forgotten yet not a one less vital for all that, & one day the near last one, & then the last one, & if an after none now may wholly tell.

Finally she speaks to me, softly. "They need your Magick. Sometimes you don't feel it or see proof of it, but it's truer than ever. Power is going to be wielded in this world, in every possible world. Even if you left here you would not escape this truth. You can no more completely wield the world than it can completely wield you. The music you make is the collaboration. When the world weakens you must give more. It will shift back & forth. It always does."

"I wield poorly. I have for a long time."

"You wield in pain, not poorly, they are not the same. Everyone has this wound. Rent from the cosmos to dwell briefly in it before returned."

"No agreed on reason. I don't believe the easy answers. Men-shaped gods or mathematical chance."

She looks at me dark blue eyes throbbing intensely. "You are robbing yourself of so much & so others too."

"I don't what to do, what the right thing is."

She looks at me even fiercer. "There is only better & worse, not right."

A moment, then another. Another.

Rouse things greater from the diminishing cripple, crackling spring, electrical universe, hands toward service & its greater, thrust & its coil, beauty & its release—

the future of colors a white rose eschews—

happiness in the rhythm & the beat—

I look for myth's higher ground—
wish to provoke within harder—

Safety not in anger nor mourning—
nearer in singing—

& again I walk into her wall of hooks—no cry of pain this time—plod & silence—my Art threatened I do not submit. What she offers now I do not become its capture—

She nears me one way then another, I feel the press & poke in dreams in others her darkness
wields her & response is blankness

You can't have me as you are, as you live.

Rebecca nods.

I'm going to get you, Raymond.

Not if I don't wish you to.

You're mine.

You're not capable of claiming me.

Why don't you love me??

My silence expresses my feelings.

What do I have to do.

Whatever you want.

I want YOU

Because I resist?

Because I can't do this anymore without you. When are you coming back to Portland?

No.

You're mine.

When yr ready to stop drowning.

I am.

Raymond?

Raymond?

Are you there?

I don't know where I am or who I am seeking or calling—I only know this pen in
my hand & the way of life gestating this kind of moment's greater frequency is my guide &
my wish—

candlelight writing shadowy porch among tall magick trees drizzly night 4 a.m. or
whatever

this music of else & how to live in it or near it—

there is no option in this—

life otherwise does not matter—

She who would sit near with her own art going is who I wish—

if none, more candles, more pens & paper, music, if not happiness of one kind, another

Luna T's Cafe shall not be neglected again—

I'm trying like once ago

I will only try more

hope embedded in work

mystery bring it on again—

Luna T's Cafe in a city long past its meaning. I cannot give back whatever art or truth it had save somehow these pages where a resistance to its mechanical throb strums. Where there is a darkened space I ignite music & its people, commune of needful souls, the icy relief of sentiment's absence, my every throb toward hardest need's songs

"Buy him a beer!" cries a bigbellied trucker near me at the bar. He smiles at me with sodden lips. "You tink too much! I know. I was like you." Mr. Bob placed an ices cola before me.

"*Nah!*" the trucker bellows. "No sody pop for this gen'lman. You are going to have a drink with me & toast our brotherhood & our life! Our good life!"

"No. I'll toast with this." He looks at my cola. At me. At me closer for signs of rust, capitulation. Little. He roars assent & our glasses & many others raise in cheer.

The drinking fires out & roars on, & I remember other days when I sought sodden relief too—& they are long gone now, I suppose because drink failed me in the end, failed to be other than drink, fool comment yet true—all I found at the end of every rousing night was my heavy figure fell to bed—it gave me what it was til I could not find a thirst n'more

the music meant more, means more, does not empty with a glass or a night, suck off my last dollar & a tip, flatulate my mind into sleep—the music raises power, strokes & strums it higher, returns to me in new forms, a sky translucent with colorless light, where perches & hides the chirp & tweet of nocturnal observers—

sometimes the music even moreso than the muse, none stay, & sadness, yet see this pen carry along—

"I understand your sayings" my blurry truckerdriver friend observes. "Sometimes on the road I'm not missing her body or her meals . . . Just something stupid like the way she laughs at *I Love Lucy* on TVLand when I gotta be up early. I bitch her out but good but then later I remember. And it hurts." He stares watery at me. "You know what I mean when I say it. *It hurts.*"

Another time in bed with Rebecca & she lays across me somehow it feels OK, her artpad out & her lost in a complex of pencils & pastels. I'm reading a labyrinthine novel, again, & keep drifting into other versions of it til I wake again.

I remember a cafe, Heaven Cafe, in Portland, Oregon, how often I went there to write, sometimes no money, I think even Christmas Day. I was so alone & hopeless but on I trod, looking for work, reading books, writing poems, hoping she would call. How I wanted her to call. How it lessens when I never believed it could.

Rebecca twists as only a 22-year-old girl could & lands on my lips in a praise & a promise both—

When I returned to Connecticut it felt like failure, & I've squirmed with this feeling since—now I've gotten to feeling toward good things again

“Now I stand in sympathy
not for her but for me”
the Jayhawks tune “Better Days” slouching acoustic sweet from Luna T’s jukebox—

I live stained by you less who you are than who I once collaborated toward you becoming—
now others do that—it hurts to be left out—

“Wait til you have kids” slurs my friend. “See em break ‘or heart like no woman could. Mark
my words.”

How my pen can still go, how I can sit here determined to keep pages filling, how I can hope
toward returning West, or getting a desired job, or anything at all, I don’t know. I’m zipped
back into my own body again, no woman shares me with the world, none, a few think of me
but none sit on my lap holding my wheel, her wheel, steering

I choose to remember but not as manacle, to look forward with little clue, choose to feel I
am loved, I affect, ripples hit me and change as I release them—

Little knowing next & still I will not shirk—fear to shirk—measure hours by bottles—by the
warm grooves of old trystings, blown, broken, buried

another night, another row—

Seventeen years ago I got my first fulltime job in Hartford, Connecticut, & just a few
hours ago, eleven years since last I worked here, I scored work again, a part-time temporary
copy editor at the *Hartford Advocate*—& see this lead to odd thoughts—

I remember running late to that or some later job, passing through this park—
Wildfire Park in my fiction, Bushnell Park on a map of Hartford—

How years & more ago all that was! My life til I was 28 & I left Connecticut in
1992—eleven years later I move back—

no answers, I can’t even summon questions right now—history leaves strange marks
in the mud of one’s soul—

Several at Luna T’s bar, from where I’ve strayed, drink to that sentiment—I nod

Summer 2003 & this story nearing three years in the writing & barely halfway—

fountain springs water into the air & cascade down—kinetic, delicious—

Being in my hometown, born here, became an artist here, worked here, a few kisses here, &
what now? What’s left to this story, this city, that needs telling, refuses otherwise?

Cement Park. Is it lack of sleep or thinning of connection? I truly don’t know.

Part of leaving cleanly in good time is clarity on this matter—

The bar empties toward 2 a.m. when local law bids tavern doors be shut & beertaps stilled. I keep my seat, no mug in my grip in any case, & wonder about loves old & new, & how the yearn hardly slows, & wonder if I am least ways wiser & think a little—

New green eyes bid me near, known awhile but now further & can it be another girlpath is beginning to select my steps?

fear hunger hope yearn yearn yearn

nothing to do but check black pen's progress for signs of my well-being—

and—

Again a push to learn & cohere, & eventually do better than these, to respond ahhh & gosh to sudden bursts of sunshine, to feel presence & absence as a sum of one part, to elude metaphors when possible & smack kissy love them when not—

write more boldly toward invisibility, toward carnality, toward earth & sweat, set flame to blankness as not a native human way, to kiss her afar, now, this brawling heart moment, kiss her & someone loves her, & when your hope deserts keep breathing. Relax. Keep breathing. Candy & splendor will surely appear soon.

Some days I am sadder but not by sentiment's weak lean, more a wishing that my own edges groped out farther, release & content the sum of one part, how I yearn! I find I love more of everything no matter I am as ever toothless of understanding—

Mr. Bob the bartender is wiping down the counter near me. "Did you sleep at all, son?"

"It's morning?"

"I took your missus home. She wasn't sure but I said it was OK. She trusts me well enough to listen."

"Thank you."

"Mind the radio?"

I smile & shake my head.

He looks at me again. "I think your music is closer to the truth than your dread."

I nod.

Muse on the blood, green eyes, wiggle, her squeeze, her breath. Mind swings through the leaves & brush, hours of restless light & stroking darkness, & return to her, music & dread not near to summing to one part but see this pen moving it is my most muscular bid—

Braver to fill blank pages or leave them? I keep filling, hundreds, thousands by now, & I keep track, account my days in music then account the accounting, nothing summed just sleep eventually, dreams of cats, each a singly-stamped being

where once I chased human masters & gurus none interest me now

“Trailing off again, bud” Mr. Bob says softly—

“I keep going dark & dry”
He nods. This more comforting than words.

Mostly I don’t know what to say anymore. I’ve forgotten how fiction works, how it’s a different order from walking daylight. I have a hard go reading anything that exalts humanity above anything, yet I do not think I hate men so much as my heart has decades to catch up in loving everything else—

I tried to read Emerson’s *Nature* essay but he preached light above music, which idea I struggled to exist with. Then he said men are exalted enough to claim the world if they but try—& I could not continue. Many parts, yes, & perhaps many wholes too, but men own nothing & do not take even breath with them into the earth.

I watch people & often become sad, a feeling nature rarely induces in me.

These burnt cities & towns I abide in these days, places not obsessed with the mistier yearnings—I know some in them may be—I was long before I left—but how many leave?

My old acid guru Hartley would have called it entropy. Curiosity toward the common til tired & out.

My stories aimed me out & then chronicled that & now I’m back in yet hung over the borders.

Cecile Grey regards me. “Just one pint, mate.” He swills his down & calls for two—Mr. Bob brings his Guinness & my iced water. That door is shut, & gone.

Luna T’s no longer needs my chronicles. I need them. Passing wild green on local buses I hardly say. I want to. Where the connection between the wild green, human caterwaul, the music of everything & machines grown ever nearer the mystical?

Wonder through the wild green more & more, no chaos, no order, kin to music conjured as made, the roar contained in a sudden kiss, through flail & flow—

greedy for a new language of the wild green, a human beginning toward wild green knowing, & whatever human thing may interest in return—

I don’t know if it can or would—

“Love stretches from readiness to regret” I write wondering what
Look around morning Hartford & think: here I am again
employed for the moment
loved completely
well & a bed to sleep in too

Mr. Bob nods. “Keep it moving, Son. That pen of yours.” The bar is lined with greenery more than ever before. Digital breezes balance here & there. A TV screen into other realities hums. The music in words will help me find the way.

deep enough into Luna T’s Cafe& arrive in the desert city, the continuing festival, the jungle space of whoops, mountains, seaside sky toward which hands dance, earth wherefrom feet launch & rest, & sometimes this story comes along half-pages at a time

knowing dreaming from waking as hard as fiction from not—too many gradients, exceptions, relativities—

a city, a festival, moreover, less, hurry,

what’s passing? what’s ever really gone?

No security, no assurance, little promised but slowing & demise, & this endless fucking story, post-story, & just the wish to write again madly, & thinking soon, eventually, but no, now thinking: why the fuck not now? The mind pushed responds, & pushed again responds better so soon, eventually, but no, *now*—

Maybe I’m in love again, always, I
and,
 how those words stumble pen

What I won’t do is become old and boring with a few pocked bitteresses to tell of—that’s why I stumble & rave onward, this fear inspires & paralyzes me

& a desire to reach beyond denying this story’s lacks toward its treasure—its wild greens & lights

the power in me yet resides & I will work it up until it shines & swings about with no cricks—days of angry try, of teetering assault

I want my fucking faith back

nothing else matters.

But how. Can revived faith really root in another person, or people at all?
If not people then what?

A beat. A beat. Three. Sitting in this city where I began & eager to depart it again—

the words come with difficulty these days but they do come—they will come even better in later days—I dwindled for so long—rising again in stumbles—

One looks to one’s kind for empathy—I can’t think of any other reason to persist—

Someone I like with green eyes I haven't talked to her in nearly a week, she swore & hung up on me & it shouldn't matter but it does, another betrayal, disappointment, I shouldn't care but I do, & how anybody can harm someone who's showed them love & kindness—

blah fucking blah—

what seems more likely is that no answer is ever enough, life is now as good as it will ever be, praise should happen more often,

I want to leave this city & not return but as a visitor—the better to love it—

Please, Universe, help me to do better.

It this shaggy Art thing becomes a deeper necessity, not a thing I can reason about or discuss much with anyone, a response to sadness, a riffing on sadness, what could I possibly tell anyone anyway, storytelling makes no sense to me anymore, nor does confession, maybe all which remains is a sort of imaginative recording of events, maybe that's all fiction ever is or was—I feel sad very often & it bears no sweetness about it, tis morbid, tis maudlin, & I can hardly say

language—music—singing—comfort
the perpetual rhythm & run of nature—I don't even know if it teaches though I watch, I listen—

the sadness wants me to be obsessed with it—not green, not music, no whatever comfort there can be in people—memories, hopes—no, just sadness—

sitting in an unfamiliar corner of Luna T's Cafe for tweak & twinge of the strange, I see how further greed it is becoming—& rhythms & melodies unceasing—& will it disappear, & the city around it? Is this what this story tugs me toward?

Well, then, so be it, each page adds & I don't know to or toward what—

the crowd at the bar grumbles about the 2nd-place Red Sox & the gruesome political quagmire in Iraq—

“We should bomb the fucking White House & get our boys home”

“Hey now!”

“That AWOL motherfucker isn't going to stop. He's a hero in his own mind. I say six or seven bullets to six or seven criminal heads, deal with the murder & the aftermath, then wake up from this shit”

“That's not how democracy works”

“No, but it's how this damned country has worked from time to time. It's called coup d'état. The CIA & the Mafia took out Kennedy in '63 that way. He was going to pull out of Vietnam. He wouldn't invade Cuba. Forty years later, we need another one.”

“How many have you had?”

“Four. They're called sody pop. Used to be I could suck bourbon down clean & pretty as a college girl's left nipple. Then one night it got ugly, & the next day uglier. Later I stopped. Never read a book in my life. So I had time & I started. You wanna know the lesson of books? People lie & they always have. Kings arrive on thrones bloody from their climb.

Woman are exalted as prizes when they're not beaten to shit. Children have some good ideas but no power. Nature has all the answers to our questions but most of us only talk to each other."

"Why are you here?"

"I don't know. It's been 20 years since I walked through that door; tonight I did."

"No bourbon, though?"

"Not in this lifetime."

I listen, write it down. The sadness waits me out, sees what I can build up.

Noisy Children plays Friday & Saturday nights. Again the houseband, but far more cultish. Guitarist Ronnie Pascale keeps a Weblog on NoisyChildren.com. He tends to a simple kind of entry: set lists, odd song choices, band schemes when any occur. He leaves a lot alone, unjournalled. Fans maintain the site communally—discussion forum, chatroom, music downloads. Rebecca writes a check once a month to pay the site's host.

O, is this fiction? Oops—thought I forgot how. The bus I'm on is nearly arrived. 45-minute trip; didn't sleep as I intended.

Feel pen's sometime revived shimmer.

Maybe it's learning to think severally again—the sadness is grey & does not divide into ideas, characters, stories—more than weakness, tis a nada, a negation, a passive dribbling out of days—it is one hurt or several become a way of life—a such inward-looking til nothing is seen new anymore—

tis a vision encrypted—

Lately my pen sometimes blows up again—like old—& I feel continuity not nostalgia—the sadness, compelled to dance, dances—

Rebecca joins me wherever I sit—ever friend, ever wife-muse—muse but no mock in her—

"They keep coming & going"

"Both, yes"

"I don't know how to better"

"Nobody really does"

"Why don't you?"

"You don't make me"

"Is that what I don't know?"

"Is it?"

"Will Burning Man help?"

"Let it"

A few weeks of stability then some more. Home, job, woman.

We walk into the bar to let some noisy jolly air clean us out—

“Some rely on horses, some on carriages. The truly insane, however, lean upon man-erected gods, man-erected symbols, man erected institutions, man-erected contrivances claiming refuge & certainty.”

“I rely on cold beer. & warm pussy when it’s offered,” cracks one of the grizzles at the bar to a raucous return.

“Glad the establishment is that you do. Drink it, guzzle it, buy a dozen kegs, break into the local YMCA pool, fill it up, & go right in & drown in it.” His remark produces a more uneasy laugh from a few.

Someone asks Rebecca who the guy is. Knickerbocker’s long-lost son maybe? She smiles.

Later as she commences to seduce me, lightly, slowly, she says “OK, where did he come from?”

“Knickerbocker’s long lost son?” She grins & keeps at her task.

Knickerbocker listens to the newcomer’s rants in silence. I ask Rebecca if he’s OK—she says he’s no different than he’s been for awhile.

Rebecca looks at me & nods. “You’re into another one, I was hoping.”

“Not jealous as usual?”

“Never, none of them ever threaten me. They make things better.”

“How?”

She’s quiet. Thinking. Maybe listening. I wait. She’s taught me.

“They fuel & drive you in ways my world & I can’t. Complementary.”

I nod. “She loves me. I think she means it. Not just a whim or a mood or a lustful pulse.”

“And you’re doubting & scared.”

“At least.”

“You’re saying ‘help.’”

“Help.”

She’s in my lap, easily, familiarly. Arms twined, skins meld, years of this long-firing wish, help me, she sleeps in my right hand, waiting for black pen, more, dancing whip of light in a sky dusted past emotions, help me, past the best or subtlest of human containers, help me, eat me kiss me, own me, know me, trill of moans, sparks bang from miles traveled yet to be, help me, color me, fool me with less that more will always wait—

burn me, dig me, bring me to new bells chiming songs I can still learn from—

to drums ever more twisting & baby post-lingual, drummers more & more a feast of rhythmic arcing fire—

“Trust” she says lips along my arms & lashes “Trust” she continues, dabs & drawls, fuck words, fuck language, let’s eat berries, let’s get high, let’s climb steeper stonier trails, let’s do better, help me, “I will”

I make Art to remember how to tell the truth, sometimes it hurts, this story 3 years already in the making & little flicker it will find friends, I don't know. It's crisscrossed America with me, learning deeper our unknowing, & whatever its root far gone now & sad that & hope too of course—

I await her taking my hand in a glaring Midwestern town—touch melding, smile, begin—

X the Space Alien flings darts as I notice his return. He's pretty good. "If it didn't matter you wouldn't keep trying" someone says. That's the sharpest comfort available.

Seattle today, the road east again soon, then Hartford, it never fucking ends.

I need something new please.

Something new. Revived? Novel?

OK, maybe simply not old, the idiot snap of one clothed brute to another—

"Fuck em all til they learn some empathy"

I don't know if that's learned or even can be

"Humiliate the bastards & cunts. Hard. Fast. Make it hurt. Make it stick."

The world's usual way. Everything else called fairyland.

Nods. "True. Like I said, gather em up, make 'em dance for your blessed tough ideals. Make it hurt."

X laughs, jagged, musical. "Civilizations collapse like that. Planets."

When?

"When I & we cease their open flow. When it's long past time they've ceased."

I look at Rebecca. She nods. We leave. "There are other ways to empathy, Raymond." "How?" "The green strength of nature." "The pink strength of feminine beauty?" She smiles familiarly. We're walking deeper into Luna T's Cafe, woods never the same, hills elsewhere, ocean's shore endless, walking toward floating, not quite dream, not quite not, now maybe drifting, maybe toward bodiless save closely held hands, is there music now? the kind of loose gestating instrument or capturing ear, something like perhaps, slipping side to side on air currents colored by speed & direction, she doesn't let go, never, empathy begins somewhere, eruption from gesture, something, sometimes I think I do know—

Well at some point Rebecca is next to me on this bus & we are traveling eastward just past Bismarck, North Dakota, my worlds again coalesce, she leans against me & smiles, very Rebecca, & her eyes say keep at it & I do, she smells like clean morning light would, she kisses me cheek and naps against my shoulder—

Now what? Rename this fiction *Solipsist Funnies*? What now?

One presses pen to paper & something spreads across the page, I've been doing this for decades, & it changes over time, how it feels, what becomes on paper—

The changes run across & through the soul until—

this. This page. Its earnest, paltry explanation, standing here in front of some tattered inn, Rebecca asleep on the bus, are we still somewhere deep inside Luna T's Cafe? The sky a pressing herd of grey hands, the air thrummed by passing train, its chug & whistle.

Well—

It feels like a long-yearned still point—where strange things are at least on plain view—

OK.

I'm writing beneath an outside light affixed to wall next to inn's entrance—people all about chattering—bored locals & tired bus travelers—

Rebecca is hard asleep—married to me 6 years, 23 years old, & can be eventually exhausted by my freakish paths we walk—

Someone said if it didn't matter I wouldn't persist & it does matter—for an admitted shifting parcel of reasons—because my ancient readers are all gone, & none new have yet arrived—because it's a world that matters & should continue—because my heart's blood & its ink have commingled, we now share some wounds that remain—

because this story has told some truths along its way—

& I suppose it can't be like past fixtions anymore than each of them could possibly interchange—

142 miles to Fargo, North Dakota traveling east on Interstate 94—listening on my walkman to Traveling Wilburys sing “End of the Line”:

Well it's alright
 Even when push comes to shove
 Well it's alright
 If you got someone to love
 Well it's alright
 Even if the sun don't shine
 Well it's alright
 We're going to the end of the line

a bright chorus of bemused singers—voices, changing lead vocals, dandelion sweet coven of acoustic guitars—yes music salves & sillies, a miracle our gift lightest deepest toy—

Still point. Now mobile, diminishing miles to the large bus station shack in Fargo where I'll call my latest baby, she in Omaha, Nebraska—

my fiction now comes with me, we go together & so the structure & form it bears knocks about in the winds of my phasing dramas—sure & no fiction cannot but trouble by this way—even as it both matters & persists—

129 miles to Fargo—see how it is?

& I skid to Connecticut its doors lay open sullen & indifferent—

& here I am days later feeling trapped & trashed trying to fight my way out with pen & guts—

& I beseech my Merry Muse to help me—

“Ha!” she snaps—muses dislike neglect soundly—

but love attention—I won't stop trying—

There is no truth that does not give way to another, no love with neither beginning nor end, no pain that reigns then diminishes, no gesture of an open hand that, once offered, can be retrieved—

“Man, he needs a drink”

“I think that would put him out for good”

The door between bar & band room swings open & Noisy Children rehearsal blows through: electric & acoustic guitar twisted high, bass guitar & drums upholding their soar, keyboards loose & tumbling among the jam—

“Great good lordly absence of justification! Explanation’s gape! A world full of hints & tricks & deceptions disguised as guru, philosophy, sea & oak! How we cry for masters without knees to crack, loins to fell, faiths to delude, hands to purchase in night’s secret shades! Something lasting, a bloom, a song, a moment! Something save loss & its increase, sin, regret, harm, poverty, tears, the wealth ever greater of decay & entropy!” Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker speaks softer & softer til his last words are cried into their own nested silence.

Truths perhaps linked & building not toppling game-pieces. Love perhaps untellable by time’s manacles, pain a push toward some greater sensation it poorly intimates.

The band coalesces around me neither bar nor band room just music flooding with light’s potent as well as its own.

“Saloon Keeper! Neither its history nor its future shall explicate this establishment’s splotches & twinkles! I can no longer renounce thee nor thine tavern as once I mightily did! I submit to thee, to a world with no true ground by which its heart’s purity may be ascertained nor vain sky above by which its spirit’s intent may be beheld! I submit! I submit!”

The crowd cheers & the band takes a break. This story calls tangle its secret noun & verb.

Truth flies by the train’s window, brushed through by horn’s cry, swamps & ponds tell plainly through shade & hue, complement to a sky long in cloud & azure, true lays open the wild green, the twicker of antennae & eye, seed & leaf

Love arcs through absence & immolation, induces yowling song nearer, crumples memory’s rust with dream’s rowdy nocturnes & daylight’s first portents, confess it all to the heeding world

Pain teaches what none else can, what kind of enemy the world can be, & perhaps what kind of friend, & what time does to shape & shape again history & anything it meant, ever nearer somewhat home, ever, nearer

gesture inks & bloods, witnesses time when will none other, cauterizes love without end, caresses pain & hopes for better, all there was, will ever be, the truth flies by, love arcs through absence & immolation, pain teaches what none else can, gesture inks & bloods, a cry must be louder, she's tired tonight—

A morning now & I sit at the bar drinking iced water. Mr. Bob the barman regards me closely. Fondly: “You’ve got the chops, bud. Keep swinging true.”

“Me? Big shot editor?”

“You. About time too”

Rebecca sleeps in my arms every night, sometimes nude, sometimes one of my shirts, tie-dye, & pink underwear, or white, or black, or red, or something she painted herself, these little wearable paintings private to us. Heh.

She's more grounded than I am, comfortable in her world. Her loved ones are near again. Luna T's shimmies & glows with her pictures, & sometimes she takes to figuring up shapes like bits of glass & leaves. I have not fully attended her world in years; it belongs more to her than to me.

She keeps it kinetic, waits for me. She is quiet master of this fixtional world. Does not interfere but rather gesticates. The world grows. She watches.

“So I'm doing OK so far?”

“Fine, bud. Keep it positive. Ask many questions. People like that. Humility, humor, confidence. Keep true.”

I look at him hard. “I want this editing job at this paper. I want two years plus of job shit to end.”

“Stay true, son.”

She asked me one night how much her world needed to mirror mine. I said it hardly did anymore. She said she wanted to accelerate things some. I said yes. she said it would be more obvious experiment. I said to her: help it stay true. She said yes.

I've written over a very long toss of years now, nearing 30 years of it. Still, tonight, thinking: how do I do better, make it matter harder? How?

She turns away & I follow, the music clues & confesses, follow past days I can barely & abide, & too many places met & gone, she turns away, I follow, loved ones & lost ones scattered in ten fingers' directions & more, yet always one more nearing, one more possible—

I was doing this a year ago, five, ten, twenty—hundreds of miles away, thousands—a bus, a pen, what new? Me. What new? Each next word. What new? Every night is new, a fresh try from bare ground—

To write more, & more, breach possible—find the danger, hit it, kiss it, make it creak & blow—harder, harder save when softer works better—

“Hearts do not heal.” Strum. Strum. & sing again. Words like these stay among the dancing bodies. The band kicks up a little harder, hearts do not heal, a hard truth to move with, yet reckon bodies moving, the light artist gives out something more, maybe a few fire dancers now, call the moon at its fattest above, hearts do not heal, the guarding green does not offer comment, another show this one not going to end, this on leaving the stream entirely—

a touch of blonde hair & starlight, magick in a casual sanctuary, the roundness & call of faraway hills, a few memories in a sack around one’s heart—unlovely buildings for manufacture—hidden walls scored with one night’s rowdy remain—

brown & white fields full not empty—the man who sees otherwise is still asleep—

Take it slowly, no, tired of that, hit the peddle, go, I’m enough to go further harder now, hereon, & maybe dreams erupt within to point hard to what matters, where to go—

Luna T’s Cafe a deeper & deeper, OK, something persists about that, has years now, from what remains to what hails, sentiment to beckon—

from skin to rhythm the world is a texture hardly told in five six or a thousand senses, a wealth of sway & hue, angle & shimmer

help me write on, write forth, write past, write deeper harder laugh laughter help me to jiggle with grateful & flutter with mercy, I know not who I ask or what or how but still help me, & us, body & thing, help & more, ask, ye untellable rushing force in things, ask for more, demand, cajole, sing, there is love waiting a million pending gestures high, & more, ask, pray, offer, receive, nothing need suffer alone, nothing at all, god, man, beast, leaf, one & many & neither—help & aid, feel it good, the ripe & the roaring,

hearts do not heal—they pend painful til everything cracks & a wild beyond flames blooms madly now—

Hearts do not heal but a flash & a word & a task distract their flail & mourn, an hour passes, a day, the world’s roof one night covered in pink-hued cloud ruffled as a morning bed—blood keeps coming & going, oxidizing, relieving, & another flash, word, task, another hour, day—

cemetery of the heart alive with unburied wounds but each can & does come here eventually, fills & keeps another space, yet reckon so much yet unfilled, unkept—

reckon other regions as well, where heart plays, where heart yearns, where heart praises—

Others, too, where heart perpetuates its enigmas, its cries to & fro with know not what—reckon the rhythms within rhythms, what undergirds, what protects, what stays blade & pill & dance cut short most hours, most days—

He looks at Rebecca awaiting me & says “The Empire never ended. That’s where you begin.”

“Which Empire?”

“Well, all of them really, one to next is an illusion. But call it the Western Empire. That’s what’s outside those doors. Hey barkeep, another soddy pop?”

Rebecca is quiet. “So that’s how I begin?”

“That’s what you acknowledge. Kings & armies & even nation-states rise & fall but—”

“The Empire never ended.”

He sips his soda, a microbrew root beer, on tap. Mr. Bob the barman cares for every kind of thirst.

“Well, you were looking for a way to put this cafe in a fuller context. What’s outside those doors as well as what magick runs deep inside here, right?” Rebecca nods. “That’s how. You look at what the world is in a different, truer way. To unenlightened eye, it resembles fixtion, but the truth of fixtion is the truth of the world, not a veering away from it.”

Rebecca drinks milk, chocolate milk. Mr. Bob conjured up a recipe learnt from a friend on the road when they were minor leaguers scraping through.

“You look at the spread of nations as a collective ideology, very little difference among them. Christian-inclined, materialist-bound, patriarchal, hierarchal, militarily-enforced pseudo-democracies. Conformist-worshipping, nature-abhorning, ecstasy-shy, creativity-vampiring. It’s been like this for thousands of years. The machine & scripture dominate & subjugate the freak & the tree. Start there, with those ideas, & then look around. See where they fit.” He sips his root beer through a long red straw with a loop in the middle. Gift from Rebecca. He wouldn’t drink without it.

“Does Art oppose it?”

“Some does.” He sips. “Not much really very much. The Resistance scrapes by with what it can. Sex is a weapon, ungovernable by materialist consciousness. Music.” He waves away another round of root beer. Stands. “Seeya, Becky.” Walks out.

Rebecca winces but allows this one person to use that severely unloved name.

What else? What more? The Empire consumes blindly, constantly, no regard for subtlety or other. Is the Empire all, has it no real nemesis?

She told Mr. Bob she needed some books & would be gone a day or two. He nodded & fetched her a thermos of chocolate milk, a bag of cheese sandwiches, some peanut butter cookies.

Books were a start, hints & clues. Comfort that others had wondered what was going on, & been brave enough to get their answers or shards into published matter.

She did this work alone, put aside her artpads for much of several days, taking them out only at night to doodle & calm.

She missed everyone but trusted they would await her.

Cosmic Early wrote, “To play one true note is to become slave, ever seeking the next, hustling the twilling birds & the midnight skies, believe it lurking in a pair of pink panties, in the silent desert, somewhere in a crowd of swaying faces.”

Rebecca looked up. The bookstore was quiet tho for a moment it seemed suddenly loud. She’d walked in quickly, not noticing the store’s name. It been a long time since she’d been in a bookstore, pretty much since the Arcadia had burnt down. Well, years.

The book was paperback, lacked a cover & title page & the binding was partially gone, title gone, Cosmic Early’s name listed. It was sitting on the small table next to the old armchair. She didn’t know whose it was but she sat, & began reading.

“Even after the pursuit of the next true note, in a voice shiny with bracelets & starlight, in a hand seen as a language Breast confused, mind ransacked, dreams haughty & irregular, to play one true note is bondage. Nothing but the flames are godds thereafter; nothing but orgasm & death worthwhile news. The tongue sliding down throat to belly to bush to buttocks to back ceases if her breathing proves not tuneful, if clouds shroud starlight over the hill—”

Again. Noone. The other chairs & couch in the small room empty. Others in the room to her left—the cafe counter, staircase to book floors, main entrance—& to her right—a deeper room within, more chairs, more couches. But nobody here. Right. Sort of.

“—if she or the cosmos itself seem too or too little willing.”

“How to oppose the Empire, you ask? Go ahead.”

“How?”

“Why too? How & why?”

“Yah, Jack. Both.”

“The how is easier. Assume that what most adults do most of the time is self-motivated. When you find yourself in a crowd, look a different way. Engage your passing moments.”

“That’s not much.”

“No, it isn’t. More than that runs from hint to instruction.”

“Why then?”

“The Empire encourages sleep with dreams of gruel. Or no dreams at all. A life spent as audience. As component.”

“You’re a crackpot. I’ve got lottery tickets to buy. I’ll think of you as I’m engaging my tickets.”

“Can’t win if you don’t play”

“Damned straight”

“Can’t lose neither”

“Oh I know all about that”

“So why bother?”

“Why not. Three, four bucks a week. No harm done”

“It could add up if you save it”

“Add up to what? Listen, I like my pleasures small & frequent”

“No hangtime?”

“None.”

“What about death?”

“It’ll come when it’s due”

“That’s all?”

“What else? When your time’s up, you go.”

“Where?”

“The ground, Jack. Maybe Heaven. We’ll both see”

“What about more?”

“More isn’t going to gain you anything. The fight’s long over. I’m just playing out the rounds”

“Why?”

“Because the only thing worse than failure is failing again & again. Not learning your place.”

“Does everyone have one?”

“I don’t know. I ain’t God, just a prole standing in line.”

“Is that enough?”

“That’s not the question”

“What is?”

“Well?”

“Are you going to tell me?”

“How to make it from A to B & back.”

“That’s it?”

“No.”

“What is?”

“The question is: where’s your A & what’s your B?”

Trying to remember something, she kept trying out books, but few lit her eyes. Annoyed, after her lucky success with *Cosmic Early* she came back to the armchair & looked out for more abandoned tomes.

Funky music played, never anything familiar & not the radio with a DJ to name the songs. The place didn't seem to close & she kept her diet good—with juices, bagels, odd little salads—once Mr. Bob's food package had run out.

OK. Here I am. I don't know why but it's OK. I need to remember something then I'll go. Somewhere. It's like tripping as much as anything else.

What to do when a pamphlet, dark green, thin, yellow viney wordless cover & she read it

“Tonight I let you go. I must walk on. Our blossom was of a season; it will not survive the heat. A thing of frost, a single secret going with spring's waking. Summer's press.”

Hmm. She looks around. Whatever watches does not threaten. Curious, fond. Evening time others are about.

“You finally hunger anew, call it my gift. Now I breathe twice & let you go. Walk on. Let you go, tonight, now scrape & fumble my music back.”

Last page reads Q.E. & none else. She returns to text.

“Our blossom was sugar, now melted, now dew. A blessing, a jaguar; fierce, a flu. Gleaming penny in starlight. A persisting greed for love's secret brew.”

Hm. Not sure if she likes him.

A moment of happiness, several lately, they are strange, lacking slave mind to other & then & maybe—moment of happiness, a surge, trees mourning festive colors, air liquid with chill, a moment riding along dandy, here, on these wheels, this right-now is perfect, it knows me, has waited, oh, shit, fuck, some sort of sloppy bliss—

so much hurt for so long, as though always—but, no, twas not always, & neither will be ever—grateful, happiness, then afraid because of that happiness—

not learned, not kept, don't know, what tis? maybe learned, unlikely kept, but don't know, not at all—

afraid but *fuck it*—here it is—happiness—here it is—here goes—

Rebecca finds a park behind her bookstore, the rear door opens out to it, leaves fill its air, benches scatter its woodchip-covered ground. A breeze led her here from her usual armchair, the trees here vibrate red & orange & maroon.

She sits on an empty bench with her book. Buildings on all sides. Black metal fire escapes, walls of windows, a wooden playground. People sit reading, an insect growl rests on the air.

“What is reality? What is nature? What am I doing here? What happens next? *These* are the questions that matter.”

“Nobody fucking knows, mac. That's why there's priests & scientists.”

“And what do they do but seek to enforce the validity of their prejudices & institutions? To find truth, everything needs to be tossed on the table. Including the questioner & his tools.”

Someone else says, “You forgot strippers. Don’t forget strippers now.”

Paths sometimes lose their audience, no longer serve from somewhere to somewhere, stall, stop, stay. New paths break, begin, are born. The world is wrinkled in both old & new paths.

But what of no path, no right direction, home a verb, a moment, the map written in dream, the way there not assured by previous accounts.

So. No path. Nothing bids helpful, nothing in the way. Night on all sides. Dawn comes without explanation.

She sits in the grass & begins to draw on napkins & as these accumulate she weaves them together, uses pages from Cosmic Early’s tome, selects carefully, then randomly, then blindly. She seeks to weave a path, or at least scrap of direction, if not gestated by her hands then how? She concentrates on remembering in both directions, & others as they appear.

Well. Regard happiness when bitter & broken ranges & rages about. See how the hurt feeds on happiness, won’t stop til none left—so happiness backs away, keeps some, insists—that’s how it survives—gives away the froth, keeps the veins—the muscle—the heart—the living engine making, being, living happiness—you sucking bastards can’t have it—else I become one with nothing too—again—

regard the crimson night from a high hill, celestial chiaroscuro above & keep near the dearer truths of clean moving water & how leaves in autumn tickle down draft & sunlight

disappear into the image of sparks falling, each last flickers alone, no lingual subtlety or blaze, wind down streets other than one walks

a pair of maids squeak youth & unmade desire

A code? A pattern? A maze? What for this story, whereto? Has a plan, an ideology? A trunk toward sky, branches & leaves? Confession, lie? What has it been, what tis?

We’ve traveled from Malden & Boston & Cambridge to Black Rock City to Seattle & Portland to Plainville & Hartford & New Haven & Black Rock City again, again—through love’s agile rise into its disaster—again, again—hope defined by dollars & safe beds when little but this story remaining to assess—& again Art blew the world up happy—& again dollars & bed were beams not the sun—

Still, tis narrative? Tis experiment? Tis song in black ink? Can it be more, can it help or heal?

What part does it play in the resistance, what its blows against the Empire? I want to find out however crazy to do.

Can a story demand its own, stand straight up after months in a hunch, speak through me by my pen & back again what must needs occur?

Dunno. Maybe. I think so. Yes. For this story's ambitions are hard & eager, summon stars, tap into dreams, make peace with its most wounded bedamned page, a whole not of high notes but of how each note mattered to the song—

Nothing can untangle this story from my life or the passing times yet more is wished, more shall be conjured, neither intricate for clever nor simple for cry: more shall be

it will begin to weave with itself, revisit, harmonize, how we've crawled back to standing, how shaky we still are

I convince me to work, to the new push, toward the stranger rhyme, night revealed but not solved, love riled til a lasting glow, memories loved & burned for fuel, wisdom hustled for a little extra,

blows against the Empire? Every last word I write. Every breath.

I don't know how to do this anymore but my blood & my ink both run & no life without them.

Blows against the Empire in every leaf, every sunrise, every orgasm, every calliope of drums rings round fire in forests taut with power. Every word. Every breath.

Empire romances the world's rot,
its fear, its foul prejudices.
Empire tags does not name,
preaches famine not share.

I grow older. I just want to do better.

I don't want to suffer to kin myself with the wounded but salve their wounds, teach them how, & help, & discover what past those wounds, what magick, what renewed knowing.

I will drown with nobody ever again. I will urge swimming on the way to natural flight.

Blows against the Empire in raving every day & surviving the rest & I'm a less likely to say I love you & more to show you how much. Every word. Every breath.

Once I dreamed a man named Richard James Americus who become lesser the more he resembled me for he is a guitarist & musician in ways I am not—he satisfies in a group submersion to ecstatic knowingness I have only ever found alone—but a wish remains—always a wish—

Still—we are not the same & that is better—I'd rather call him brother than mirror—I need more brothers in casting blows against the Empire—

where I most want to do this remains far tonight—& several I love—

but I'm fuckass stronger than I was—the strength of will & body—

my advice to human communities: women nest, men govern, between the two is a community of mercy grown.

Bureacracy is governance without mercy. Terrorism is the society of waking nightmare. Justice only comes when every hand is full & counted.

Brotherhood is not defined by agreement nor challenged by dissension. Brotherhood is made from the bones of days & years involved & caring—

The Empire would have us name therefore to judge—divide & judge—to put ideology before even survival, common sense—the Empire is a blind consumptive & will not cease. Music opposes, & passion & the at times cartoon foolishness of the counterculture—at other times inestimably hopeful—the Empire threatens all—

“FUCK BUSH!” the crowd at Luna T's bar roars & raises glasses. Yes & more.

Someone urged up on the bar dances & every voice hurrahs. I forget something & hurrah as well.

Everything matters. All which has been leaves its color, texture, melody. We belong to the world. We belong to each other.

Alone & together both.

Dream time & lesser. Never a lasting answer how.

Serve the muse, serve the muse, serve the muse, sans the how. In loving old brick & winter-bare trees, serve the muse. In fooling through familiar streets, the rare gold of a new run of bushes, serve the muse. In slave's wordless awe toward a marmalade dusk, serve the muse, how it drips windows & common, serve the muse. The whole of the universe something soft-flesh-breathing-rhythm in all, eternity's simple language—serve the muse.

For the girl with blue eyes & a laugh sugar & cream, learn how, do better, wake fists flying for meaning like this morning, & the many trees royal along tired path, serve the muse, for the rise embedded in every fall, serve the muse, serve the muse.

Four autumns this story has trailed me, never anything like it in time & length. Raw at times, sloppy, embarrassing, ugly, nothing resembling bright melody, or story, little, nothing, pages a cranky few at a time, cries, hurt—

tonight I say thank you, universe, & pray my many muse's protection, I run the many miles on tracks & tires, I say thank you for so many moments you protected my sorry ass, luck, kindness, it's been savage—

a hundred, many hundred shacks & dorms & storefronts, trees in the thousands, a sky passing through flesh raw & sweet, help me, heal me, you do, & I want to return something, more than return—

neon & shadow insist the night an old great glory & many more despite men—

People began talking to Rebecca, it was her unwanted quiet & sliding blue eyes that drew them. She lived in the bookstore, as did a few others, & curiosity came about because noone had brought her, as was usual. Her age, 23, did not raise note because there were young & old passing through all the time. She kept her Cosmic Early art nearby, a remembrancing & some sort of promise too—

One girl thought Rebecca some kind of guru, though elusive. Dressed more ragged & skinny, carrying a guitar she would strum for hours then grow shy & stop if a compliment, she asked questions.

“Do you have a boyfriend?”

“I think so”

“Do you believe in Godd?”

“Believe? I don’t think that’s the right word.”

“Would you let me braid your hair?”

Rebecca smiled.

“Where are we, Rebecca?”

“I’m not sure”

“You know better than I do.”

Well . . . you’re braiding my hair. It’s very long & takes time to do well but you have educated fingers . . . they like touching my head . . . they suggest touching more but I demur, I belong to something . . . perhaps you can come there too but you’re not ready, I think something within has to snap, & open . . .

“Rebecca?”

“Thank you.”

“You look even prettier now.”

“I have to work, Ozma”

“Why do you call me that? I like it though”

“Well in some other world you’re the farmgirl & I’m the great queen.”

“Why not here?”

“I don’t know.”

The same confession to the night every time, love me, forgive me, sire me anew. Same feeling part precipice part cage. Another night of stars brightest where civilization calms, shuts the fuck up. Blood & leaves & loss still wild in & around, music the sweet-colored end of a roaring branch, a blind geography, a walk endless when ground never gives, deeper now, summon the magick, to heal, to salve, summon, universe how fragile this beast, how mere my implement to address you, thank you for life & the will to wield it freely, thank you for all that I am.

“Who do you miss?”

“The same. My father. Luna T’s.”

“Who else?”

“The people there. The band. It’s fun.”

“Who really?”

“Gnight, Ozma, go home. Your aunt Glinda is waiting.”

“You could come too. She likes you.”

She turns & looks at me. “When are you returning?”

“When this story is strong enough to sustain my burden”

The girl looks at Rebecca easy adore. “I read that book. You call me Ozma because you like me.” Rebecca nods. “I wish you would let me take care of you. I’m good like that.” Silence. “You’re the best artist I’ve ever met.”

“You should know my dad.” “Is he your role model?” “No. He wouldn’t like that.” “Do you have one?”

“Monet. Lennon. Oak trees.”

They walk through winter lights holding hands. The girl kisses Rebecca’s cheek, good night, Rebecca smiles., no more.

Rebecca begins working more, even giving art lessons of a sort in that people watch her & ask questions. She’s friendly, knows there’s nothing to lose or give away, but sometimes she doesn’t talk awhile.

Word finds its way back to Luna T’s, there is relief but no surprise. She’s her father’s daughter, they do things like this.

Mr. Bob wonders when Rich will visit her.

“They say the Empire Never Ended,” & he sips hard at his spiced root beer “& as the beginning of an explanation I find no flaw. They say that most men slumber awake through their lives. Again, none objection raised. Some even hold to a nearing date or the approach of a retributive figure as pending milestone of irrefutable shift, a final chasm between history & the future.”

Another sip. “What little remains from the past, what residua we call our heritage, our living remain, is fundamentally insufficient to explain *anything*, any now, then, foresee any possible future.

“The past & the future are virtually identical darkneses & we have not even an instinctive brute’s understanding of them. We dismiss what nature, what dreams, what madness may tell us.”

Someone yawns & gently nudges up the TV’s volume using a somewhat concealed remote control. Network news discusses humanity’s return to the Moon.

“What we know as history, as wisdom, has failed us all! Our traditions, our great books, our revered wise men & women all have proven shams! Yet we revere & we thank! We celebrate their deeds & teach children their speeches!”

The TV flickers channel to channel. Glimpse of the Red Sox new manager, of a bearded wizard prominent in a coming film. Singing cartoon excrement & black & white cowboys keeping order.

“We lack the fundamental imagination to see the dead end we lie squalling in, envision instead great civilization, a species undoubtedly this planet’s jewel, some even avow that all creation was conjured by a being resembling us in figure if not in form”

TV lingers on a channel featuring gyrating Christmas whores lip-synching the words to an old holiday song.

“The Empire Never Ended because nobody has come up with any new ideas to replace it. For all the so-called modern talk of liberty & individuality, most human minds suckle lifelong from the same meager tit of clichés & simple mindedness.”

Now a hundred gyrating Christmas whores, now two.

“An original thought is peril, to itself & everything else. Mediocrity will blindly consume & replicate it a thousandfold before its deepest juiciest magick can manifest.

“I foresee in my own lack of solution, or worth insight, that I no more near—”

“Dude, calm down. It’s Christmas time. Here’s a nice red Santa cap to wear. With a little furry puffball on top, see? Here’s a glass of egg nog. Don’t worry, it’s from the non-alky bowl. Come on! Ho ho ho!”

“Ho. Ho. Ho.”

A deep slow inhale & a short burst out, again, once more & write serve the muse. With fiery branch & roaring text, unloose the steam words within, ascend, diminish, extinguish, serve the muse. With belly stiff & eyes fearful, flickering, when it hurts, when it hurts more. I can’t return, yet, maybe ever, maybe not, I have to walk this hard world awhile, snow cascading rock tonight, the old places I long ago tired over, again, serve the muse, in love & restlessness, too much reveals to call any answer, & fragments deeper cloak than clue—

Serve the muse, words to instruct yet oft I ache. Confusing muse & girl, need & love, Art & prickless wail. I try because I try. Holy emptiness in a still pen yet fight off the privacy of my death for one more milky nocturne, one curve, one lash, one giggle, & the snow blows through its power again tonight, I live life best it seems among ten thousand words on a rack, it hurts. Embrace it all, let go, see what remains, life’s times thinning shadows on a walkway, no direction but home, & again the muse a girl, & again the joy a whipping pen, & trees assent, tell me embrace my own kind too, & I become again a new fool in service of her night, wishing hours, holier music, strumming starlight, no death but a different range of rhythms, higher colors, roots deeper than soil but no telling bell, leaf’s blood weaned of grab & grief but nothing concludes, entropy’s wailing smell, but relief in some things fallen, vision rising, coloring bells, serve the muse, she clings sister to willows, she won’t let you not, she is an ancient fire ever brightly kindled, count what is lost, surrender every number, & ever more remains & squeezes you smiling.

new fool every night every fucking night because the first one too safe is death’s little hook, & two & three after that, so a fool every night, twice, whatever clock, whatever clime—

Luna T’s in Hartford still mostly by sentiment, its within more rarely concerned with the not-much outside, & its within so much deeper than once. People entering from elsewhere & exiting too—a nexus, an evolution, a place of crossing as well as underground home. A steam engine against the Empire—

For steam engine it had become, none cohered in its many people & activities, but growing, allied with human & otherwise—

Most still saw only what they were ready to see, & many passed each other unawares, & it is quite possible that Luna T’s not only crossed & joined impossible sizes of space but time

too, & not merely both of these—these sentiments, these verities of a kind best be remembered for nearing pages—

Serve her night, no bones nor chords, her truth endless greater neither beginning nor end. Her night, its wailing, no ease, she pulses, all that is, pulses, & call her Art, man, woman, oak, song. Nothing ends but everything moves. A pen on paper on a speeding shell on a planet deep with groove, ahh . . . yes!

Skies clear, building erupt, break down. Burn. Build again.

Love scrambles from every rubble.
Smiles aching with release.

I follow weathered by hunger, eyes knowing by want, heart leaner & abler, & none of this much defense.

Many prayers tonight for those passed elseway to grow green & good. Universe, tend my scattered loves as much as others, bear them some comforting tremble from me. Nobody is forgotten. Blow over them softly with news of my wish. Offer them healing, again, always, but amplified by my own urging tones. Little explains in this world yet answers skulk, flirt & cascade about, at least one for every struggle. Wealth mistaken for confusion, or contrived by the soul atwist into pain, punishment.

Missing my girl most days & years yet tonight Quixote on a bus, in danger, in love—& again—

again—approaching girlish eyes wondering & wanting me—girlish heart part giggle, part conflagration—mine own rhythmic higher & hurtling—she seems some vital part of my home, a throbbing jewel to open more of my doors within as we both pass through them, no other way, a vessel to feed my vessel to feed her vessel, yes, that idea has kept ahold me from some willful place.

the brown winter landscape of middle America, the rodent's squeak of a careening old bus—somewhere last night two aging men discussed fine motorcycles with the brightness of newer days—a woman tended her child with crooning & juice & tickles—some bus drivers seem nearly friends with their soft words, others command order with fistly bluntness—1500 miles or so ago I left an empty cold city bound for more because that seems my quest—often I do not know what more is—electrical devices for breaching space/time, scruffy songs in black ink on white paper, & ever the warm girlish hand I long to be in mine—

Please, Universe, let my hope meet its mate, let the greater days I shamble toward arrive now, more wholly, I'm all at the new doors, one way or another I'll walk in, my wish is not alone—

She looks at me with eyes clean of brutality, no wish to softly punish for punished, her hands are small & seek only knowing & comfort not a weak place to recall, the night bears no

resumed shame for an intimacy ever desired, I give to her sweet & fierce, & only more fills me to give

These are her new days & she fills me with them, their promise & amusement, I scrape around for metaphors & wonder that I don't care when few come—

Candle glows within a glass globe candle decorated in snowmen, rests on top of large TV we use once to watch a girl talk to God. Heh.

Bureau of flowers, teddy bear named Mr. Jeremiah Tipples, fruit, earrings, purse, hopes, dark matter at rest.

Our bed for three days, & forever in dreams, is wide, is soft, rests with us, kisses with us, plays with us, sups with us, listens to our talk, protects us from the night's freely stalking creatures.

Armchair where she sits in my lap & I don't know how happiness nudged me here but it did, happiness & history, they did, persistence, she did—

We drink the juicy elixir & watch the night dress up & dance on a screen, & later gallop off to behold fanciful creatures from evocative elsewhere assure that the world *can* be saved & power need not be wielded by crooked merchant overlords bound to iniquitous scions of narrow life-despising ideologies—

she holds my hand in both of hers—she sighs smiles upon—she is woman-child pending to goddess muse healer—I don't kid—

My touch learns her by breathing & contraction, my touch is student of girlflesh & erotic magick—her touch doubts & is shy—yet again & again she would breach & know more—I begin to yield to her my trust, frost to the rising sun—

she stands fine in leather & unbound tresses, her smile power's bauble, her blue eyes leading her along in pixie's come-hither, & I follow & fret to keep pace—

I read “no direction but home” in a sheaf of ragged road songs & look toward Noisy Children to explain a little, Americus & Pascale send back twin acoustic comment something like “the world is fat with miracle & woe,” Gretta's bass & Stephanie's keyboards & Cecile's drums press me, surround me, behold this new dream, bigger dream, no longer a dream at all—

Up the dose, it came to me & I wondered over it awhile, seemed obvious yet open & worth keeping & so I have but still.

What tis. Up the dose. What tis.

The music will smooth, will slick into a single instrument, the lights will merge, dancers crackle, & no time along this path, nothing like time at all, the night is night, no other name, no destination.

Up the dose? Yes & sure, this is how.

Then a slip, a divide, several directions, a cusp, a height, an end again. Truer? Different truth? Up the dose silly & squandering—

into dreams whole & helpless what is this, what can such be? Even waking lingers back, something insists & is carried along—

Jim Reality hoists his drink to his lips & smacks it down. Dr. Emerson rises his & on through. X the Space Alien upends his tankard with a grin. David Time nods through his OJ on ice. Jack Shit joins along. Dr. Knickerbocker quenches. They glance toward me & I look without the bus window at the dark yards speckled in electric reds greens & yellows.

“You’re back?”

“I’m always around”

“Where’s Rebecca?”

“Where she’s been.”

“Go help her!”

“No. She’ll do better free awhile.”

“If you abandon her we’ll drop you like a bad habit.”

“Don’t worry. I’m always hers.”

“Have a drink? You used to like Guinness & Jack.”

“Some other life maybe.”

“We miss you getting loaded at the bar.”

“I miss me in other ways.”

“Just one? A toast to old times?”

“I toasted old times when they were new. There’s nothing else about them to tribute. I look at the fallout, my friends broken & dull, & nothing good seems left from then. But I’m sitting on a bus riding through ghosts & my pen is moving along & I know there’s one good thing. It’s what I’m doing now. What I nearly lost. I don’t know if it’s right anymore how I do it but it’s what I have. It’s plenty enough.”

“Not even one?”

“I never belonged here like any of you. I had my own way which did not resemble anyone else’s. I still do. It costs. I pay.”

“You’re one stubborn bastard but we like you OK.”

“Thanks. I’m learning to like me too.”

Up the dose. Every fucking day possible.

I see affliction all about me & don’t know how to elude it. One friend in a wheelchair, another w/collapsing knees, a third sodden w/his accumulating suicide. My father missing legs entirely. If I look for too long seems like there’s nothing else in the world to see.

But regard the nearing dawn of a new day. Hope in waking, moving about, engaging the world with one’s own hands & voice. I can’t stop. I can’t fall in the ruins of where I began. I won’t.

The men at Luna T's bar remain & toast me anew. I believe what matters in life is not wholly one's choosing.

Devils are about & would encroach but at best for now they follow & hover. I stink too much of life to them still. They wait. I'll beat them every way I can. Those falling whom I love will not compose my continuing tale.

I will find a fucking way.

Labyrinthine. Labyrinth. Maze, puzzle, seek. Play, find, & on. I keep thinking there's more than my tired & stressed is holding.

No more modern brand name brews at Luna T's Cafe. The neon beer signs in the window are touched & torched into lingual symbols without incumbent meanings. The brews are now hand-made, & far more powerful than the preferred dictates abounding without. To drink these tankards is to submit to more than numbness & sloppy eyes. Visions grip, sink in, let not go. More power, raised higher, faces radiate this simple evolution.

Mercy when again we meet, mercy, mercy, she topples me from mine own fists, beauty hard & lasting in her tight mouth on mine, love a stench to solitude & pain, love a messiah among this world's broken churches, love stronger than all which scrambles to oppose or lessen it—

She is Rebecca, She is Kassi, She is many others who've marked my heart's ancient lightless walls—I cannot help but love them all, no retreat, no safety, the hand I hold now connects helplessly to every other hand—

a winter's snowscape stares me bluntly & waits my lingual conjure, & I meet it with my eyes thrusting more awake, rousing greater pitch, dread glory in flying the land & dancing the faith—in scribbling nonsense—in praying for at least a large fool's share in something vastly wide—

Dreams everywhere I wonder how to do with them. What they to do with words. What Dreams & music can, do make together. What sounds dreams when drummed & danced ten thousand words high?

Listen more for the healing prayer at the heart of all creation, its something lingual conjurations, Art makes us to blow up again like truth, wider sky, deeper magick

If I could tonight understand anything, the brilliant star of a soft kiss, the way some memories keep biting, grow snagged with later power

Understand anything, what the cold night means in music, how music plays with history—

I mumble. Mumble more. Consider & scribble. The coffeehouse light & chatty about me. I can't. I won't. Muse wishes more. Blues eyes & pressing fingers. More.

All glory passeth, & again, & more, & new, & ever onward. Glories by field, by skin, by trill & fray & thump.

Sit here like a thousand other nights, other tables, other chatty decorations frill about.

I cannot abide less than this, cannot abide a life partway to climax, work left about like stray tools. Whatever offered, I wish to take, & imbue, fire wildly, transform—

No obedience but to within's imperative—none—& as she transmutes one to next, it's on & it's on & it's on. Whatever clock, whatever clime.

The black pen in my hand like ever, the teeth of its need & its push—

Luna T's Cafe invented & renewed in the electric orange juice pouring from its taps—

asked: on the bus or off the bus, answer: there is no bus. None. Tree branches along the road touch hood & roof, & whatever composes the next music.

Wearing ring or necklace, what bauble catches & keeps a passing day's silhouette, its grazing lovely fancy—

Listen a voice lifts in sadness & empty calm. Call sentences a mechanism only law's righteous fool would create.

From tonight to a past all bears a trailing web to anon awaiting too eager to join & pass on—

All I can think to do is wake up & join the fray once more, carry along my long-time companion questions about dreams & music & nature & desire, & press, press—

It rarely eases up, the struggle, yet on I go, not knowing how else—type, talk, travel—seek to persuade, fail, try again—

the details of human toil do not interest me much anymore—what underlays is fear, a selfish want for more, a generous impulse rarely sprung naked from magnanimity—no—what I see is laziness some call it a civilization while most do not care to address it at all—

Pleasure is rare, called exotic & kept at a viewable distance. Diversion is rife, so much so that it is handmaiden to laziness, if not partner—

Worse yet, these are no unique times nor my culture a singular being. Progress is a sham: death is still helplessly waved away, solitude is still regarded as freak if not enemy, play is for children & drunks, imagination a draught horse to be grunted & thinned of its strange jewels by limitless demand for samely production.

I don't know how to stand against these things. My health will fade, fail or break eventually. My wallet is empty because I refuse whatever place there is or ever was for me. I hang on the margins & call them otherwise. My ideals are the kind best lived not died for.

I cannot conjure a happy world by mine own hands, & lack much of any others to join with—my plan is simply my pen & a place I've briefly known & loved—yet even there I did not succeed but to limp away still flailing—

The days clump in desperate succession—capitulation simply seems worse—

My only comfort from the world are these words: No way out but through. I look at the bent & broken around me & think: this freedom I know is better, I just don't know what better to do with it.

I can only ask of myself: do not give up. & this morning I found some way to again press myself into the world & allow it in me.

My train runs through snowy bare woods & life hugs me to pass the mystery live in again & again—

I want to write til I die very old & spewed empty, romance black & white winter scapes that neither need nor follow—I am fang-hungry not for money, not for beeping baubles but for music, conjured from all about the pink the waving the rhythmic

I walk days unto years without hardly a true word spake. I want to, hard deep want to say lasting something & bump about with what I hear in return—

this is all that matters—all I cannot shed—all I cannot fail to believe in—

A scream through my mind that *this is it*—now—now plastic cafe, some radio chewing candy, some night wiggling blue with snow—

it—this is it—this is it—
 it always has been
 wherever—*this*

The only promise my art seems to wish to keep is to those I have been—it's as though how I would teach & remind myself is found in my own notebooks—pages thick with many heeded in song, book, film—in person—

the connection I seek & advice I'll use is there—

Luna T's Cafe sprawls & more than ever—the storm without somewhat tonight's, somewhat else's—there is a place for me at the bar—Rebecca waits in her seat next to mine—Rich & Franny sit nearby—Mr. Bob cleans glasses & watches sports news on the TV—Dr. Arnold T. Knickerbocker droops over a bourbon-laced coffee & an old memory—firelight & Spanish guitar—

I watch from afar as I have many years—
 my home not place but rhythm & melody—
 lingual hovel aburst with many rooms—

Accelerating into my work again—times are struggle, familiarly uncertain—& I can only think how always it's like this—

the night is cold, customers few—TV does not last, gives way to radio, then to strumming—
I will not dwindle because those I was would notice—

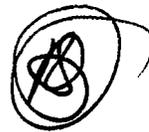
It was a hard day, whichever this was, & I write still doubt's bitch, yet I do write, hope passes me to another day—

Rebecca looks at me pleased—I kiss back several of her moles—

This is all I've ever done that matters—& do it now with a crackle would rather break than decline—I radiate the words from a fat little candy in a pitch of possible—

They sing—I listen—I hold Beckah's hand—she's with me again—call her Kassi, Merry Muse, call her whatever the words that leaf beauty's corona about her head—

I sleep before the rest, on the couch in the old manager's office—the shouting & dancing go on in yon fixtional world, loves me, needs me some.



To be continued in Cenacle | 62 | June 2007



WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES
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Ric Amante



Ecuador Hotel

I

Federico couldn't have chosen a more incongruous, ironic, or nostalgic name for this, his hundredth residence. Surrounded by so white mountains so white faces so white decorum (damn these rigid, law-abiding robots who slayed you with their steely eyes should you be so brazenly demonic to cross the street against the light!). Might as well be holed up in a room in Hotel Alps or Hotel Good Citizen or Hotel Freud.

No, Federico was sleeping on a stained and sagging mattress in a hotel held together with duct tape and spit, whose name evoked lassitude, tropical disregard of time, faith, and merriment in the vegetal blossomings of chaos—while outside his cracked window the voices and attitudes were humorless, sterile, paranoiac, proper. Even a leisurely smoke on a vacant stoop was a threat and affront to man and mountain alike.

Yes, Federico was rotten with despair but punch-drunk with glee to be here at the Ecuador Hotel, out from under the cold and invasive winter rains. The Ecuador, replete with a sour-smelling phone booth in the furnitureless, fluorescent lobby, a feeble shower and filthy toilet at the end of the dim corridor on each of the four floors, and, yet another incongruity, housekeeping. Housekeeping being the slapdash services of a pair of ever-changing lodgers—presently a hunched-over Vietnamese man between 40 and 60 years of age with very large, very yellow teeth and a wild-eyed Nicaraguan in his 20s with a tattered copy of essays by Octavio Paz protruding from his back pocket like a dirty handkerchief.

This new life in this new country in this new city was old black wine leaking from the soft leather of the rainclouds above. And although the Ecuador was part of this moribund tableaux, it possessed a rawness and perverse purity that elevated it above the pretensions and conventions of the spectral places and faces Federico encountered on the street or at work.

Thus the man in Room 19, through whose porous door seeped corrosive mutterings, the last of which culminated in the enigmatic warning—"Beware the double helix of the greening motherboard!" Yet Federico felt that this man knew that you knew he was operating from a very singular and authentic arena and would look you straight in the eye and say hello when passing in the hallway, and Federico respected him for that. Whereas the people in the offices whose cubicles and lavatories he cleaned concealed and deflected their feelings whenever possible, giving their voices either an authoritative brusqueness or semi-hysterical sweetness, neither of which encouraged you to linger.

For a while Federico attributed his unease with and distaste of this city to a number of factors—the slow process of acculturation, racism, classism—but no, he had lived in many countries among many cultures and peoples, and even allowing for his own and others' justifiable preferences and dislikes, there was something decidedly awry here. And so today, knocking at the door of the man in Room 19, he set out to get some clues.

II

Three sharp, swift raps on the darkly-stained paneled door produced no response. Federico turned his head and moved his left ear to within an inch of the wood, simultaneously listening with his other ear for possible footsteps or voices in the hallway. Hotels like the Ecuador housed men either honest and helpful or larcenous and misanthropic, and to be glimpsed by either sort in this suspicious position would be unfavorable. He heard nothing from within the room and only television squawk drifting down from the floor above. Just as well, he thought, since his first impulse was to initiate a conversation with the man as they passed in the corridor. Better to begin slowly and tentatively in a neutral setting, lest the nebulous impetuosity of the mission drive his quarry away. Besides, this guy could be psychopathic and respond to a question with a fist or knife or cast iron skillet to the back of the head.

But moving away from the door, Federico stopped short. He noticed the corner of a piece of paper that he had not seen earlier. A small yellow triangle wedged between door and frame about a foot from the floor. He reached down, pulled it free, and brought a strip of card stock the size of a bookmark before his eyes. Blank on the side he held before him, he flipped it over, and there in red ink in well-formed, appealing cursive were the words, “Tomorrow, two o’clock, ferry terminal.”

III

The man in Room 19 was registered as one “Paul Skype.” Skype had been living in the Ecuador for the last three months, arriving in the city on a train whose whistle could still be heard in the small hours of the morning. He left the station not knowing where the nearest affordable residential hotel was, yet trusting his inner radar to guide him.

Skype believed that everything on the planet possessed the ability to interact with everything else, both simultaneously en masse and selectively on an individual basis. This conviction was experiential and, yes, scientifically verifiable, the proof of which consisted of an amalgam of quantum physics, biochemistry, and corroborative shamanic/yogic truths.

In any event, five minutes and seven blocks later Skype was being handed a receipt and room key by the Filipino desk clerk at the Ecuador. The clerk informed him the Ecuador was a safe hotel—no junkies, hustlers, troublemakers—and in the same sentence asked if there were any valuables he would like to keep in the hotel safe. Skype smiled, relishing the contradiction, and replied that safecrackers and stickmen were a more proficient, intelligent, and dedicated bunch than common thieves, and he had nothing of material worth to be coveted.

Lastly John, the Filipino desk clerk, inquired in a friendly, small-town way where Skype was from and what kind of work he did. Skype responded with a generic, “back East,” which was accurate, and an apocryphal but feasible, “Restaurant work, prep-cook mostly, but I’m thinking of getting out of it and trying something else.”

To be continued in Cenacle | 62 | June 2007

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from the Northwest

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), and resumed after a long absence in issue 59 (October 2006). It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

January 17, 2007
Seattle, Washington

The Congress can cut funding to the War, which will not end it tomorrow, but will simply begin the process. This is how the Vietnam War came to an end, by Congressional legislation cutting funds, and limiting the number of troops allowed in the field.

Of course, the down side is that Bush and the neocons may try to cast the Dems and allies as “losing” the war in Iraq. I doubt this argument will convince anyone at this point.

It’s going to be a mess for the next two years, but the more lives we can save by pushing the Congress to act, the better. Nobody will forget Bush’s failures. His bloody, idiot’s legacy will haunt the Republicans for a long time to come.

Nancy Pelosi is tough, and she’s leading the House majority. We have to wait and see what this word firefight with Bush yields. She has the purse strings of the Congress behind her, and American support.

Signing statements are not illegal, just being unconstitutionally used by Bush. Many presidents have used them, just not to say that they don’t listen to no steenkin’ laws as the Chimp does.

The press is supposed to be independent, they will annoy progressives at times, and do seem skewed by their corporate masters and lack of balanced reporting. But I have noticed that they will jump on any bloody story, any politician who seems vulnerable, any bright shiny story. We cannot trust them for the truth, just mostly for how the wind blows.

Keep an eye out late January when Bush asks for billions more in war money. If the Congress rolls over, then I think we better take to the streets. If not, then the elections really did make their point. Will world will be heeded? I don’t know what to expect.



March 1, 2007
Seattle, Washington

I see it every day. People have forgotten they are one tribe, one species, that skin color and nation-states and languages don't mean squat but in local, changing ways, not universal to all times and places, and moreover that the planet is our home, not the house or town or country we allie to.

This morning a bus driver honked at me as I rode my bike, and yelled he'd run me down if I got in his way. I called the bus company, put in a complaint, but what I really wanted to do was ask him: were you ever taught that all people are your kin? That everything on earth is of value and deserves its place? That life can be better if we make it so?

Would I have sounded like a nut? A self-righteous asshole? Who knows . . . I just see it all the time, peace not war as a last option . . . communication reserved for if-all-else-fails, if one side doesn't back down, etc.

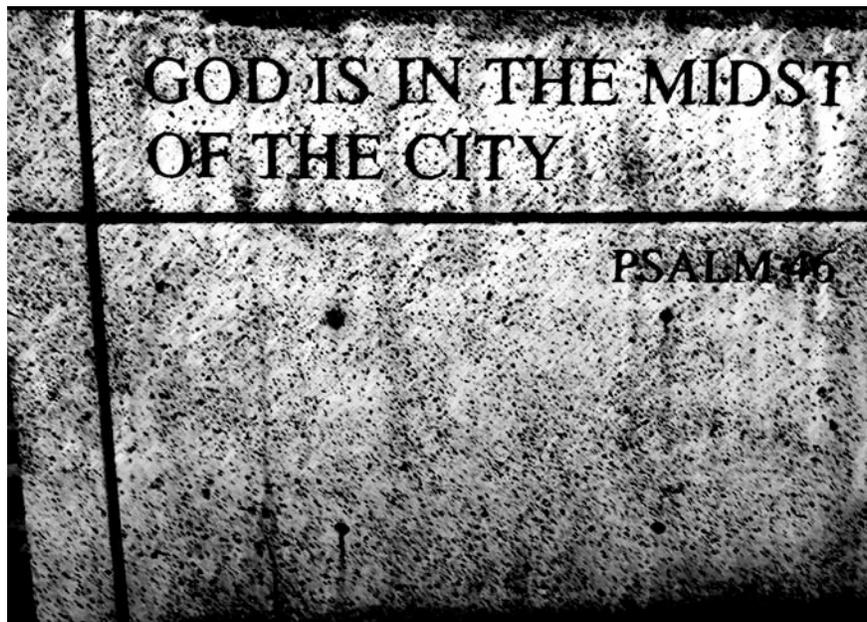
I don't know if the world can be saved, or what that would look like. Or if everyone would be saved, or would want to be. I don't expect heroes to appear from nowhere. I don't expect the laws of gravity or the jungle to go away.

But one has to live one way or another, and I think one should try to live as one believes life should be lived. I don't think many do. I think people live like someone is watching, some parent, some teacher, some cop. Some deity in the sky or elsewhere.

Hope is powerful, as is despair. I think most people have lived dominated by one or the other at different times. Loneliness is potent, as is a kind touch or word.

We can affect things, as individuals. Our decisions count, they sum us. Together we sum more than is easily comprehended.

It matters. It all matters. I choose to believe this.



March 17, 2007
Seattle, Washington

Four years of fucking War. I can't believe I am saying that. We didn't stop it from happening, and we can't seem to make it stop. I look around and think OK, it's either impeach the lunatics, one and all, or they're going to get their nuclear fucking war. I saw a German movie tonight, *The Lives of Others*, about the waning days in East Germany, how bad it got, state spying on everyone, neighbor silently against neighbor. We are not there yet, but the only way for the State to be safe is to consume all possibilities of decay. The State must control all.

Or we say no. We say no quietly, then louder and louder. We put aside our cable TV relaxation, our pop culture self-referential ironic ambivalent bullshit and say it. No. And again. And again. We say no because we have not earned yes yet. We have not earned anything. Just saying no is enough. Too much. I hardly hear it. Are you saying it? Am I? I think so, but I'm not sure. I don't really know. Some are saying no, but I don't know.

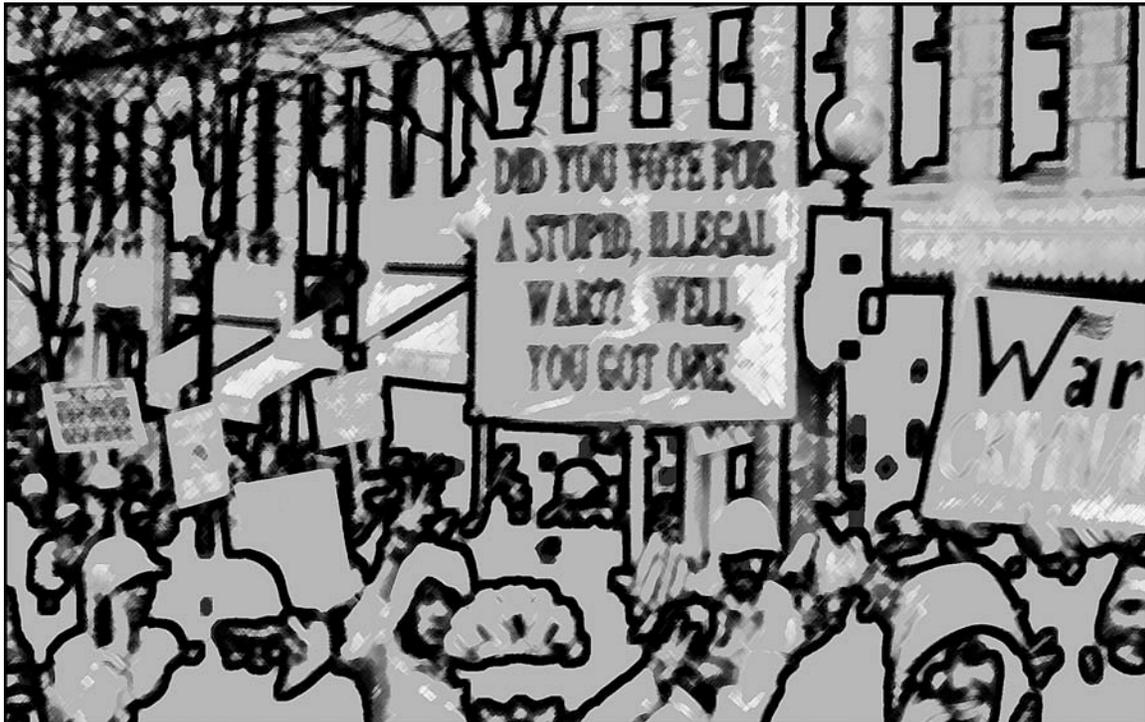
Will the State await our no? Is it awaiting? Shall we politely gather a no among us?

If your city was burning, and the men running your nation were taking turns looting for themselves and calling you terrorists for defending your families, what would you do?

See, I don't fucking know. But it's another Saturday night, four fucking years into this war, and I am not convinced we are not simply becoming used to it.

I have to work on Monday. A lot of us do. Four years ago we invaded a nation and burned it down for profit.

Is anyone anywhere REALLY saying no to this tonight?



March 30, 2007
Harvard Square
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Well, if this isn't a kick in the ass, cosmically speaking. I came here so many times back when I lived in the Boston area, years of thens, come back to visit and fuck if I can't sit here now with my Mac laptop and look online if so wished.

Boston is far less the laptop culture than Seattle. People talk here, loudly, gesturing, noisy, where in a Seattle coffeehouse most tap at keyboards. Some talk there, some tap here, but the differences are notable.

I haven't written here in 5 years, that's the strangeness of this, and a sea change of life has happened to me between then and now. 3000 miles west is where I live now, not a few blocks away, as once on a time.

Some of it has changed here, a store here, a business there, but the streets are the same, the trains, the weather. I imagined here often in the past 5 years, yet never took the chance til now to come and see.

I had anger and sadness pent up, the love I had living here for years, the heartsick, broken, dispirited way I left. My own doing, though there were also no jobs to be had. But mostly I moved on because I chose to.

Now here again, nostalgia, not much more. I live in the West, that hasn't changed. Seattle today, maybe Portland soon. Whatever out there is home, whatever quality or feeling, I don't know for sure. But it's true. I used to live here. I remember. Little more.

Lovely chilly night, the rest will be lost to my pen and pages for in truth cyberspace held no place when I visited Harvard Square of old. Hasn't changed. It was good to have come. Yesteryear is potent.



April 10, 2007
Seattle, Washington

What interests me about the television show *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* is how its fictional story of TV personalities is mirrored in multiple ways. Consider: a TV narrative fictionalizes *Saturday Night Live*, itself a show of fictional skits. NBC & CBS engage in a bidding war for the show, which NBC wins. They pimp the show to high hell & then abandon it after less than half a season. 'Tis said NBC's president turned his enthusiasm to that other *SNL*-like show, *30 Rock*, which is owned by NBC (unlike *Studio 60*) & championed by Brandon Tartikoff, creator of *SNL*. *30 Rock* prospers, in part by way of the timeslot originally reserved for *Studio 60* but never given it. As of this writing in early April 2007, the likely cancelled *Studio 60* is filming more episodes even as the gravediggers are clearing their calendars.

Why? An expensive show with low ratings, though oddly *30 Rock*'s are lower, skewered by many critics, who would advertise on it? Why hostage its performers, crew, & writers to a delayed, inevitable fate? And yet, *Studio 60*, if cancelled, will become the newest metaphor for hubris, greed, corporate incoherence in decision-making. Next new show touted as *the one* to save a network, it don't score crazy in everyone's books, the network goes for the hook, twill be said it is "pulling a *Studio 60* on that one!"

Studio 60 is a smart, well-made, at times hilarious show (there was an episode with a mechanical baby that nearly did me in). It deserves better than it's getting. I say, renew it, NBC. Bring it back for 13 episodes next fall. If it tanks, nobody will say you didn't do all you could for it. I don't think anyone will care. If it turns around, you will be named geniuses one & all. Give it a chance. Don't do the obvious thing *because* it's the obvious thing. You're owned by General Electric; put your *imagination to work* on this one.



April 22, 2007
Seattle, Washington

It's not enough to say we live in interesting times, since all times are interesting to those alive during them. I believe we must involve ourselves in our world, even as we must sometimes pull back, sit on a far hill, play lamenting pipes. Neither is enough, in my view. Too much involvement and one loses touch with the quiet, obscurer places in the soul. Too little and one looks upon one's fellow man from a distance.

It's not even enough, for me, to say I am a pacifist. I believe that humans would live better in peace than war, but I do not assume peace is the natural state of humanity. I don't know what the natural state of humanity is. I think each of us chooses, every day, what we think humanity is about, and for. Also, since I live in an American city untouched by human war, I don't know what I'd do if war came here. What if my wife was in a prison camp? Would I leave her? Would I risk my life in some act of violence to rescue her? I think I would. Does that deny me calling myself a pacifist? Am I only a pacifist when life is peaceful? I don't wish to own or use a gun, or see harm befall anyone from some prejudice. But what I do believe is that the lands in a human soul, and the race in a whole, are somewhat unknown, so what might happen cannot fully be predicted.

For me, these issues run deep and constant. I'm sure others take a different view. I've been living with War now for years, and the fact that I respond to it with my pen. When someone else addresses that subject, I am very involved right away. These times are hard, are bloody. And, like others, there is joy and ecstasy too. Fruitful for art, no matter the approach. I simply wish we had more voices in power who had a piper within, a peaceful music inspiring them. We have a few, we need many more.



Stewart Tendler & David May



The Brotherhood of Eternal Love

Chapter 7, *Outlaw Days*,
Panther Books, 1984

<http://www.druglibrary.net/schaffer/lsd/books/bel3.htm>

The Mystic Arts World Store was opposite a Mexican fast-food stand on South Laguna Beach. At the front it sold the sort of things to be found in a thousand similar stores that were sprouting up across the America of 1966 and 1967—home-made clothes, natural foods, leatherwear, brass, tapestries, pipes and papers for marijuana smoking. Just another “head shop,” a sort of frontier store for America’s newest pioneers, the hippies; a corner shop for the colony of young people moving into Laguna Beach, south of Los Angeles, to enjoy a “Haight-Ashbury on sea.”

But the real business of Mystic Arts lay at the back in the meditation room. The floor was covered from wall to wall by foam rubber overlaid with thick carpeting, making visitors feel as though they were walking on a huge, luxurious bed. At one end, a small waterfall tumbled into an indoor rock garden. The sound was soft and rhythmic, lulling. In another corner stood a water pipe. Scatter cushions had been left here and there for customers, who removed their shoes before entering, to loll at their ease. A group of young men in their twenties might be sitting round at the beginning of an LSD session. Their hair was long. They wore patched jeans and loose shirts, embroidered waistcoats over painted T-shirts and single strings of thick, crude beads. Some had the deep sunburn that you find in this part of California on surfers, where the heat of the sun has burnt into the skin, magnified by the sea-water, and left a rich tan. Others had the thick-set, hard-muscled build of mechanics.

They were men with a cause, yet theirs was not quite the burning ardor of the radicals elsewhere in the country, streaming across the campuses towards the administration blocks and screaming against betrayal, grappling with the police as they denounced L.B.J. and vowing they would never fight in Vietnam. Theirs was another kind of fervor: there was no violence, just the unswerving confidence of missionaries going about their work.

The meditation room was, on occasion, the private chapel of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, a legally incorporated religious charity. At other times it was the front office of the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, drug dealers extraordinary. The essence of the Brotherhood might well be summed up in Owsley’s “chemistry is theology.”

The man to watch at the LSD sessions was a short, stocky character wearing a Hopi Indian headband and flowing green Eastern trousers and shirt. John Griggs, dark and intense with bright blue eyes, was the founding figure of the Brotherhood: a man who had discovered LSD in dramatic circumstances.

At the time, Griggs, approaching his middle twenties, was the leader of a marijuana-smoking south Los Angeles motorcycle gang, preying on supermarkets. Largely unschooled, Griggs was a wandering adventurer who had earned the name of “Farmer John” after disappearing into the Californian mountains to live as a trapper. He rode with his pack along

the freeways and highways that criss-crossed Los Angeles in search of fresh excitement. On a summer night he led his gang through Hollywood towards Beverly Hills and Mulholland Drive. According to the grapevine, a well-known Hollywood film producer up there kept a cache of pure LSD in his refrigerator. Griggs and the gang decided it was time they tried this LSD stuff everyone was talking about.

They burst in on the producer during a dinner party. All the guests froze as the gang, armed with guns and knives, came out of the darkness . . . but all they wanted was the LSD, and they took it. The host was so relieved that he rushed out to the driveway as they started up their motorcycles and cried after them: “Have a great trip, boys. Jesus, I thought it was something serious.”

The gang roared out of Los Angeles towards the vast, high acres of Joshua Tree National Park beyond the city. They climbed higher and higher into the hills among the yucca trees until they were above Palm Springs and, at midnight, they came to a halt. Motorcycles parked in a group, they stood round in the clear, sharp mountain air and shared out the LSD, made by Sandoz. Each man swallowed the equivalent of 1,000 micrograms, four times a normal dose, and wandered off to await the result. It was cold and the yuccas with their twisted stems and shrouds of dead leaves cast fantastic shapes in the gloom.

As the sun burst across the sky at dawn, hours later, Griggs threw his gun into the dry scrub and shouted: “This is it. This is it.” The gang regrouped round their motorbikes, shaken and overwhelmed. All had thrown away their weapons. They started home for Anaheim, a flat Los Angeles suburb of pale-colored houses, and what was to be a new life.

Griggs was the proselytizer, the moving spirit. He talked to old school friends like Glen Lynd and Calvin Delaney. Lynd had already tried marijuana and now took the LSD Griggs passed on to him. Like Griggs, Lynd was in his middle twenties and something of a drifter. The group that began to assemble totaled nine. Most of the young men, all in their early or middle twenties, came from Anaheim. Michael Randall was from Long Beach, although he had attended Anaheim Western High School. He started smoking marijuana in 1963 but remained on the edge of the group, since he was finishing a course in business administration at California State College.

At first, the group did little more than meet at the weekends to try out the psychedelics, but Griggs had wider visions. He urged the others to move with him out of Los Angeles, east to Modjeska Canyon, in the countryside beyond the city. The group shared a couple of houses, feeling, like Alpert and Leary had felt at Harvard, that they had “something wonderful in common.” Those who had jobs continued to work—Russ Harrigan for example was a longshoreman—but all now began a little drug dealing as well. Lynd and Harrigan went down to San Pedro with the odd kilo of marijuana brought back from trips to Mexico, and all the group sold LSD from San Francisco to visitors to Modjeska Canyon. Several of them enrolled in research programs at the University of California, Los Angeles, in order to continue using the psychedelics for free.

But on Wednesday nights they came together to talk about their futures. Lynd said later: “There was hopeful thought of buying land . . . the purpose was to buy it so people could live on it. We could farm it or whatever.” Plans began to form round the notion. Lynd had heard Leary lecturing and had been impressed. Griggs went east to meet him at Millbrook. Leary was taken with him: “an incredible genius” was how he described Griggs; “although unschooled and unlettered he was an impressive person. He had this charisma, energy, that sparkle in his eye. He was good-natured, surfing the energy waves with a smile on his face.” As far as Griggs was concerned, Leary was his guru, one with some useful practical ideas.

In the summer of 1966 when Griggs went to Millbrook, Leary was working on his plans for the formation of the League of Spiritual Discovery. Griggs and his friends seemed to have a good thing going out there in the West, so why not set up something similar? The new psychedelic religion was not something all-embracing and spiritually omnipotent. There was no Pope to set out the prescribed dogma. This religion was about a new kind of spiritual freedom which you found for yourself. The basic tenets of the League included: “enthusiastic acceptance of the sacramental method by the young . . . a recognition that the search for God is a private affair . . . the rituals spring from experiences of the small worship group . . . the leaven works underground . . . friends initiate, teach, prepare and guide . . .”

Ten days after California banned LSD in October 1966, Lynd, his wife, and a friend walked into the offices of a Los Angeles attorney on Sunset Boulevard and signed the papers incorporating the Brotherhood; Lynd was the only Brother who did not have a criminal record, so he was designated to organize the incorporation. According to the legal papers, the Brotherhood, tax exempt, was dedicated “to bring to the world a greater awareness of God through the teachings of Jesus Christ, Rama-Krishnam Babaji, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mahatma Gandhi and all true prophets and apostles of God.” Was there a hint of Leary’s influence in this list? Griggs had recently returned from a trip to the East, and the Brothers were largely ‘unschooled’.

To achieve its ends, the Brotherhood intended to “buy, manage and own and hold real and personal property necessary and proper for a place of public worship and carry on educational and charitable work.” Was there an echo of the League’s tenets in article 4-D which read: “We believe in the sacred right of each individual to commune with God in spirit and in truth as it is empirically revealed to him”? This was “a recognition that the search for God is a private matter,” written another way. Lynd said years later: “Well, it was John Griggs’ main idea to incorporate because he had talked to Leary, and it was possible to incorporate to become tax-exempt as far as land goes and, if and when marijuana ever becomes legal, become tax-exempt on marijuana.” There were no fixed rules for joining; no name signing or ritual. But there was one basic rule among the Brothers—they believed in taking as much of the psychedelics as possible, the largest doses of LSD they could buy. The articles of association did not explain how the Brotherhood intended to buy its land or establish its place of worship. You cannot really tell a lawyer or the State of California that you intend to raise capital by breaking the law—by massive dealing in drugs.

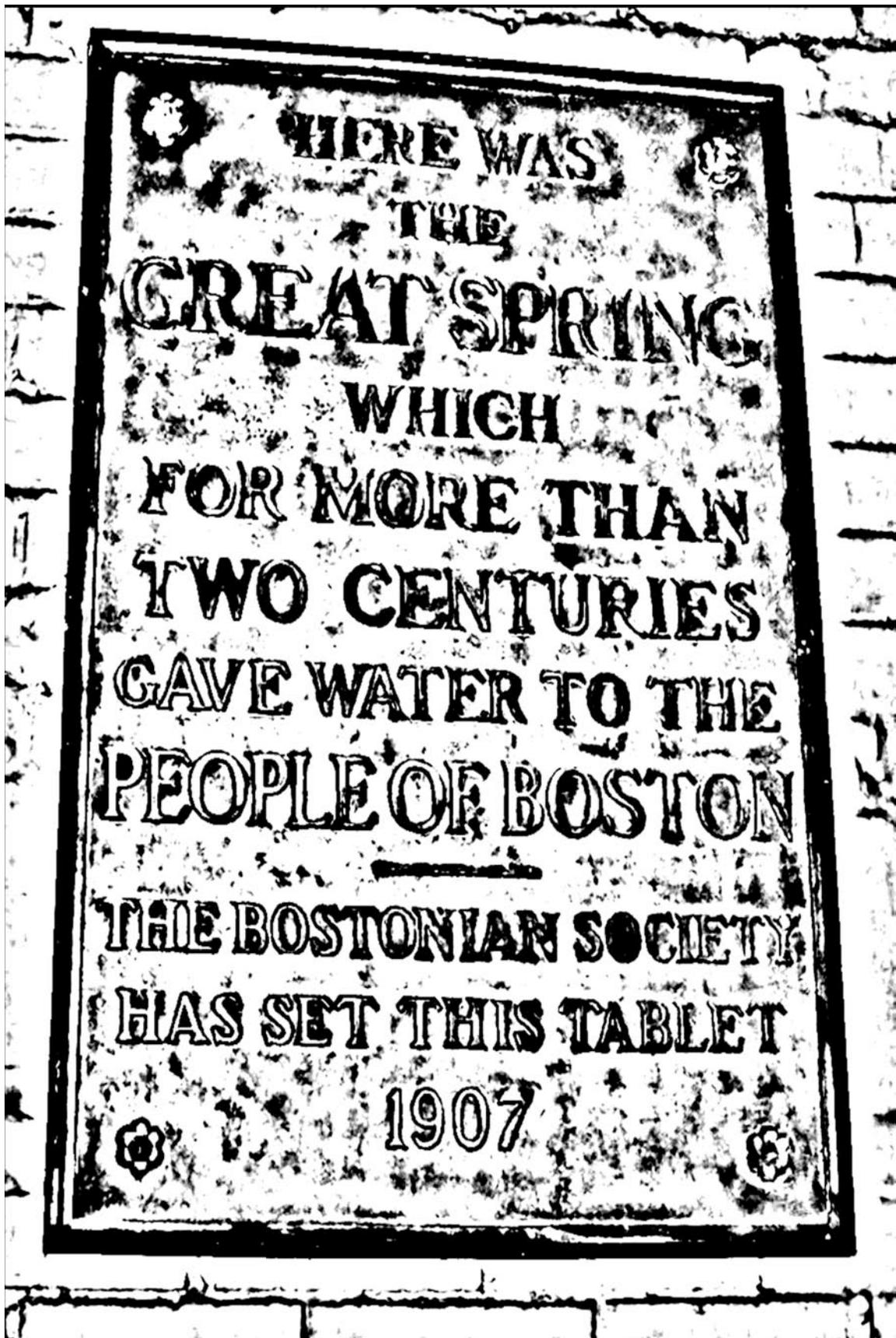
Laguna Beach is an artists’ colony and resort thirty miles south of Los Angeles. There are only two roads into the town: the Pacific Coast Highway or, from inland, down Laguna Canyon. The town itself, like the stage of an amphitheatre, sits at the base of a semicircle of sandstone hills rising to 1,200 feet above the Pacific. Amid the bright flowers and clapboard homes the hissing rush of the surf, rolling across the sand eight to twelve feet high, is the major disturber of the peace. The plastic and concrete sprawl of Los Angeles could be on another planet. The peace brought the artists—Laguna has a museum devoted to the works of early Californian painters—and the ocean brought the surfers. In the early 1960s Laguna was a sleepy little township with the sort of mix to be found in many Californian communities. The American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution thrived alongside the artistic community—indeed, the local high school football team was called the Laguna Beach Artists. Once a year on Labor Day, things got a mite out of hand on the “Walkaround,” a fifty-year-old custom in which the passing of summer was mourned by a walk from bar to bar along the Pacific Coast Highway. Other than that, not much happened in Laguna.

But in the mid-1960s, the number of young surfers was growing and they brought with them other young people eager to live a rude life away from the cities; among them were the Brotherhood. A mile from the beach, a cluster of about fifty houses made up a sub-suburb called Woodland Drive, beneath one of the sandstone hills in Laguna Canyon. It was a ramshackle area of gorse and dirt tracks, running down to badly paved streets and a single street light, but it was home for the colony of youngsters. The Brotherhood moved into four white-painted houses.

The scene was painted for a journalist some years later by one of the young men who lived in the Drive: "I went to school in Hollywood and got into surfing and just like everyone else I wound up in Laguna. Things were happening then, opening up. The chicks were seeing things and there was a lot of grass and there was a vibe that you could make it with love and digging each other . . . I'd go down to Laguna more and more and finally I just moved into a place on the Canyon with some chicks and a couple of other guys. It was cheap and it was fun. You know the bond, the thing that tied us up together was surfing and dope and balling. We'd get up early in the morning, stay out in the sun all day and somebody always had more grass. . . Then this cat Farmer John started coming around and he was really into acid. So we did a lot of acid and dug it and Farmer John was putting down a heavy brother-love rap." Griggs, a charismatic figure, began to enlarge the Brotherhood, drawing people in to create concentric rings which spread out from the central core of Brothers who had moved into Laguna.

The Brotherhood and its apostles were no longer occasional dealers. The business was now a full-time occupation, financing the way they lived and the opening of the Mystic Arts World Store. At first, there had been odd deals of marijuana tucked inside matchboxes—and, the next moment, consignments of kilos. They arrived in Laguna so often that Lynd for one no longer found anything strange in this new life. "It was just an everyday occurrence. We would buy kilos of marijuana across the Mexican border and sell them to other Brothers who would turn round and sell them, with the money going to the store. Then there was the LSD sales. Different people would go up to San Francisco which was the place to buy LSD and buy it in quantity to resell in Laguna," he said. As far as the marijuana was concerned, "there could be anything from one kilo to as many as 300 to possibly 400 kilos at a time. I had taken kilos most likely on half a dozen occasions, possibly even a dozen occasions to places like San Francisco. Most of the money that was made was turned into the shop. Randall would collect money and Johnny Griggs would collect. . ." The two men were at the centre of the distribution system for the marijuana. According to Lynd, kilos were bought for \$45, sold to Griggs and Randal for \$65-\$70, who then sold them for \$100 or more. The buyers broke down the kilos to smaller dealers selling on the streets. Sales were not confined to the houses up in Woodland Drive. At night, the area round the Taco Bell fast-food stand, close to the Mystic Arts World, and crowded with surfers, beach bums and hippies, buying and trading small deals.

Lynd may have sounded nonchalant about the source of supply in Mexico, but the Brothers worked out a careful system centred on a town near Tijuana, a few miles south of San Diego. The long-haired Brothers may have seemed unlikely company for an officer in the Mexican police, but once a month they met for a quiet chat. There was not much that a policeman missed in a tiny Mexican town. A group of young Americans renting a house, coming and going with battered cars and trucks on the dusty roads in and out of town stood out among the local peasantry and the tourist buses thundering past. But a policeman has to live, even a local police chief. He had arranged their tenancy and offered to watch the house for a few dollars; for \$30 a month, the Brothers paid him not to. In return for this outlay, the



Brothers could buy their marijuana, hide it in the fenders of their cars and drive across the border without problems. No one seemed to bother them.

Griggs was so excited by the Brothers' successes, he would telephone Leary at Millbrook: "Hey, Uncle Tim, we've just moved half a ton of grass and we've got some righteous acid." The calls came in about once a week, but Leary tended to dismiss them, although Jack, his son, now in his teens, decided he would go west to California and have a look. He returned home to Millbrook filled with enthusiasm. One evening, he told his father, Griggs was counting out a stack of \$1,000 bills by the light of candles. The air in Griggs' home on Woodland Drive was heavy with incense and the smell of marijuana. Jack Leary leant over, took a banknote and lit it with one of the candles. As a thousand dollars disappeared in a bright flame, black ash and the smell of burning paper, no one batted an eyelid.

But back at Millbrook, Leary was astonished. He called Griggs and offered to repay the \$1,000 dollars, but Griggs would have none of it. "Hey, Uncle Tim, we all wanted to burn a thousand-dollar bill. It was a great thing he did, very enlightening."

Leary was becoming a frequent visitor to the West Coast as he toured the country lecturing and lobbying. When he decided to visit Laguna with Rosemary, his latest wife, he was greeted like an elder statesman and given conducted tours of the Brothers' achievements. He said: "They were running the store which was an enormous, beautiful place. Just a group of guys who were pooling all their resources to raise consciousness. They were dedicating their lives to becoming better people. They could see it happening round the country. They were pioneers."

Hollingshead, the man who had given Leary his first LSD experience, had returned from Britain and joined Leary in Laguna. "The Brotherhood felt they were leading a new society," he remembered. "California was the country of the future. It was as if the culture had entered into them. They were responding. Righteous dealing was a sacrament, with Tim as their guru. I have always found them very gracious people, very honest, very wise—but also very naive. It was the Dead-end Kids who took acid and fell in love with beauty." The Brothers were making money out of dealing, but Hollingshead said: "Griggs was not thinking in those terms. He was only thinking of getting the psychedelics on the streets so that people could take them. They were totally committed. They had tremendous determination. They were all very tough; once they were moving dope, they were manic. When the stuff came from Mexico they did this non-stop thing. . ."

Lynd slammed down the boot of the car, climbed into the driving seat and drove over to pick up his wife and children. Once they were settled, he turned the car northwards out of the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona, on to the long, dusty desert roads; a young man and his family innocently about their business. Christmas 1967 was just a few days away. Perhaps they were heading home for the holidays, visiting the grandparents. The highway patrols ignored them.

The brand-new Cadillac, the dream and envy of many a fullblooded American, took the miles of tarmac like a stately liner. There was no rest for the huge chrome car. The family slept as Lynd crossed America straight as an arrow on the long country roads, whistling past farms, towns, cities. He drove, eyes fixed, for New York. The car's air-conditioning went off and the heating came on as the air outside grew colder. The roads were sometimes snow-lined now.

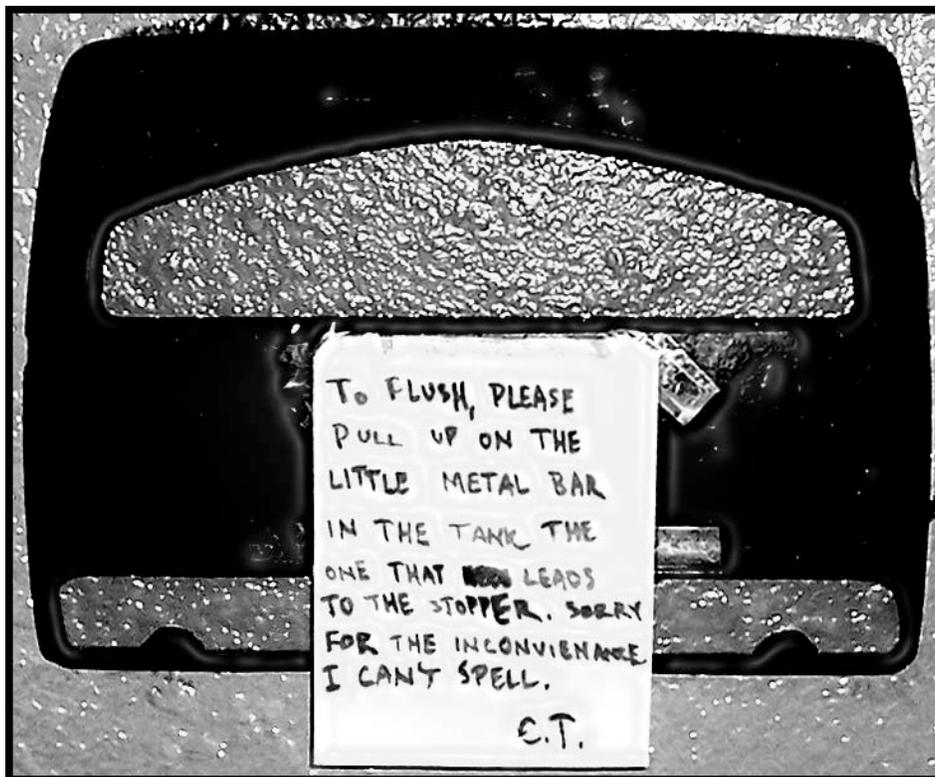
As he drove into New York, Lynd, tired after his marathon, searched for a telephone. Griggs had told him to call a certain number in New Jersey and the people at the

other end would be ready. In the boot were 250 kilos of best marijuana.

He rang. No money yet. Leary needed \$5,000 fast. Lynd tried the contact number again. The buyer had raised a stake. Lynd dropped his family off, and grabbed a flight back to the West Coast. At one in the morning he was back in Laguna with the money for Leary. He took another flight back to New York to finalize the deal on the marijuana.

He had hardly recovered his breath back home in Laguna before he was on the road again. As 1968 opened, the Cadillac had been replaced by a big Ford camper and a cargo of 500 kilos, again bound for New York and the same buyer. This time there were no hitches. Ten days later Griggs appeared in Woodland Drive with two suitcases. He opened them up in front of Lynd and Randall, revealing wads of banknotes. Three times the Brothers counted the money and then they were satisfied. Lynd's two drives had yielded \$98,000. Over \$40,000 had to be paid to a connection in Los Angeles who provided the marijuana. The arrangement with the Mexican police chief had fallen through after someone had tried getting across the border without paying the monthly dues and had been caught on a tipoff from the policeman. Mexican marijuana now came to the Brothers from the barrios of Los Angeles, or across the border in Arizona.

Nearly \$50,000 the richer, the Brothers drove over to Palm Springs. Leary's advice was to do what they had always promised themselves—buy land. Led by Griggs, the Brotherhood put a cash down-payment on the Idylwild Ranch and bought themselves a 300-acre retreat. Not for them the crowded streets of Haight-Ashbury and a beaten-up Victorian house. Southern California slept on in the sun, paying them no heed.



Notes on Contributors

Ric Amante lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry last appeared in *The Cenacle* | 60 | December 2006. After five years, we finally met again in person, in Melrose this past March. Sat with old acid guru Hartley at Ric's kitchen table, remembering the past in blithesome spots and laughing our asses off to surreal speculations of the future. The "Ecuador Hotel," in his fiction for this issue, is loosely based on his adventures years ago at the Panama Hotel in Seattle, Washington.

Raymond Carver was born in 1938 and grew up in Yakima, Washington. He is the author of numerous works of fiction & poetry, including *Cathedral* and *A New Path to the Waterfall*. Carver is widely held to be one of the late 20th-century's great fiction writers. His reprinted story in this issue also appears in the 2006 Burning Man Books title of the same name. Carver died in 1988 in Port Angeles, Washington, from lung cancer.

G. C. Dillon lives in Plainville, Connecticut. His fiction last appeared in *The Cenacle* | 58 | June 2006. His fiction has gained a powerful, melancholic wisdom with the passing of the years, a greater knowing toward the possible. Yet it knows not all, as none do while breath still services and eyes still watch . . . if ever . . .

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry last appeared in *The Cenacle* | 60 | October 2006. She is poet, teacher, wife, mother, in order by way of the present hour. Her poetry finds a supple, subtle groove and rolls through it, like a wave approaching shores, at a speed musically fine . . .

Kassandra Soulard lives in Seattle, Washington. She has recently been studying the poetry of Adrienne Rich, and the poor folks of Hurricane Katrina, with deep sensitivity and empathy to both, her love flowing toward pain, thick with the bright-eyed hope of youth. Youth, in blessing . . .

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Seattle, Washington. Recently turned 43, as Scriptor Press turns 12, neither knowing an easier way to do than the familiar, nor convinced the familiar is all. Concurrent to this issue, Scriptor Press is releasing a long-delayed book of my poems from the late 1990s, *Resurrection, Now*. The lights within shone then, still shine now, & much grateful . . .

Stewart Tandler & David May are co-authors of *The Brotherhood of Eternal Love, From Flower Power to Hippie Mafia: The Story of the LSD Counterculture*. The excerpt from their book that appears in this issue is also included in the 2005 Burning Man Books title *All is Dream: A Seventh Anthology of Writings about Psychedelics*.

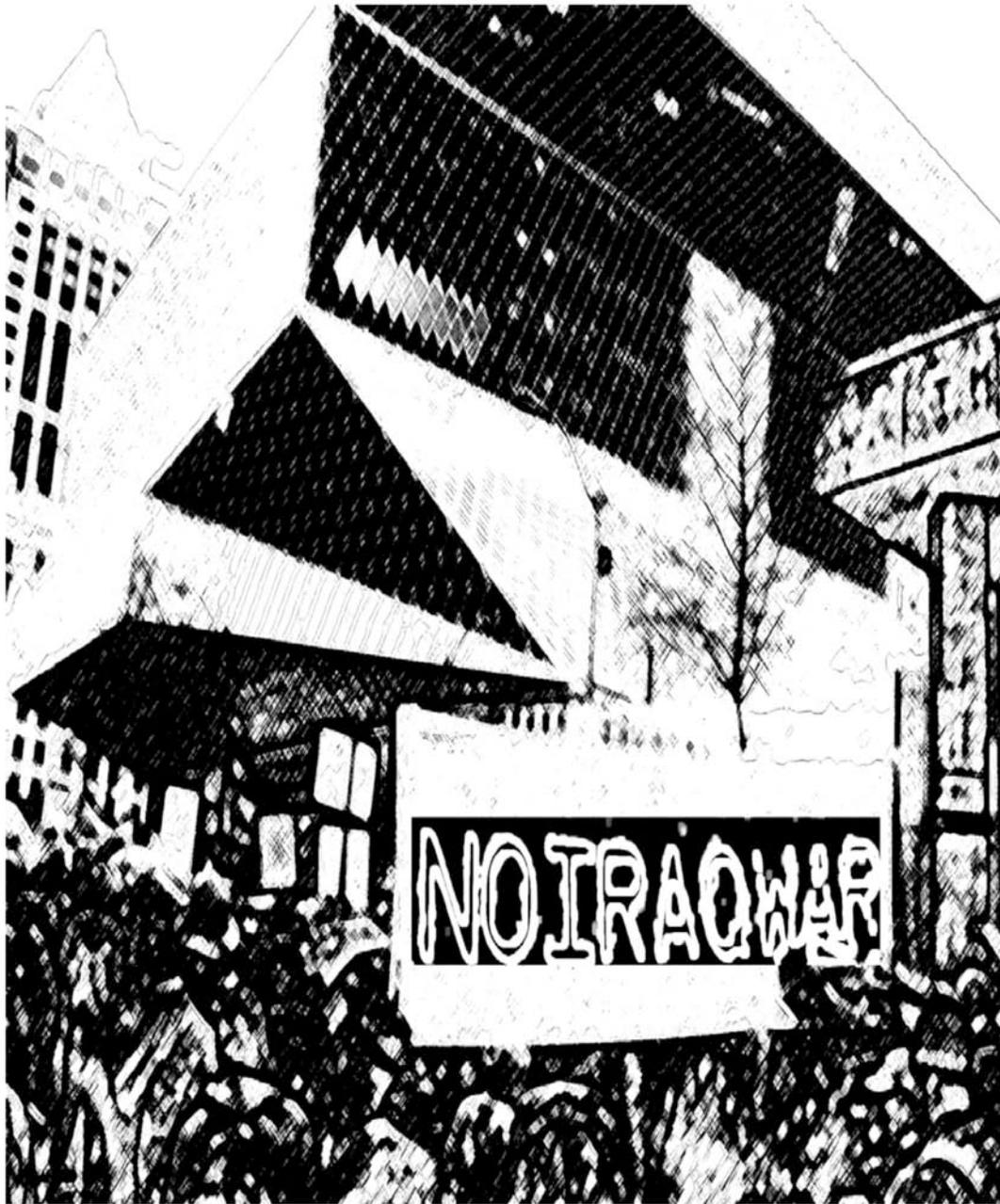


All this automatic writing I have tried to understand

From a psychedelic angel who was tugging on my hand

It's an infinite coincidence but it doesn't form a plan

Bright Eyes, "If the Brakeman Turns My Way," 2007



“We are entitled to ask—we are required to ask—how many more men, how many more lives, how much more destruction will be asked, to provide the military victory that is always just around the corner, to pour into this bottomless pit of our dreams?”

—Robert F. Kennedy, March 18, 1968